Music for the Majority

Sinhala Song and the 1956 Cultural Revolution of Sri Lanka

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Dedicated with love to H.D. Nayomi Field
Abstract

*Music for the Majority* investigates the lives and thought of Sinhalese lyricists, vocalists, and composers employed at the Sri Lankan radio station, Radio Ceylon, and the *sarala gī* or light classical musical genre they fashioned on the brink and aftermath of the “cultural revolution” of 1956. I explore how these men’s songs coincided with the first post-independence election of South Asia to transfer the locus of political power to the majority, and precipitate a switchover in the official state language, from English to Sinhala. These lyricists, vocalists, and composers were members of the rural intelligentsia, the constituency that spearheaded the cultural revival that ensued. They worked to represent the majority population, assert the value of Sinhalese culture, and raised the standards of Sinhalese music. In this study, I explore the local and transnational forces that motivated their aspirations and analyze how they used music and language in song to achieve their objectives.
Preface

Salman Rushdie’s acclaimed novel, *Midnight’s Children* (1980), tells the story of an Anglo-Indian boy, Saleem, whose birth is, “on the stroke of midnight…at the precise instant of India’s arrival at independence.” Saleem, and the 1001 children born during the first hour of India’s independence, are the “Midnight’s Children.” They possess magical powers: a Kerala boy steps into mirrors and emerges through lake surfaces, the girl from Goa multiplies fish, and a Calcutta youngster’s words inflict physical wounds. Saleem can hear people’s thoughts. In this passage, Rushdie’s protagonist likens his power of telepathy to that of morphing into a super All India Radio receiver. This receiver is tuned in to voices of myriad language communities dotted across the Indian subcontinent:

In 1956, then, languages marched militantly through the daytime streets; by night, they rioted in my head…the inner monologues of all the so-called teeming millions, of masses and classes alike, jostled for space within my head. In the beginning, when I was content to be an audience—before I began to act—there was a language problem. The voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga dialects, from the purity of Lucknow Urdu to the Southern slurrings of Tamil. I understood only a fraction of the things being said within the walls of my skull (200, emphasis mine).

In this dissertation, I examine how the Sinhalese lyricists, composers, and vocalists were akin to Saleem and the midnight’s children: they possessed gifts to make radio songs as powerful as literature, and their lives, bound up with the radio station, served as allegories of their nation’s post-colonial history.

Unlike the midnight’s children, however, who were born within the first hour of India’s independence, these Sinhalese lyricists, vocalists, and composers came into existence at a different transitional moment. This was the moment—April 10, 1956—when the Sinhalese village elites elected S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike as the fourth Prime
Minister of independent Ceylon. Then, three months later, they spoke their first word—in Sinhala—after the Lankan parliament passed the Official Language Act, No. 33, switching (controversially) the official state language from English to Sinhala.

In this study, I consider how this switchover and the election of Bandaranaike resulted in a genuine power shift in favor of the masses. This shift contributed to the formation of a musical genre known as sarala gī, most often translated as “light classical” music because of its “oriental orchestra” of sitars, violins, tablas, flutes, sarods, and guitars (Sheeran 1999: 972). In particular, I inquire into the manner in which the switchover and election convinced the national radio station, “Radio Ceylon,” to hire a group of lyricists, vocalists, and composers to fashion this light-classical song to represent the majority, assert the value of Sinhalese culture, and raise the standards of Sinhalese music.

I commenced this dissertation the day I encountered the Sinhala script. I felt confident to learn it because the language has similar grammatical structures as Tamil. I had studied Tamil in the summers of 2007 and ’08, at the South Asia Summer Language Institute at the University of Wisconsin, and at the American Institute of Indian Studies, in Madurai. I studied Sinhala independently for a year, and then visited Sri Lanka in the summer of 2009 to learn more. An American Institute of Sri Lankan Studies language fellowship funded my lessons. In 2010, I secured a Fulbright-Hays scholarship and studied in Sri Lanka for two years, with a two-month break. I worked at the gramophone and digital archives at the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Corporation, the National Archives, the National Library, and the library of the American Institute for Lankan Studies.
The emotional and intellectual support of many individuals in the United States and Sri Lanka directed the progress of this project. My family’s love and encouragement can be found in every one of these pages. My mother, Ellyce, inspires me to make connections between histories and cultures, while my father, Stephen, challenges and supports me to be thorough in my undertakings. My wife, Nayomi, and her parents, Ranjana and Suneetha, patiently answered my endless questions and encouraged me to timely complete this project. My twin brother, Andrew, carefully combed through the prose and helped me clarify my thoughts and sentences. My maternal grandparents, Chuck and Belle, model integrity and urge me to take pleasure in life. I have learned from my paternal grandmother, Grandma Frieda, to sing in the face of challenges. Jordan and Marjie, my brother and sister-in-law, and their boys Logan and Dylan, teach me about balancing family and career.

My advisor Mark Slobin attentively guided this project from its inception, constructively criticized my writing, and helped me clarify my thoughts. Thank you Krishna Winston: I secured the Fulbright fellowship because you edited draft after draft. B. Balasubrahmaniyan mentored me from my first day as a graduate student and generously shared his time and musical knowledge. Eric Charry helped make this document more fluid and balanced. Jeanne Marecek, Susanne Mrozik, and Wimal Dissanayake generously gave critical advice and edited chapters of this dissertation. Kindred spirits Aaron Paige, Sarah Jane Ripa, Pete Steele, Shoko Yamamuro, Andrew Colwell, and Amanda Scherbenske supported this project in myriad ways; they edited pages, gave helpful suggestions, and put many smiles on my face during my life as a
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Mrs. Nirmalini Rajapakse, Mrs. Uchita Ranasinghe, and Mrs. Chandini Tilakaratna patiently taught me the Sinhala language, explained difficult sources, and aided my attempts to write in the language. Chinthaka Ranasinghe offered his intellectual input. Thank you Liyanage Amarakirti for your gracious hospitality and intellectual support. Suresh Mantilake and Utpala Herath provided an opportunity to present my research at the beautiful University of Peradeniya.
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2. “Ōlu Pipīlā” (1946)
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4. “Dudan’oda Binda” (195?)
   Lyric: Rapiyel Tennakoon, Music and Voice: Sunil Santha

5. “Saraswati Gitaya” (1961)
   Lyric: Chandrarathna Manawasinghe, Music and Voice: W.D. Amaradeva

6. The Radio Opera “Manōhari” (1955)
   Libretto: Chandrarathna Manawasinghe, Music: P. Dunstan De Silva

7. “Ran Wan Karal Salē” (1957)
   Lyric: Madawale Ratnayake, Music and Voice: W.D. Amaradeva

Disc 2 of 2

1. “Bambareku Āwāi” (1964)
   Lyric: Madawale Ratnayake, Music and Voice: W.D. Amaradeva

2. “Mindada Hī Sara” (1964)
   Lyric: Madawale Ratnayake, Music and Voice: W.D. Amaradeva

3. “Gī Potai, Mī Vitai” (196?)
   Lyric: Mahagama Sekera, Music and Voice: W.D. Amaradeva

4. “Pilē Pādura” (196?)
   Lyric: Mahagama Sekera, Music and Voice: W.D. Amaradeva

5. “Ihala Velē” (196?)
   Lyric: Mahagama Sekera, Music: W.D. Amaradeva, Voice: Lionel Algama
6. “Anna Balan Sanda” (1961)
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Introduction

In this study of music in 20th-century Sri Lanka, I ask ethnomusicologists to rethink “colonial” and “postcolonial” in the context of South Asian music history. Because we lack perspectives from composers, vocalists, and lyricists at the margins of South Asia, ethnomusicologists tend to explain projects of musical nationalism within a colonizer-colonized, British-Indian framework. Yet this configuration does not apply to all of South Asia. Beyond the British-Indian axis, Sri Lankan-Indian tensions at the transnational level, and rural-urban intelligentsia disparities at the class level, characterize the projects of music reform that Sinhalese composers, vocalists, and lyricists spearheaded. The aim of this project is to analyze these tensions in the lives and works of these musicians and contextualize their biographies and oeuvres within Sri Lanka’s political and sociolinguistic history. In so doing, I want to reconsider what “colonial” and “postcolonial” means from vantage points that ethnomusicologists have little acknowledged.

