

Constructing narratives of everyday life and aspects of Kandyan social order through personal diaries

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ABSTRACT

As a researcher I got interested in the use of diaries as a method of capturing qualitative data and constricting life histories, with the encounter of a personal experience. Biographers, historians and literary scholars have long considered diary documents to be of major importance for telling history (Corti 1993). In Sociology, medical research, and psychology researchers have counted on diaries as useful source of data since the early 20th century, (Kaun 2010).

This research presents ‘a time capsule’ encrypted in diaries over four decades that is from 1943-1982. The researcher explores the handwritten entries of a respected lay religious leader who is also a politician and an eminent businessman of this era. Therefore this research is primarily concerned with the construction of everyday life. Even then it also strives to reconstruct a time period in history spanning from pre-independence and post-independence Sri Lanka from a non-political view with the narrative reconstructed through these diaries. Since the gentleman concerned is my maternal grandfather, I felt the diaries gave me a personal entry into his life and made me closer to him and the events in my family history. However reading through these diaries convinced me that they through some new insights into certain nationally important events or even family incidents, some of which were easy to frame, but others were difficult comprehend. The research is a work in progress and the diaries will be further analyzed to counter validate a large collection of photographs in constructing not just the life of the individual but certain important events in history. Therefore the preservation of these diaries and personal journals are important especially for the understanding the particular period of history and the cultural heritages of Kandyan society.

Keywords: diaries, everyday life, Kandyan social order