

Heritage as a soft power: The effect of *Pasan* and *Vyakûla Piransangam* during the lent season of the Sri Lankan Catholic community

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The Catholic community of Sri Lanka have distinct cultural practices based on whether they are Sinhalese or Tamil by race. This research focuses on the villages of *Doowa*, *Pitipana*, *Munnakkarei* in the *Gampaha* District and *Pesalei* in the *Mannar* District. It can be seen that the mental and physical pressure of the pain, death and loss of Jesus Christ impacts the cultural activities of various communities in various forms and environments. Thus, a distinct form of expressing grief as chants, prose singing and dramas have been adopted by communities throughout the ages. These are centralized on the pain the living person or community faces due to the loss, and the nature of the loss of one of their own through wailing as an outlet. The objectives of this research are to study the cultural diversity of the Sinhalese and Tamil Catholic communities of these areas, to investigate how these communities exchange their ideas and share their views and to study how *Pasan* and *Vyakûla Pirasangam* lead to coexistence and development of cultural thought. The research methodology used here were case studies while in depth interviews and observation were used to gather data. It was observed that the Sinhalese and Tamil Catholic communities of these areas use *Pasan* chanting and *Vyakûla Pirasangam* as a method of catharsis during the Lent season respectively. These however are not done individually but rather in groups, within the community itself and cross communities, thereby bridging the gaps formed by the competition between villages and the rifts between castes and races. The idea that the torture and death of another brings grief to many is prominently projected here and is embedded into the minds of everyone in the community when participating in the cultural activities of the Lent season.

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