Sri Lanka is an island country twenty-five miles off the southeastern tip of India. Relatively small in size but large in population, the island is roughly 7000 square miles smaller than Ireland; but its 20 million inhabitants more than triple Ireland’s population. The Sinhalese ethnic group comprises seventy-five percent of the population today. During the 1950s, a period important for this dissertation, the Sinhalese made up about sixty-five percent. They immigrated to the island from either Northeast or Northwest India around 500 BCE, and mixed with the indigenous islanders. (The Indian Emperor
Asoka’s son Mahinda introduced Buddhism to the population during the reign of Sinhalese King Devanampiya Tissa (307-267 BCE).

The Sinhalese speak Sinhala, a language distinct from the other members of the Indo-Aryan language family. Distinct, because Sinhala is the only Indo-Aryan language, along with the Dhivehi language of the Maldives, that is spoken south of the Dravidian belt. For this reason, linguist James Gair (1982) termed it an Indo-Aryan isolate. It has two main varieties: the literary and the colloquial. The literary is used for written materials, television and radio news reports, and public speeches. The colloquial is the everyday language of the Sinhalese people. In this dissertation, I translate from the literary variety.

Sri Lanka is a diverse country—ethnically, religiously, and linguistically. The ethnic group of Sri Lankan Tamils is mostly Hindu, but contain a significant Christian demographic. The Sri Lankan Tamils speak a distinct dialect of the Tamil language, compared with the Tamils in South India. These Sri Lankan Tamils have resided in the north and east of the island since ancient times. To complicate the picture, there is a second group of Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Indian Tamils, who immigrated to the island in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to work on tea, rubber, and coconut plantations.

Along with the two populations of Tamil speakers, there is a third: the Sri Lankan Muslims. The Sri Lankan Muslims also speak a unique Tamil dialect. Rounding out the remaining population are small communities of Malays, Burghers (families with Portuguese, Dutch, and British descent), and Veddas, indigenous islanders. This dissertation will be concerned primarily with the Sinhalese population.

In 1815, British colonists annexed this diverse island and remained in power until 1948. They referred to the island as Ceylon. (In 1972, well after independence, the native
government changed it to *Sri Lanka*). The British exploited Indian Tamil laborers to establish a plantation economy of tea, rubber, and coconut estates. Throughout the nineteenth century, British teachers taught English in elite schools in Ceylon to entrench their colonial regime and spread Christianity. These teachers tended to denounce native languages as inferior to English. British officials took language censuses that suggested language was the defining feature of each particular ethnic group. These pedagogical and census practices caused a shift: people had conceived of language more as a *medium of communication*, but they started to conceive of it as an anti-colonial rallying point, as well as a salient mark of identity (Ramaswamy 1997, Mitchell 2009). After Ceylon became independent in 1948, linguistic identities further reified.

I am mostly concerned in this dissertation with this post-colonial juncture. During this transitional moment, a group of *rural-born Sinhala-educated Buddhist* lyricists, vocalists, and composers began write songs for the radio. These songs represented a personal search for national identity, and a reaction against *English-educated Sinhalese Christians*. These English-educated Sinhalese Christians comprised the political party known as United National Party (UNP) that held the reins of power during the first eight years after independence. But soon this power would be begin to shift.

In the General Election of 1956, the electoral allegiance known as the People’s United Front (*Mahajana Eksath Peramuna*, or MEP) defeated the UNP. Michael Roberts puts it simply: the MEP “gained considerable legitimacy because [it was] linked with the claims of the have-nots challenging the haves” (1999: 23). The rallying cry that united the parties of the electoral allegiance and their supporters was
one particularly charged issue in public policy: Sinhala Only! This was a plea by this electoral allegiance and their supporters to make the Sinhala language the official language of the state. This would be in place of English, which was thrust on the island, as mentioned above, by the British colonial administration. This plea excluded Tamil from being elevated to an official state language along with Sinhala.

The Sinhalese have a term for the population of Buddhist, Sinhala-educated, and village-born, the group whose vote secured the MEP victory. They are known as “the five great forces” (pancha mahā balavēgaya). These five forces are the Buddhist monks, ayurvedic physicians, Sinhala-medium teachers, cultivators, and workers.

Although popular opinion considers these five forces to comprise the rural elite, scholars like James Manor and W.A. Wiswa Warnapala have shown that this elite did not consist of cultivators and workers. Rather local board members and educated youth, rather than the cultivators and workers, were the true fourth and fifth “forces” that influenced the election in favor of the MEP (Manor 1989: 250). W.A. Wiswa Warnapala adds the influence of Sinhalese businessmen, who “had wealth, [but] were not culturally and socially acceptable to the better established English-educated strata of society” (1974: 243). Roberts includes Sinhalese journalists, minor officials, notaries and petition writers, and small businessmen (1999: 298).

All these professions wielded a higher status in the village, and received deference from the other villagers. That is why we call them the “rural elite.” In the 1950s, this population catapulted into the role of the very arbiters of high fashion in Sri Lankan music.
When the Bandaranaike government took power in 1956, the radio station—the principal and most powerful medium of mass communication on the island—instituted projects to raise the standard of Sinhalese music. Station officials hired Sinhalese lyricists, vocalists, and composers to create an exclusively Sinhalese form of radio song that would “penetrate deep into the popular [Sinhalese] imagination” (Anderson 1991: 175). By extension, sarala gī would represent the new majority-dominated Sri Lankan nation. It would have to magically transform the imagined Sinhalese community into a pure nation unblemished by colonialism, commercialization, and the perceived threat of minorities and religious others. Armed with this ideological stance, and the fact that there were separate “services” at the radio station for the Sinhalese, Tamil, and English language, it is no wonder that the lyricists and composers hired for this task did not embrace multiculturalism.

These lyricists and composers did embrace an aesthetic agenda complex in its own way. This agenda signified particular arrangements of local and transnational. It was inflected with nostalgia for pre-colonial Sinhalese Buddhist village life, and produced song texts that teemed with Sinhala narratives, poetic rhythms, and diction mined from pre-colonial Sinhala literary culture. At the same time, composers often set these song texts to North Indian rags to articulate the standard Sinhalese transnational imagination that held Northern India in esteem as the ancient home of the Sinhalese and Buddhist religion.

I conducted research for this dissertation during twenty-four months of fieldwork in Sri Lanka between June 2009 and June 2012. A wide range of primary sources enrich the
text, such as recordings from the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Corporation’s (SLBC) digital archives and gramophone archives, and three compact discs released by SLBC; interviews conducted with musicians, lyricists, and scholars; and Sinhala newspapers, magazines, literary journals, and novels published between 1900 and 1965, which I accessed at the Sri Lankan National Library and National Archives.

**Local Sources**

Postcolonial literature scholars tend to overlook South Asian language and literature (Bahri 2003: 20). They privilege English-language depictions of “Third World” experience. I do not claim that South Asian regional literatures are more authentic repositories of culture than English language texts. However, we bypass South Asian language and literature at a price. Our puzzles are missing important pieces.

In *Music for the Majority*, I put long lost pieces into place. I translate light-classical Sinhala-language song and some Sinhala poetry to make more accessible Sinhala language and literature from colonial and post-colonial Sri Lanka. In so doing, I provide readers with an opportunity to supplement their readings of globally circulating English-language texts.

