

## **Sinhala Studies as an academic discipline in postcolonial Sri Lanka: Insights from Prof. Ediriweera Sarachchandra**

Chamila Somirathna<sup>1</sup>

---

The discourse of Sinhala literature and theory in particular and the discourse of Sri Lankan academia in general, grapple with one significant issue which can be called the lack of a clear and appropriate theoretical framework to develop its body of work, express its values, critique itself, and guide itself to the future. Prof. Arjuna Parakrama analyses this point elaboratively in his writings and invites the scholars to re-visit and re-read the texts they always read with a fresh eye to seek what can be learned anew. In the light of this argument, the attention of this research study is paid to explore an appropriate and strong theoretical lens that is capable of energizing the discourse of Sinhala studies as an academic discipline. Thus, this research study attempts at understanding what we can learn from Prof. Ediriweera Sarachchandra, one of the pioneering figures who stabilized Sinhala Studies as an academic discipline in postcolonial Sri Lanka. I chose Sarachchandra for few reasons; first, the social recognition of Sinhala Studies at the present has got parallels with the social recognition that existed at the time Sarachchandra entered the Sinhala academia during the 1950s. At a time when Sinhala Studies struggled to develop itself, Sarachchandra made a significant contribution to its flourishing as a discipline and created enormous popularity around it not only through his professional and creative works but also through his interferences in cultural discourse. As a whole, his body of work exhibited a strong cultural vision that was strongly connected to society. University education, Sinhala language, and literature were major aspects of his vision. In this light, the current qualitative research study addresses the below research questions: How can Sinhala Studies be made contextual? How can Sinhala Studies reach its maximum capacity of interfering in the cultural and political life of Sri Lankans? What insights can we receive from our pioneering figures, particularly from Prof. Ediriweera Sarachchandra, to overcome these problems? The results suggest that making the discipline of Sinhala Studies contextual is necessary for its development as a subject with a practical value. Contextualization of Sinhala Studies should be done within a strong theoretical framework which would broaden the minds of the scholars to the local as well as to the foreign literary cultures. Sarachchandra's vision that can be named "cosmopolitan nationalism" sets an example for what we need to do today to build the future.

*Keywords:* Sinhala Studies; Ediriweera Sarachchandra; contextual education; cosmopolitan nationalism; postcolonialism

---

<sup>1</sup>*Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*