

**MARTIN WICKRAMASINGHE'S VIRAGAYA:
A STUDY OF ITS THEMES, FORM
AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES**

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The intention of the present paper is to examine in some detail Martin Wickramasinghe's *Viragaya* (1956), the novel generally considered to be Wickramasinghe's greatest novel¹ as well as perhaps the greatest novel in the Sinhala language,² and the first 'psychological novel' in Sinhala³. Critics also agree that *Viragaya* set up new bearings in Sinhala fiction in both theme as well as technique.⁴ In theme, *Viragaya* can be considered as the first attempt to study in detail the psychological processes and the chronological psychological development of a single fictional character (Aravinda Jayasena) in a deliberate and systematic manner, while in narrative technique, likewise, it is perhaps the first sustained effort at writing a "spiritual biography" of a single character in Sinhala, using the form of monologue or autobiographical confession in which the narrator-protagonist attempts to probe his own psyche, his thoughts, feelings, emotions and mental conflicts at considerable depth. As a consequence of its basic preoccupations and narrative techniques, *Viragaya* turned out to be the first "plotless" novel in Sinhala, as well as the first psychological novel in the history of Sinhala fiction.

The objectives of the present paper may be said to be fourfold: (1) First, to show that *Viragaya* can be categorised as a "psychological novel", and the first of its kind in Sinhala, by virtue of its subject-matter, which is the typical subject-matter of psychological fiction in other (especially Western European) languages; (2) Second, to point out how it falls into the sub-category of psychological fiction of the non-stream-of-consciousness variety; (3) Third, to demonstrate that in form it uses for the first time in Sinhala the first person autobiographical confessional narrative for representing the "spiritual biography" of a single complex fictional character conveying, especially, the "inner life" of that character; and (4) Fourth, to show that while the novel uses the form of autobiography or monologue as its staple narrative technique, it also uses, though occasionally and sporadically, certain techniques that are characteristic of stream-of-consciousness fiction (such as direct and indirect interior monologue and certain "cinematic" devices such as the "flash-back" and the "flash-forward.")

In order to facilitate the attainment of the fourfold objective outlined above, the paper is divided into four parts. Part One discusses some basic