In this dissertation, I amply draw on publications of Radio Ceylon’s lyricists, vocalists, and composers. For example, I developed a stronger awareness of Sunil Santha’s music with the help of the twelve songbooks (books of lyrics and notation) he published (1947-52), and a songbook that his disciples put out posthumously (1993).

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1 Producers of these compact discs did not print the dates of release on the covers or cd. The three discs are *Madhuvanti – I* [collaborations between Mahagama Sekera and W.D. Amaradeva], *Gramophone Gī* (Gramophone Song), and *Ōlu Pīpilā* (The Lilies Have Blossomed [Songs of Sunil Santha]).
When I read his songbook prefaces, newspapers writings (1947-53), and small book (1952), I could better understand the way his career objectives overlapped with other artists of the \textit{Heḷa Havula} (Pure Sinhala Fraternity).

Chandrarathna Manawasinghe’s extended preface in his illustrated songbook (1957), three unpublished radio opera libretti\(^3\) that his son Udaya Manawasinghe generously shared, and a collection of his radio lectures (1969) got me thinking about the ways Manawasinghe experimented with figurative language and engaged with Indian culture.

I gleaned Madawale Ratnayake’s views about village life and folk music from his novel \textit{Akkara Paha} (1959), the prefaces and lyrics in his two songbooks (1977, 1997), and his book devoted to lyric analyses (1992). I found much helpful information about W.D. Amaradeva’s outlook as a composer in his collection of essays about music (1989) and description of stories behind his well-known songs (2007).

I could begin to figure out the way Mahagama Sekera’s lyrics grew out of literary projects, because I alternated between his eight books of poetry (1960-1976), and his two songbooks (1972, 1984). I read Sekera’s most famous novel (1976), newspaper articles about lyric writing and literary criticism (1961, 1973), and his dissertation about rhythm in the Sinhala language and literature (2007) to deepen my knowledge of how literature informed his lyric writing.

Sinhala-language secondary sources further illuminate this dissertation’s understanding of \textit{sarala gī} and Sri Lankan music in general. Musicologist Sunil Ariyaratne’s intellectual contribution abides in this study. Ariyaratne’s extensive catalogue includes books on Portuguese-influenced Sri Lankan \textit{baila} (1985), the Sinhala

\(^2\) Vinnie Vitarana has collected all these writings into the collection \textit{Sunil Samara} (2001).
\(^3\) Salilā (1956), Dikwijawa (1956), Galwaduwā (1957).

There is a dedicated group of Sinhalese scholars who publish works about lyricists and the art of Sinhala lyric composition in the twentieth century. Many of these works focus on one lyricist like Sunil Santha (Allavattage and Vitarana 2009, Nelson and Pranandu 2009), Madawale Ratnayake (Herath et al. 1997), Mahagama Sekera (W.A. Abeysinghe 1997, Moratuwagama et. al 2002), and lyricists of later generations like Ajantha Ranasinghe (Herath and Wettasinghe 2002), and Ratna Shri Wijesinghe (Wettasinghe et al. 2005, Aruna Veragala 2008). Some authors publish books devoted to different lyricists in each chapter (Ratnayake 1997, Herath 2009, Perera 2009).

**Broader Currents**

Because of Sri Lanka’s geographic proximity to the Indian sub-continent, its postcolonial history runs parallel with West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, linguistic states of the young independent Indian federation. Partha Chatterjee argues that Bengali cultural reformers constructed unique cultural spaces, or “inner domains,” before anti-colonial nationalism became political battle (Chatterjee 1993). Inner domains include realms like Bengali family values, art, language, religion, and literature.

In *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern* (2006), Amanda Weidman considers inner domains in South India and Karnatic music, and refers to this phenomenon as a
“safely delineated realm” (5). Ethnomusicologists like Weidman, Matthew Harp Allen (1998), and Lakshmi Subramanian (2006), convincingly show that cultural reformers forged the category of Karnatic “classical music” in the colonial context as part of an effort to fashion an inner domain unblemished by colonialism.

Chatterjee contends that elites construct an inner domain in reaction to a so-called “outer domain.” The outer domain is the material sphere of economy, statecraft, science, and technology, of which the West has supremacy. The more citizens of colonized societies imitated Western skills in the outer domain, the greater the need was to protect the inner realm (1993: 26). Likewise, Weidman asserts that South Indian elites defined Thyagaraja\(^4\) as a musician existing outside the money economy in proportion to the development of the Westernized urban music business (2006: 100).

Studying the formation of Sinhalese inner domains from the marginalized perspective of Sri Lanka supplements these works in ethnomusicology that restrict analysis to the British-Indian axis. Sinhalese artists of the colonial and postcolonial period used song to create an inner Sinhalese domain, but not always in relation to a Western outer domain. They wrote musical treatises and created song forms in dialogue with North Indian power centers. At the same time, absences speak as loud as presences: as Tamil-Sinhalese relations worsened in the mid-twentieth century, Sinhalese composers and lyricists, generally speaking, did not engage South Indian culture, despite a rich history of Sinhalese-Tamil musical interaction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

\(^4\) The Brahmin middle class canonized Thyagaraja’s Karnatic compositions in the twentieth century.
Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino uses the term “modernist reform” to describe music in postcolonial nations characterized by cosmopolitan aesthetics, ethics, and worldview (2000: 16). He defines cosmopolitanism as objects, ideas, and cultural positions disseminated throughout the world, but specific to certain portions of the populations within given countries (7). The lyricists, composers, and vocalists of the Sinhalese rural elite propounded certain ideas and cultural positions disseminated throughout South Asia to negotiate local predicaments.

Sinhalese and Tamil music reformers, for example, sought to make musical influence compatible with putative ethnic origin. Because Abraham Pandithar, the pioneer of the Tamil music movement, believed in the existence of Lemuria, a putative continent of Tamil speakers said to exist to the south of India before it was subsumed by the ocean, he created a body of exclusively Tamil music theory (Weidman 2006: 169). If Sinhalese intellectuals, lyricists, and composers embraced North Indian musical influence, they believed that the Sinhalese people’s ancient homeland was North India.

In the chapters that follow, I probe into the ways the language of sarala gī transformed local worlds in post-colonial Sri Lanka. I take inspiration from scholarship authored by ethnomusicologists and linguistic anthropologists who explore the nexus of music and language. Stephen Feld’s Sound and Sentiment (1982), Aaron Fox’s Real Country (2004), as well as Bernard Bate’s Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic (2009) detail how “literary communications” produce, reproduce, and transform regional consciousness in a unique way.

Literary communications (poetry, song lyrics, novels, short stories, drama) do not necessarily have to comment on a specific state of affairs in the real world, and may involve fictional speakers interacting in
They particularly focus on the ways communities *aestheticize* (Daniel 1996, in Bate 2009: 119) utterances in song and oratory by incorporating figurative tropes, linguistic registers, narrative strategies, literary and oral intertexts, and poetic conventions rooted in their respective cultures. Feld reveals how the Kaluli of Papa New Guinea aestheticize colloquial language for *gisalo* song by infusing it with the linguistic register and narrative found in the myth, “The Boy Who Became the Muni Bird.” Fox focuses on the way Texas working class aestheticize language of song by filling it with colloquial talk, phonetic parallelism, intertextual narrative strategies, and chronotypes found in other country songs. Bate’s informants transform political oratory into persuasive, authentic, and powerful performances by speaking in an ancient literary register of Tamil. This study investigates the way Sinhalese lyricists of Radio Ceylon aestheticized the song lyric with cultural metaphors and metonyms, purist and Sanskrit-heavy linguistic registers, Sinhalese folk, court, ritual, and modern poems, Sinhalese and Indian legends, and English Victorian poetry.

