

READING BETWEEN THE LINES: ANGANAGUNADAPANA IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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Introduction

The changing female attitudes in par with dynamic social and cultural patterns are one of the key factors in Sri Lankan feminist history. During the British colonial era, this change sharply combined with the cultural colonization and decolonization process. With the development of female education and socio-economic activities, women could raise their voice louder in a male-dominated society. Before the expansion of Buddhist revival movement, there were few courageous women who attempted to criticize their unbalanced social status in that society. For example, *Gajaman nona*, *Ranchagoda lamaya* were famous poetesses who grappled with their predetermined destiny. They condemned any unreasonable accusation against women and wielded the weapon of poetry against male dominance. But it is obvious that, after the beginning of Buddhist revival such female representation has faded away. One of main objectives of the Cultural revival movement was to introduce the ideal woman who appropriated for both the newly westernized society as well as for the Sinhalese traditional society. Most of the didactic literature was published to advise women on new behavior patterns, ethics and the value of virginity and chastity. These ideas reflected the Victorian influences

and the attempt of establishing the so-called 'glory of the past'. *Anganopadesha* (1891), *Ovmininihara* (1898), *Ovamutuhara* (1918), *Kanta Prabodaya* (1936) are few examples for that new genre of literature. Obviously, this pattern led to mitigate women's oppositions and their independent thoughts to some extent. During this time, some books were written by extremists to condemn women's behaviors and to emphasize the value of gentlemen, for which, the lost anthology of poems called '*Virathivivodaya*' is a perfect example. According to the introduction to *Anganagunadapana* (1894), it is a direct reply to the *Virathivivodaya*. Therefore, as a radical feminist reaction, *Anganagunadapana* needs a new historical review and a reinterpretation. Considering these factors the main objective of this research is to analyze *Anganagunadapana* while locating it in a proper historical discourse.

Methodology

The methodology of this research is to refer to the contemporary primary sources which were published during those days and to analyze them by considering contemporary social and economic conditions. Special Manuscripts collections called '*Hettiarachchi Collection*' and '*Ratnasooriya Collection*' in the main library of University of

Peradeniya are closely used. The only copy of *Anganagunadapana* known to be available in the British Museum Library, and a photocopy thereof found in the main library of the University of Peradeniya. These rear materials were used while contextualizing in proper historical discourse.

Discussion

Cathrine Silva Hamine, the poetesses of the book, was a low country woman who belonged to rural socio-economic class and to Salagama caste. Durawa, Salagama, Karawa were the major castes in the coastal area which rapidly engaged in new economic activities and social milieu. In comparison to that of the other low castes, the level of education of female members of these families was considerably satisfactory as they had to compete with the Govigama families. Cathrine Silva Hamine was a perfect reflection of that social diversity who was a schoolteacher in Balapitiya area. Many literary sources to which Catharine Silva has referred in support of prove to her arguments sharply reflects her higher education level. For example, she cites from Buddhist classical literature like *Parajikapali*, *Dampiya atuwa getapada*, *Manorathapurani*. Also she has used literature which emerged from Little Tradition in Sri Lanka like *Rajavaliya*, *Ahelepolanatake*, *Upadeshabashini*. Interestingly she has also referred to Christian scriptures such as the Bible and *Decameron* by Boccaccio. Furthermore, the work hints at the

fact that she could handle a second language. The poetess was very keen to establish equality for women. In the eight stanza, she has argued for the necessity of women's existence in the world. Other stanzas also reflect her broad approach about women's virtues.

Conclusion

Direct impact of the social changes and economic trends on women's attitudes and behaviors in the colonial era is particularly noticeable. The Buddhist revival movement drove Buddhists to flock together and cultivate nationalist feelings and to encourage cultural decolonization. In addition to the role-models like Anagarika Darmapala, there were significant motivations at the grass-root level of the society to smoothen this process. Thus, the *Anganagunadapana* is a strong backing for those who try to establish epitome of '*Kulagana*'.

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