

Representation of Picturesque Paradise - A Case Study of Sri Lanka

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In most cases during the colonial period, British aesthetic tastes and beliefs were transferred to the colonies; in that context the Europeans reinvented the colonial landscape in terms of their convictions about the aesthetic. This is evident in the colonial paintings and illustrations that were created during the British colonial period. I will investigate how the island of Sri Lanka is represented as a paradisiacal place under the colonial shadow. For instance, the pictographic record of Sri Lanka from the British colonial period is a very rich one. Both amateur and professional artists reproduced what they saw in terms of their own artistic tradition and of their understanding of the relationship between their own society and the one they visited (Dharmasiri 1988). In doing so, they provided visual materials for the people at the home to witness the British imperial power over the rest of the world.



Pl. 1: Andrew Nicholl, *Ceylon*, 1804-86.

Apart from that most of these paintings are considered paradisiacal images of their colonies. For instance,

Andrew Nicholl, who was worked as an artist during the British colonial period, produced paintings and illustrations for the duration of his visit to Sri Lanka. While he was travelling in Sri Lanka, he wrote to the Editor of the *Illustrated London News* in 1848, describing his experience:

Sir, I left Colombo on the 28th July, 1848 by the Kandy mail, to proceed as far as Ambepusse. After crossing the bridge of boats, over the Kalang Ganga, the scenery assumed a beautiful sylvan character: the road runs for a considerable distance along the opposite bank of the river, through a thick grove of suria and cocoa-nut trees, native gardens on either side, containing mango, pomegranate, plantain, custard apple, clove (Silva 1998: 311).

This type of record was published in the newspapers with illustrations. It is evident that there was a huge demand for hunting scenes and these records were published not only in England but also in Australian newspapers. A lithographic print which was published on May 20th 1871 in *The Illustrated Australian News* depicts British men and women relaxing under the shadow of coconut trees near the Gall, Sri Lanka (Silva 1998). Another image which depicts a seascape near Colombo's suburbs was

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