

The Village as Seen in The ‘43 Group’ Projected on the Silver Screen by Lester James Peiris

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Lionel Wendt is accepted as the founder and only photographer of the ‘43 Group’. This presentation poses the question, if the ‘43 Group’ had any expression in the medium of film. The other question is if there is any visual relationship in Lionel Wendt’s photography and the cinematography of Lester James Peiris as seen in ‘Rekawa’ (1956).

‘Rekawa’ (the Line of Destiny) came at a momentous time with the Bandaranaike government coming to power. Sinhala was fast replacing English and Sarachchandra had turned a new leaf in Sinhala theatre with ‘Maname’. LJP had quit the Government Film Unit and was shooting his first feature film ‘Rekawa’. The presentation is based on some in-depth interviews with LJP in January 2014 and archival material from the ‘Sapumal Foundation’, Colombo.

Identifying the main features of ‘Rekawa’, one may say that it was a feature film shot on location (outside) and not in studios, this in keeping with Italian ‘Neorealismo’ of Rossellini, De Sica and Visconti. LJP’s “Village” disturbed the audience. Critiques said that ‘Siriyaala’ where the story is located, as narrated by LJP was not a Sinhala village. The allegations made on LJP of creating an eroticized village for the English speaking audience was similar to those aimed at members of the ‘43 Group’ like Richard Gabriele. Ivan Peries, the greatest artist of landscape of the group, was LJP’s brother and LJP was a member of the group at some point. It is the visual imagery of the 43 Group, featuring an exotic Sri Lanka, filmed open-air and camera angles that were inspired by Lionel Wendt, that provide strong evidence that ‘Rekawa’ can be regarded as the only film of the ‘43 Group’. The discussion revolves around the conception of the “village” among the new Sinhala elite and the Colombo based English speaking artists of the ‘43 Group’.

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