Ethnomusicologists’ studies on radio music and nationalism also provided me with a useful lens for comparison. T.M. Scruggs, Timothy Rice, and John Baily investigate how officials and musicians employed at radio stations have tried to foster imagined communities. Scruggs reveals how the Nicaraguan radio station broadcast the *son nica* beyond the immediate urban area to the outer regions, and introduced music of the villages to the urban dwellers. This helped integrate metropolis and outskirts into a national culture (1999: 305-6). Rice, on the other hand, details how the Bulgarian

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fictional worlds. Literary communications also tend to have a much longer life span than communications like emails and newspaper articles (Semino 1997: 6).

While *sarala gī* may have united the caste-divided Sinhalese to a greater extent, unlike *musiqi-ye melli*, it did not bridge gaps with other ethnic groups. This stems from the very structure of the station: General Director John Lampson, an official sent from the British Broadcasting Corporation, reorganized Radio Ceylon in 1950. He introduced *three separate radio services* (Sinhalese, Tamil, and English) based on language (Karunanayake 1990: 201).

There is a growing community of ethnomusicologists of Sri Lanka. C. de. S. Kulatillake was perhaps the first. He left a large body of Sinhala and English publications. In Sinhala, he published on ancient Sinhalese music history (1974), the Kandyan *vannama* (1982), and on Sinhalese instruments (2000). In English, he published monographs focusing on meter/melody/rhythm in Sinhala folk music (1976), and ethnomusicology in Sri Lanka (1991).

Ethnomusicologists have also studied *baila* (Sheeran 1997), calypso (de Mel 2006), Buddhism and music (Laade 1993/94), and Tamil paraiyar drumming (McGilvray 1983). James Sykes’ recent dissertation (2011) comes to terms with the extensive drumming traditions across the island, with a special focus on Sinhalese *berava* drumming. Anne
Sheeran contributed a useful broad overview of Sri Lankan music to the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (1999). Due to lack of time, and Tamil language skills that are not up to par, this literature review is regrettably biased towards Sinhala and English-language publications. Sorely needed is a comprehensive review of Tamil primary and secondary sources on Sri Lankan music.

**Chapter Outline**

Embedded in this dissertation is this question: what did *sarala gī* accomplish within the sphere of political power in twentieth century Lanka? Stephen Berkwitz (2013: 16) details how the power of local Sinhalese kings declined, and Sinhala poets began to utilize poetry to develop ethical awareness, after the Portuguese arrived to Sri Lanka in the sixteenth century. If the work of Sinhala poetry changed in this way, how did the role of Sinhala song transform after independence, when the Buddhist rural intelligentsia came to power and elevated Sinhala to the status of official language?

In chapter 1, “*Sarala Gī* and the Sinhalese Cultural Revolution” I make an effort to come to terms with the way these two events propelled Sinhalese music history. I first introduce the lyricists, vocalists, and composers whom are the subjects of this dissertation, and locate them in the population of revivalist elite. I then tell the story of how the new political elite’s language policies precipitated radio station reform, and created a new space for lyricists and composers to create a literary Sinhala song form.

Chapter 2, “Song and Authenticity in Colonial Ceylon,” is a comparative history of how two cultural reformers utilized Sinhala song for two strands of Sinhalese cultural nationalism—*Arya* and *Hela*. First, I consider the life and work of John De Silva, the “Father of Modern Sinhala Drama.” I explore how, in tune with *Arya* nationalism, he
advocated a song form that valorized Buddhism and North Indian music as authentically Sinhalese. De Silva’s pairing of Sinhalese Buddhism with North Indian music would deeply affect later sarala gī composer/lyricist duos in post-colonial Lanka. Second, I compare De Silva with Munidasa Cumaratunga, the Sinhala language reformer. I investigate how Cumaratunga’s Hela nationalism, conversely, asserted that genuine Sinhalese song would be rid of North Indian influence, full of a “purist” linguistic register, and deeply rooted in Sinhala poetic forms. Cumaratunga’s linguistic purism and regional nationalism had direct consequences for the Sinhalese music in the middle of the twentieth century, when composer-vocalist Sunil Santha waged a war against North Indian.

Chapter 3, “Resisting India: Bat Language and Song for the Mother Tongue,” compares the lives and works of a poet and a composer-vocalist inspired by Cumaratunga’s career and linguistic purism: Rapiyel Tennakoon, and Sunil Santha. Because Tennakoon and Santha participated in the same cultural movement, they had similar objectives. Both rejected Indian influence and staunchly resisted foreign counsel on “local” issues pertaining to the development of Sinhalese music and language. Such rejection and resistance grew out of Cumaratunga’s project of indigenous empowerment and regional nationalism.

Tennakoon challenged the negative portrayal of Sri Lankan characters in the Indian epic, the Ramayana, and Santha fashioned a Sri Lankan form of song that could stand autonomous from Indian musical influence. Such dissent betrays an effort to define the nation not in relation to the West, but to explicitly position it in relation to India. A study of Tennakoon and Santha’s careers and compositions supplement the many works that
focus on how native elite in South Asia fashioned a modern national culture in relation to the West. Their lives and works create a new awareness of regional nationalist, non-elites who also had a stake in defining the nation, and struggled against inter-South Asian cultural hegemony.

In chapters 4 through 6, I discuss how the shifts of ’56 spurred on the Sinhalese service at Radio Ceylon to broadcast songs that embodied, legitimated, and enhanced the “moving of the locus of popular representative power from the hands of the wealthy to the rural middle classes, from the English-educated to the Sinhalese-educated” (Wriggins 1960: 366). Chandraratna Manawasinghe, Madawale Ratnayake, W.D. Amaradeva, and Mahagama Sekera turned the tide of Sinhala song. These lyricists and composer-vocalist transformed Sinhala song from a song form with words set to imitated Tamil and Hindi melodies, to an emotionally charged musical expression that articulated the rural intelligentsia’s cultural imagination.

Chapter 4, “Setting Up New Citadels with the Sinhala Radio Opera,” considers how a discourse that stigmatized imitation in Sinhalese music propelled officials at Radio Ceylon to hire Chandraratna Manawasinghe to create the first Sinhala radio opera, “Manōhari” (1955). I examine Manawasinghe’s roots in the rural intelligentsia, life as a Buddhist monk, his Marxist turn, and the music and language of this radio opera. One conceptual metaphor in “Manōhari” is shown to drive the entire narrative and musical framework of this radio opera that sought to raise the standards of Sinhala music on par with the Sinhala rural elite’s new political position.
Chapter 5, “Music, Metonymy, and Metaphor for the Majority,” explores how a speech made by an influential North Indian scholar influenced the lyricist/vocalist-composer duo of Madawale Ratnayake and W.D. Amaradeva to create musical programs for the radio that drew on folk music. I analyze three popular Ratnayake/Amaradeva songs that drew upon “folk” sources: an eighteenth century poem that narrated the tale of the Buddha, a fifteenth century love poem in praise of a Sinhalese king, and ritual poetry performed to ward off bad planetary influence. Building on chapter four’s exploration of how the revivalist elite sought to raise the standards of Sinhalese music, this chapter documents how the Sinhalese service of Radio Ceylon, between 1957 and 1964, substantially broadened these efforts, by hiring lyricist Madawale Ratnayake and composer W.D. Amaradeva. Their songs were for the Sinhalese majority and asserted the value of Sinhalese culture.

Chapter 6, “Lyric and Literary Imagination,” is a meditation on the diverse literary influences lyricist Mahagama Sekera drew on to create his \textit{sarala gī}. These influences include English Victorian poetry, folk poetry, Sinhala legends, and Sekera’s own modern poems. I argue that these works betray a more liberal conception of Sinhalese tradition, one that celebrates the author’s feelings, experiences, and imagination. They further provide a unique vantage point for studying the cultural imagination of a prominent member of the rural intelligentsia after the country shifted from a colony dominated by English-educated Christians, to a sovereign nation led by Sinhala-educated Buddhists.

