

Theravada Men and Women of Sri Lanka: A Scrutiny of Individual Identity Construction under the influence of Theravada Buddhism and Gender in *Theravada Man*

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As in any other culture, religion has played a significant role in individual character building in Sri Lanka, and Buddhism is one fundamental philosophy that has affected, influenced and shaped the lives and characters of the individuals who belong to the Sinhala-Buddhist culture. Various novelists have explored the nexus between Buddhism and the individual, for instance, *Viragaya* by Martin Wickramasinghe and *Metta* by Sunethra Rajakarunanayake. However, while a significant number of novels belonging to this category perceive the impact of Buddhism on the individual in a positive light, some fiction focus on how certain Buddhist teachings have been twisted within the Sinhala-Buddhist culture, making the individuals become victims of a dubious tradition. *Theravada Man* (2009) by the perceptive and radical Sri Lankan novelist, Manuka Wijesinghe is one such novel that reveals how certain Buddhist doctrines have become coloured by varied interpretations, perspectives and beliefs, deviating significantly from their theoretical base. The objectives of the present research are to explore how Theravada Buddhist doctrines have become twisted interpretations which build hypocrisy in the individual, and how Theravada Buddhism and the gender notions springing from it act as defining agents of the individual characters of men and women in this context. The key findings include the ways in which the author satirizes and challenges those flawed building blocks of an individual's character, and reveal how these notions still exist and operate in contemporary Sri Lanka. The research study is based on a close reading and analysis of *Theravada Man*, and relevant theoretical writings on Buddhism and gender. The study also reveals how religious doctrines and gender notions create the individual's ontology which may not be influenced by opposing or different views despite being exposed to new knowledge, thus restricting the individual's capacity to think and act free without being enslaved by tradition.

Key Words: Individual identity building, *Theravada Man*, Theravada Buddhism and Gender, Sri Lankan fiction