

Understanding Cultural Diversity in Sri Lanka through Sri Lankan Portuguese Burgher Weddings: A Narrative Study

Anne Tunica, Hasini Weerasinghe, Prasangi Wijewardhana, Senali Wijesooriya¹
Department of English

The Sri Lankan Portuguese or the Portuguese Burghers are a small minority ethnic group of mixed heritage that descended from the Portuguese. A majority of this community currently lives in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka in Batticaloa and Trincomalee. However, little is known about them outside academia, and they still remain somewhat invisible to other Sri Lankans. Their culture also seems to be gradually diminishing from society. Many research studies regarding the Portuguese Burghers focus on the Creole language and its impact on Sri Lankan society, the Portuguese political influence on Sinhala kings, the origin and history of this community, their religion, the 'kaffirinha' dance and the 'baila' songs, and how it still exists within the contemporary society of Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, no specific research has been conducted so far on the festivals and rituals of the Sri Lankan Portuguese Burghers. This study will focus on their weddings which can be identified as one of their most important cultural events and how they have transformed these by adding new rituals. The methodology used was in-depth, semi-structured narrative interviews with five Portuguese Burgher community members including Portuguese Burgher elders in Batticaloa who shared their experiences and recollected their memories. This study explores the customs associated with food, music, dance and fashion related to Sri Lankan Portuguese Burgher weddings. The purpose of this study is to present a fine-grained description of a cultural event to gain a detailed understanding of the rituals of the Portuguese Burgher culture and contribute towards a greater awareness of the cultural diversity found in Sri Lanka.

Key words: cultural diversity, narrative interviews, rituals, Sri Lankan Portuguese Burghers, weddings

¹ *senaliwijesurya@gmail.com*