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6 I put “folk” in quotes because Ratnayake and Amaradeva explicitly term these materials as genres of \textit{folk} music despite the fact that Sinhalese \textit{kings} commissioned the poem about Buddha and the love poetry.
Chapter 1: Song and the Sinhalese Cultural Revolution

*Sarala gī* is a vernacular song form. I use the term *vernacular* in the sense that Sanskrit scholar Sheldon Pollock implies for vernacular literature: it is a stay-at-home, local genre (2000: 606). Although Sinhalese composers and lyricists did not circulate *sarala gī* beyond the confines of the country’s boundaries, they negotiated larger South Asian historical commonalities: most notably, the need to accommodate the language and culture of a newly independent nation’s majority. In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese Buddhist majority swept the power away from the English-educated urban elite, a change that precipitated the formation of *sarala gī*.

Michael Roberts has designated the rural-born Sinhala-educated Buddhist population as the “revivalist elite” (1994: 298). The lyricists and chief composer of Radio Ceylon (fig. 1-4) were all from this constituency. They were born in villages, and educated in Sinhala-medium schools. Singer-songwriter Sunil Santha (1915-1981) was a Sinhalese Catholic drama teacher inspired by the pure Sinhala movement. Lyricist Chandrarathna Manawasinghe (1913-1964) was a Buddhist monk, Marxist, and a popular journalist. Lyricist Madawale Ratnayake (1929-1997) was a journalist, novelist, and poet who advocated a return to the folk. W.D. Amaradeva (b. 1927) is still the most preeminent composer and vocalist of *sarala gī*. Lyricist Mahagama Sekera (1929-1976) was a poet, art teacher, English-Sinhala translator for the State Department, novelist, and movie director.
Figure 1 Sunil Santha (1952)

Figure 2 Chandrarathna Manawasinghe (Courtesy of Udaya Manawasinghe)
Figure 3 Madawale Ratnayake (center) and W.D. Amaradeva (right) at Radio Ceylon (Courtesy of Nandana Karunanayake)

Figure 4 Mahagama Sekera (Courtesy of mahagamasekera.org)
Lyric, Language Politics, and the Radio Station

Song intertwines music and language, but the lyricist, composer, and scholar stress that Sinhala song is a literary experience:

“The subjects of song have expanded. There are now literary features in Sinhala song. In the past, people would write song lyrics but they were not a popular form of literature. Today the song lyric is a unique literary form.”
Lyricist Mahagama Sekera, 1973, 23

“Light classical music composed for radio, film, and theater is a special form of composition that blends music with literature.”
Composer W.D. Amaradeva, 1989, 50

“In Sri Lankan [Sinhalese] cultural practice, and aesthetic conceptualization, music by and large connoted the melding of lyric and melody. Indeed, verbal content rather than musical composition was the principal focus of analysis and appreciation. Lyric received primacy over melody and the music itself was seen as subserving the verbal composition. This perception of music, where song represented the central core, slowly opened out in the direction of a more inclusive view of the medium as an art form.”
English Professor A.J. Gunawardana, 2000, 251

What, then, is the connection between this experience and the rise to power of the Sinhalese rural petit bourgeoisie? Arguably, the literary aspects of song lyrics were given pride of place, because the long history of Sinhala literary culture would not be called into question as a symbol for this constituency. Conversely, the musical setting for the text was ideologically and symbolically vexed. Literature in song could be used in ways that music could not. It could incite its listeners with the pleasures of Sinhalese Buddhist narratives. By extension, such narratives could domesticate and naturalize the post-1956 politicization of Buddhism.

Sinhalese (and Tamil) authors are some of the earliest in South Asia to use local language for literature. Sinhala works of poetry and criticism survive from at least the
seventh century (Hallisey 2004: 690). Lyricists thus had a wealth of “authentic” material to drawn on: Sinhalese cultural metaphors and metonyms, purist and Sanskrit-heavy linguistic registers, and a wide variety of Sinhalese folk, court, ritual, and modern poems. Lyricists evoked and valorized the rural elite’s literary culture by infusing literary qualities into radio song.

Composers could not easily settle on one ideal musical style because there was no well-defined classical tradition. The Buddhist producers of radio music programs had trained in North Indian classical music and they believed in the fifth-century, Pali-language Mahāvamsa (‘Great Chronicle’), which stated that the Sinhalese and Buddhism had ancient origins in North India. Accordingly, they created a musical genre rooted in North Indian music and Sinhalese folk song. Listeners could recognize this musical style in comparison to other Sri Lankan musical forms, like berava drumming (Sykes 2011), the Portuguese-influenced baila (Ariyaratne 1985, Sheeran 1997), calypso (De Mel 2006), and the classical tradition of the Tamil population—Karnatic music.

Such high Sinhala song did not exist during the first four decades of the twentieth century while the island was a British colony. When the radio broadcasters aired “Oriental” (Sinhalese, Tamil, or Indian) genres of music, it predominantly played gramophone records of popular Hindi and Tamil songs. If the radio broadcaster put a Sinhala song on air, it would be either nurthi, or songs that set Sinhala lyrics to well known Hindi and Tamil song melodies. Producers of the growing Sri Lankan gramophone industry, whose records were broadcast on the radio station, believed that the appeal of a song depended on the artful selection of already-composed Hindi or Tamil melodies (Ariyaratne 1986: 55). They viewed Sinhala song lyrics as a mere “lacquer”
applied to the preexisting rhythm and melodic contour of these melodies (Ariyaratne 1991: 2).

Because experts in Sinhala or Tamil earned a small income and commanded little social respect, Sinhala song lyrics possessed little artistic value in the early twentieth century. Conversely, those fluent in the colonizer’s language, English, could gain employment in government, politics, medicine, and law. All official documents, the law of the country, and court proceedings were written in English. One could not send a telegram if not first translated into English. Licenses, permits, and applications were filled out in English. A complaint to the police had to be documented and signed in English, though he/she would not have known whether the complaint was accurately recorded! (Kearney 1967: 59). Nevertheless, nearly ninety percent of the population could not speak or write in English with literacy, defined as the ability to write a short letter and read the reply to it (ibid: 56).

In 1923, the same year Great Britain created their broadcasting service, the administration appointed a committee to report on the prospects of radio in Ceylon. It consisted of the Post Master General, the chief engineer at the Telegraph Department, and the president of the Ceylon Wireless Club (Karunanayake 1990: 83-84). In August 1924, the colonial administration approved wireless broadcasting. Radio broadcasting would stay under state control yet not be fully operated by the state.

On June 27, 1924 Governor William Henry Manning inaugurated radio broadcasting in South Asia. After his speech to the Engineering Association of Ceylon, engineers broadcast music by placing a microphone in front of an ordinary gramophone (ibid: 88-89). During the 1920s, broadcasters gave little consideration to planning programs that
would appeal to native Sri Lankans. The radio catered to the tastes of the British (Sheeran 1997: 177) who enjoyed a show of Christmas Carols aired on December 17, 1925, and a “Wireless Drama” produced by the Colombo Amateur Dramatic Club in 1927 (Colombage 1980: 10). Ninety percent of radio shows in 1927 were in English, and ten percent of programs were in Sinhala or Tamil (Karunanayake 1990: 151), programs that featured Sinhala, Karnatic, and Hindustani music (Colombage 1980: 11).

The 1931 Donoughmore Constitution introduced universal adult franchise to Ceylon, and passed the larger portion of the internal government into native hands. This democratic event catalyzed elected politicians to voice sentiments of the masses (Pieris 2003: 233). These politicians subsequently strove to make Sinhala and Tamil the new languages of governance, instead of English, an effort that became the most visible and pressing issues of policy in the 1930s. Between 1932 and 1936, they presented resolutions to the newly created State Council of the Donoughmore Constitution to use the vernaculars (Sinhala and Tamil) in debates of the council, and in the administration of justice. Until 1943, their resolutions always grouped Sinhala and Tamil together as Sri Lankan “vernaculars.” In 1943, however, Sinhalese politicians enacted a resolution to make Sinhala the only official language of the state. They subsequently amended it to include Tamil, but this impetus for “Sinhala only” foreshadows the Language Act of 1956.

