

Historical Novels as a Source in Constructing History of Sri Lanka

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Historians as a rule hesitate or do not prefer to use soft sources viz; novels, short stories as those are not considered as more than literary pieces. In the nineteenth century it was highly accepted historical inquiry should be based on official documents. Nevertheless with the spring up of new directions in the twentieth century, there was an expansion of using primary sources in historical inquiry. Historical novels have proved that fiction can be a valuable adjunct to the work of historians in their discipline. Historical inquiries done in Sri Lanka mostly depended on primary sources mainly they are considered as official records. Novels can be as accurate as a history in telling what happened, when, how and where. The aim of the research is to understand the historical phenomena through novels while expanding the scientific methodology in historical inquiry. Library research has done in collecting data which covered both the primary and secondary sources. Particularly the research has analyzed the novels of Cristine Wilson's 'Bitter Berry', Lenard Wolf's 'Village in the Jungle' and Mayaranjan's Digāmadulle Ashcharya' in investigating the colonial and post-colonial periods of Sri Lanka. The research unsurprisingly suggests analyzing historical novels other than chronicles and official documents delineated the socio-cultural-economic structure of Sri Lanka. Primarily Bitter Berry portrayed the formation of social context and life style in the colonial period. Digamadulle Ashcharya is a novel encompassed the regional area of Digamadulla in the mid twentieth century which delineated the ethnic identities and the formation of the village. The analysis of the novels questioned and deconstructed the popular consciousness which hold up racial identities and social context in the colonial power of Ceylon. Using novels as primary sources give alternative approaches in history writings.

Keywords: Colonial power, Historical inquiry, Official documents, Primary sources, Racial identities

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