

Portrayal of exorcisms in contemporary Sri Lankan English (SLE) fiction

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In Sri Lankan culture, various healing rituals are conducted in order to cure a sickness. Amongst them, the widely used exorcism is “*Thovil*”, which comprises exorcists, masks and dances. Usually, a “*Thovil*” is carried out when it is believed that evil spirits have possessed humans, causing a particular sickness. According to Bailey and de Silva (2006): When conducting a *thovil* “exorcists wear masks depicting the demons thought to be responsible for a person's ailments”. Though the beliefs and associations regarding exorcisms had been widely discussed, the portrayal of exorcisms in Sri Lankan English literature had not been studied. Thus, the objective of the present study is to determine how the ancient rites and rituals of Sri Lankan heritage were used as soft power in SLE fiction. Since SLE fiction attracts a wide readership both in and out of Sri Lanka, analyzing this aspect would be beneficial to investigate the indirect contribution of ancient Sri Lankan exorcist rites and rituals in adding a “Sri Lankan-ness” to SLE fiction. In order to conduct this study, few English fictions written by Sri Lankan writers were selected. Some of them were “Colombo” by Carl Muller, “The Ceaseless Chatter of Demons” by Ashok Ferrey, “Rainbows in Braille” by Elmo Jayawardena, “Anil’s Ghost” by Michael Ondaatje, and “The Hungry Ghosts” by Shyam Selvadurai. The information collected through the SLE fiction will be referenced alongside the secondary sources on exorcisms in Sri Lanka to ensure the reliability of the study. Thus, through this qualitative study, the significant role played by exorcisms in SLE fiction will be thematically analyzed in order to discuss how this fiction aid in popularizing Sri Lankan heritage in the world.

Keywords: *Exorcism, Sri Lankan English Fiction, Thovil*