Reforms at the radio station mirrored these political shifts. In 1930, the Post Master General Report expressed that, “the time has come when the services of full-time officers are needed…to study the requirements of listeners, their tastes and distastes, to arrange musical and literary programs, to supervise and control arrangements at the studio, and to
make every endeavor to popularize the service (1930: 15, in Karunanayake 1990: 90). In the early 1930s, officials at the radio station appointed an advisory board to raise the standard of programs for Sri Lankans.

In 1935, the Post Master General Report complained that planning programs was a difficult task due to limited funds, dearth of talented local artists, and the challenge to provide quality radio programs for the Sinhalese, Tamils, and British. The writers of the report also stressed that the station was in need of a full-time officer, someone who would develop the commercial aspects of broadcasting and study the tastes and distastes of listeners in order to arrange musical and literary programs (PMG report 1935: 15, from Karunanayake 1990: 151). The hours of radio broadcasts increased, during this period, from over four hundred in 1925, to nearly twenty-five hundred in 1935. There was also a large expansion of radio receivers on the island from under five hundred in 1925, to over ten thousand by 1941(92-93).

In 1941, the government officials appointed a special committee of inquiry on broadcasting that drafted a form of long-term objectives (ibid: 93). The writers of the report recommended increasing “Oriental” (Sinhala and Tamil language) programs:

The program must be designed to confirm to the requirements of the people as a whole and thereby have wide mass appeal. One of the main functions of the radio should be to elaborate and spread knowledge among the masses. An acceptance of this policy would therefore involve an increase of Oriental programs, particularly talks in the media in which they are most likely to be appreciated and understood by the masses. (1942, in Karunanayake 1990: 99)
They also proposed to create “program committees” for the Sinhalese, Tamil, and Western sections of the station. Each committee would write its respective program, meet every two weeks to settle the program, select program material, allocate broadcasting hours, recommend rates of payment for artists to the Advisory Board, and consider all public complaints related to programs (ibid: 155). The commission also recommended the construction of a larger building. This was delayed due to unfavorable conditions created by World War II: the British air force occupied the Radio Station in 1942, and ran special programs for British troops (ibid: 101).

In 1948, the international community praised Sri Lanka as a model for newly independent countries. Independence was a peaceful transfer of power to D.S. Senanayake’s United National Party. Unlike India’s anticolonial violence, Sri Lankan anticolonial movement was a series of strikes and industrial disputes. A year after independence, the Ceylon government began to build a modern broadcasting house that merged the government broadcasting station with Radio SEAC (South East Asian Command). On October 1, 1949 they officially named this new conglomeration “Radio Ceylon” (ibid: 105).

Political Unrest

Anne Sheeran writes that sarala gī came of age in an era of backlash against Indian film music (Sheeran 1999: 972). While this fact should be acknowledged, this dissertation further highlights how the political and linguistic shifts of 1956 catalyzed the creation of

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7 This would foreshadow the 1950 creation of entirely separate services according to language (see chapter four).

8 The English government had set up Radio SEAC during WWII to bring news and entertainment to their servicemen.
this genre at Radio Ceylon. More than just a reaction against Indian film music, I interpret sarala gī to musically enshrine the rural elite’s ascendancy to dominance. I sketch the history of this new hegemonic formation in the paragraphs that follow.

After independence, the United National Party, comprised of English-educated Sinhalese-Christians, ruled for the next eight years. During this period, the rural elite’s frustration with the UNP began to boil over. The rural elite condemned UNP party members because they allowed British military bases to remain on the island, failed to remove “His Majesty’s Service” from government stationery, adopted “Westernized” lifestyle and dress, and thought in “pounds sterling instead of the Ceylon rupee” (Roberts 1994: 311-312).

The united vote of the sangha, or community of Buddhist monks, significantly helped the MEP to win the general election of 1956. They felt that the UNP did not represent the majority because party members they knew little of Buddhism and Buddhist history (Wriggins 1960: 344-345). Because 1956 was the twenty-five hundredth anniversary of the Buddha’s enlightenment, the bhikkus imagined the coming election to hold promise as a gateway to a new Buddhist era. As depicted in the often-reprinted cartoon (fig. 5), drawn by a monk from a more extremist organization, many bhikkus construed supporting the UNP as a vote for the forces of evil, while a vote for the MEP was for Buddhism (ibid: 348). The cartoonist evokes the paintings of Mara, the deity of evil, attacking the Buddha and his sangha. The politician on the elephant (a symbol of the UNP) was the Prime Minister at the time, Sir John Kotelawala. He points a threatening spear at the Buddha statue. His corrupt “westernized” lifestyle is criticized with Uncle Sam marching proudly in front with an American dollar, followed by a parade of
ballroom dancers, alcohol drinkers (including the elephant), and a carcass of a dead calf. A depraved girlfriend sits at Kotelawala’s back. To criticize the newspaper as a treacherous UNP torchbearer, a man carries a Silumina newspaper has the word *pandama* (torch) written on it.

Figure 5 Anti-UNP Poster (Courtesy of Wriggins 1960: 357)

Meanwhile S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike stoked the fires of fear, hatred, and extremism by saying, “With their [Tamil] books and culture and the will and strength characteristic of their race, the Tamils (if parity were granted) would soon rise to exert their dominant power over us” (1955, quoted in Manor 1989: 236). Bandaranaike insists that the Tamils in the North were to conquer the fragile and vulnerable Sinhalese culture. Strangely, the

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9 Kotelawala had drawn harsh criticism from the Buddhist community after carving a barbecued calf in public (Wriggins 1960: 356).
truth was just the opposite: in June of 1958, uneducated, militant, and extremist Sinhalese
groups violently attacked innocent Tamil civilians.

The Official Language Act

The electoral allegiance of the MEP pulled off a major upset over the United National
Party in the General Election of April 1956, because of the support of “every popular
dissident element in Ceylon” (Vittachi 1958: 19). This resulted in an unprecedented shift
of power and “marked the beginning of two decades of SLFP primacy in Sri Lankan
politics” (De Silva 1981: 525). The composition of the House of Representatives
completely changed between 1952 and ’56. After the 1952 election, the UNP had
dominated the House with fifty-four seats out of ninety-five, the rest split up among nine
additional parties. After 1956, the UNP held a mere eight seats, while Bandaranaike’s
MEP secured forty-nine. In a striking symbolic display of the power shift, all the
members of the new governing party donned Sinhalese national dress in the House of
Representatives (Wriggins 1960: 327). The same year, the newly elected government
established the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, a ministry that offered state funds to assist in
the revival of Sinhalese art, literature, and Buddhism (Warnapala 1974: 270).

Two months after the MEP victory, Bandaranaike enacted the “Official Language
Act” to assuage the vociferous and extremist campaigns for “Sinhala Only.” A majority
vote (56 for, 29 against) passed it in Parliament five days later. Many members of the
revivalist elite considered the 1956 Sinhala Only Act as the linchpin of an “age of the
common man.” This was symbolized by the slogan “Ape Anduwa” (Our Government)
that had spread throughout the Sinhalese areas at the time (Warnapala 1974: 250).

The Official Language Act stipulated how to switch the language of the bureaucracy
from English to Sinhalese, within four years and six months (Warnapala 1974: 296). New entrants to the civil service who had studied in Tamil or English, were required to take an “Efficiency Bar Test” in the Sinhala language. Their departments gave them bonuses to study Sinhala (ibid: 296-97).

The Sinhala Only Act empowered the Sinhalese but seriously disenfranchised the Tamil population. The legislation originally contained provisions that delineated the substantive role that the Tamil language would have in public life. Bandaranaike dropped all these clauses after a Sinhalese extremist went on a hunger strike in the Parliament, and fanatically proclaimed “a clause permitting local authorities…to use Tamil or English was calculated to make Ceylon a part of Madras in six months” (Manor 1989: 261). The day parliament passed the bill, the Tamil Federal Party carried out a hartal (suspension of normal business) in Tamil-majority areas (Manor 1989: 261). In 1957, S.W.R.D Bandaranaike negotiated with the Tamil Federal Party to give the Tamil language more recognition in the country’s affairs. When Tamil Federalists in Jaffna tarred over the new Sinhala lettering on a new fleet of buses, Bandaranaike dissolved the pact.

Because Bandaranaike abandoned the pact, in June of 1958, Tamils in the Federal Party began a satyagraha (non violent resistance) campaign. To prevent Tamil resistance, Sinhalese mobs attacked and murdered innocent Tamil civilians in Colombo, along the

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10 There were “clauses ensuring that individuals trained in English or Tamil could enter the public service through examinations conducted in these languages; that local bodies had the right to decide for themselves the language of their business; and that individuals could communicate with the government in their own language” (Wriggins 1960: 260).
western coast and in the Central Province (Wickramasinghe 2006: 273).\textsuperscript{11} These were the first modern large-scale murderous rampages against the Tamils. Nila Wickramasinghe calls June 1958 a “point of no return” (ibid: 273).

I have strongly emphasized how the events of 1956 served as catalysts for the creation of \textit{sarala gī}. Yet the musical genre had earlier precedents in the colonial era, in the songs John De Silva wrote for the Buddhist revival, and the musicological treatise Munidasa Cumaratunga authored for the Sinhala purist movement. I focus on these men, their careers, and the colonial era in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{11} See Vittachi 1958.
Chapter 2: Song and Authenticity in Colonial Ceylon

“By my reading, anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power,” writes Partha Chatterjee in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993: 6). Anti-colonialism’s antecedent is cultural reform: before political movements form, Chatterjee posits, intellectuals carve out a unique space, the “inner domain.” Native intellectuals imagine the inner domain to be a realm of authentic culture untouched by colonialism. Chatterjee assigns a new starting place for conventional histories of colonial-era nationalism, histories that begin with native political movements, or battle with the imperial power, instead of cultural reform.

I accept the premise of the “inner domain,” but I disagree with the emphasis Chatterjee places on intellectuals of colonized nations, who create inner domains *only in relation to Western hegemony* (ibid: 6). Chatterjee’s focus was on *Bengali* cultural nationalism, and its complex relation to Western culture. But he considered Bengal, the metropolis of the British Raj, to be representative of colonized nations. This chapter reveals that elsewhere in South Asia—Sri Lanka—one cultural movement sought to define the nation not in relation to the West: it positioned the nation in opposition to North India.

John De Silva (1857-1922), the “father of modern Sinhala drama,” and Munidasa Cumaratunga (1887-1944), the Sinhala language reformer, constructed unique inner domains of Sinhalese culture. I juxtapose De Silva and Cumaratunga’s notions of “authentic” Sinhala music, notions that coincided with their projects of religious and
linguistic reform. My central assertions are that De Silva created an inner domain of song with Buddhism and North Indian classical music at the core, and the West threatening from outside; and that Cumaratunga created an inner domain of song with a pure Sinhala language at the core, and North India threatening from outside.

The Buddhist Revival and the Arya-Sinhala Identity

Because of the first Sinhalese Buddhist periodical (1854), printing press (1855), and newspapers (1860, 1862), the Sinhalese “Buddhist Revival” became more systematic and resolute in the second half of the nineteenth century (Malagoda 1976, Dharmadasa 1993: 87-114, Arangala 2004: 56-100, Blackburn 2010: 199). Print culture created a public space in which Sinhalese Buddhists could respond to the Christian missionaries’ attacks on their religion. Meanwhile, Colombo-based Sinhalese Buddhist entrepreneurs established voluntary organizations that sought new avenues to propagate Buddhism.

The Buddhist monastic community adopted a more public and activist role that also contributed to the Buddhist revival’s success. In the 1870s, bhikku12 Migettuwatte Gunananda (1823-1890), “organized societies, established a printing press, wrote pamphlets and tracts, toured the island disseminating his message, and, above all, confronted the missionaries face to face in publicly staged debates” (Dharmadasa 1993: 97). Bhikku Hikkaduwe Sumangala (1827-1911) helped set up the printing press, Lankopakara (Succor of Lanka), and authored polemical works that rebutted Christian missionaries’ criticisms of the Buddhist religion.

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12 An ordained male Buddhist monk.
In the late nineteenth century, the revival expanded because of two international organizations: Henry Steele Olcott’s Buddhist Theosophical Society, (established in 1880), and Anagarika Dharmapala’s Maha Bodhi Society, (established in 1891). Members of the Theosophical Society built a Buddhist educational system that rivaled the missionary system (ibid: 108-109). Dharmapala’s Maha Bodhi Society strove to “make known to all nations the sublime teachings of the Arya Dharma of Buddha Sakya Muni, and to rescue, restore, and re-establish as the religious centre of this movement the holy place of Buddha Gaya” (quoted in Blackburn 2010: 120).

Dharmapala and his colleagues championed a form of ethnic identification called the “Arya-Sinhala” identity. In the quote above, Dharmapala refers to the Buddha’s dharma as the “Araya Dharma.” K.N.O. Dharmadasa writes that the “Arya” identity appealed to the urban Buddhist intelligentsia for a few reasons: first, the Buddhist intelligentsia believed Prince Vijaya, the putative father of the Sinhalese race, to have immigrated from North India, called the aryavarta in Sanskrit texts. Second, the word arya connoted meanings like noble, worthy, and honorable. In Buddhist texts, arya was an adjective to glorify central concepts in the Buddha’s teachings, like caturariya sacca (Pali: the four noble truths) and ariya atthangika magga (Pali: the noble eightfold path) (1993: 144-145). Revivalists promoted the Arya-Sinhala identity in early journals like the Aryaya (The Aryan, 1909), and Arya Sinhala Vamsaya (The Aryan-Sinhalese Lineage, 1912).

Although the Buddhist revivalists did not focus on the empowerment of the Sinhala language, they did use a sanskritized Sinhala linguistic register. This sanskritized

13 Buddha Gaya refers to Bodh Gaya. Bodh Gaya is located in the present day Indian state of Bihar, and is where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment.
linguistic register was an “essential yet subordinate corollary” of the Arya-Sinhala identity (Dharmadasa 1993: 151). The revivalists adopted miśra Sinhala, a language mixed with heavy doses of Sanskrit and Pali because Arya-Sinhala language ideologies conceived the Sinhala language as a derivation of Pali and Sanskrit. Further, most Sinhala Buddhist authors of classical literature wrote in this style. The leading linguist at the time, Abraham Mendis Gunasekara, wrote in his *A Comprehensive Grammar of the Sinhalese Language* (1891) that, “almost the entire vocabulary of Sanskrit words is used in Sinhalese composition” (Gunasekara 1891: 381).

**Parsi Theater and Nurthi**

In May of 1877, as the Buddhist revival gained momentum, a Parsi Theater troupe from Bombay, named the “Hindustan Dramatic Company,” brought the North Indian musical system of rāga and tāla to the island (Ariyaratne 1983: 52). The Parsi Theater troupe presented two Urdu-language dramas, with riveting stories narrated in poetry, dance, and music. One was *Indar Sabha*, considered the very first of its kind. In 1882, another troupe, K. M. Baliwala’s “Elphinstone Dramatic Company,” presented *Indar Sabha*, along with at least seven new musical dramas. Parsi Theater troupes from Bombay returned to Sri Lanka six more times, between 1889 and 1913 (Ariyaratne 1983: 55, 59).

Parsi Theater producers created a form of entertainment that appealed to a wide spectrum of urban audiences across the Indian subcontinent (Hansen 1991: 80). The Parsi Theater also captivated audiences in British Ceylon with its shiny costumes, foreign languages of Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati, and Marathi, new curtain technologies, lavish stage designs, and catchy North Indian raga-based melodies. This theater created a new trend in Sinhalese music: according to Sunil Ariyaratne, at the turn of the twentieth century,
nearly all Sinhalese musicians in Ceylon knew the songs of Indar Sabha, most songbooks contained at least one Indar Sabha melody, and most Sinhala-language musicals contained songs that imitated the melodies of Indar Sabha (1983: 56).

Sinhala-language musicals with melodies from Parsi Theater were called nurthi, from the Sanskrit word nritya, or drama. These nurthi musicals show the confluence of the Parsi Theater with the Buddhist revival, and its promotion of the Arya-Sinhala identity. The first nurthi playwright, C. Don Bastian (1852-1921), had brought out the first daily Sinhala newspaper, Dinapata Pravrtti (1895), and was the founder of a voluntary Buddhist organization named Gannabhivruddhi (Development of Wisdom) (Dharmadasa 1993: 127). After seeing the Parsi Theater of the Hindustan Dramatic Company, Bastian wrote and staged the first nurthi musical, Rolina, in 1877. It was a tale of a heroic princess who saves her husband’s life (Ariyaratne 1983: 59, Patiraja 2007: 51-56).

Equating Sinhalese Music with North Indian Music

The Buddhist revival was the dominant theme in the nurthi musicals of playwright John De Silva (1857-1922). De Silva “…was determined to press into service the modern medium of theatre for the purpose of resuscitating Sinhala [Buddhist] culture that he thought was rapidly disintegrating under the onslaught of colonialism” (Dissanayake 2009: 69). De Silva was a lawyer by profession, and would frequent Bastian’s nurthi musicals. Like Bastian, De Silva set his lyrics to Parsi Theater melodies. Interestingly, in their libretti printed for theater connoisseurs, Bastian and De Silva named their nurthi

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14 We can gauge the musical influence of Parsi Theater on nurthi by the fact that at least nine songs found in six different nurthi musicals in the 1880s were imitations of the same melody: the most popular Indar Sabha song “Rajahumayi Kavmaka.” One such opera featured five different song-lyrics set to this tune (Ariyaratne 1983: 56-58).
song lyrics after the Parsi Theater song title. These were Hindi, Urdu, or Gujarati-language song titles, written in Sinhala letters (Ariyaratne 1983: 59).

In 1902, De Silva established the Arya Subodha Drama Society to harness theatre for the Buddhist revival. To this end, his musical, *Shrī Vikra Rājasinghe* (1906), valorized the life of the last Buddhist king prior to British colonization of the island. In the preface to the musical, De Silva explained that he had established the drama society to loosen the grip of Western lifestyles on the Sinhalese, and reunite them with their Arya-Sinhala Buddhist heritage. De Silva further listed his objectives for the Arya Subodha Drama Society: put traditional Sinhalese customs and costumes on display; attack poor character traits; foster love for the Sinhala language; and re-familiarize the Sinhalese people with Sinhala music, which was quickly disappearing (Dissanayake 2009: 67).

De Silva did not mean Sinhalese folk music disappearing under urbanization. He wanted to re-familiarize the Sinhalese people with *North Indian classical music.* A preface he wrote three years earlier for his musical, *Sirisangabō Charitaya* (The Character of Sirisangabo) (1903), will shed some light:

There is evidence that Indian classical music existed in ancient Lanka during the times of our Sinhalese kings. Consider where Sinhalese poets of the past took their poetic meters. A careful analysis shows that such meters originally belonged to the system of rāga and tāla, found in North Indian classical music. Take the famous Sinhala *samudraghōṣhā* meter [quatrains, each line with eighteen syllabic instants] of the *Sālalihini Sandēśaya* poem. When you read texts on North Indian classical music, you find that musicians performed the tala *khyala* with the raga *pīlu.* Our *samudraghōṣhā* meter has the same structure of *khyala* [one rhythmic cycle has four 18-beat sections]. Since the poetic meter of our ancient poets is structurally similar to this tala, we can surmise that Sinhalese people had a sound knowledge of Indian classical music (De Silva 1903, in Ariyaratne 1992a: 119).15

15 All translations are by Garrett Field, unless indicated otherwise.
De Silva interpreted the eighteen mātrā (syllabic instants) found in the samudraghōshā Sinhala poetic meter, to be derivative of an 18-beat North Indian rhythmic cycle. De Silva hypothesized that many Sinhala poetic meters originated in the Hindustani music tradition. In so doing, he justified his own use of Hindustani music as an authentic expression of the Arya-Sinhala cultural ethos.

**Raising the Standards of Nurthi**

Later in his career, De Silva frowned upon borrowing already-composed Parsi Theater melodies (Ariyaratne 1992b: 15). He came to believe that nurthi songs should be original creations that drew on Hindustani music. In 1903, he brought Visvanath Lawjee, a musician from Western India, to compose the music for Sirisangabō Charitaya. Lawjee composed the music of De Silva’s most famous nurthi musicals. De Silva staged these musicals between 1903 and 1909 (Ariyaratne 1992a: 119). After De Silva explained the scene to Lawjee in English, Lawjee would compose suitable melodies based on North Indian ragas. De Silva would then compose Sinhala words to match these melodies’ rhythms and contours (Sunil Ariyaratne interview 15 July 2011).

De Silva felt his musicals were progressive, because his tunes were originals, rather than Parsi Theatre imitations. In the preface to his nurthi musical, Sirisangabō Charitaya, he proudly introduced Lawjee as the composer of original music (Ariyaratne 1992a: 119). In De Silva’s twelfth musical, Valagambā Charitaya (The Character of Valagamba) (1906), he criticized Sinhalese songwriters who carelessly set words to imitated melodies:

Narrator – Actress, where are you headed?
Actress – I’m going to sing songs to earn my wage.
Narrator – Are there people in Lanka tricked by music?
[Are there people who are willing to pay to hear your songs?]

Actress – Right now there are. These days, audiences consider beautiful any sweet Hindustani or Gujarati melody fed with frivolous Sinhala words.

Narrator – Our [Sinhalese] people are that foolish?

Actress – They can’t appreciate the meaning of the words, and please their ears with the sweetness of melodies.

Narrator – This hinders the development of our people. Our ancient Sinhalese authors of drama did not use music like today. They wrote poetry that illuminated the mind.

Actress – Why, then, do songwriters use such Hindi and Gujarati melodies today?

Narrator – To enhance the plot for the Sinhala people who do not care to relish good language in song lyrics.

De Silva criticized nurti playwrights who carelessly set Sinhala lyrics to catchy melodies of the Parsi Theater.

**A Song from the Great Chronicle**

Champions of the Arya-Sinhala identity and leaders of the Buddhist Revival often cited the fifth-century, Pali-language Mahāvamsa (‘Great Chronicle’) for evidence that the Sinhalese had descended from the prince Vijaya and his retinue. The chronicle tells their story of arriving by boat from North India to the island in the fifth century BCE. De Silva’s musical, Sirisangabō Charitaya, was based on an episode found in the thirty-sixth chapter of the Mahāvamsa. Here, three friends named Sirisanghabo, Sanghatissa, and Gothabaya, are traveling to the royal city of Anuradhapura to serve the Sinhalese king. De Silva and Lawjee’s strophic song, “Dannō Budungē” (Abiders of the Buddha’s Dharma), describes each man’s reaction as they enter to the city’s entrance.
### Table 1 "Dannō Budungē"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sānghatissā: dannō budungē shri dharmaskandha</td>
<td>Sānghatissā: Behold in this town like a mansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>pēvī rakiti sonda silanibanda</td>
<td>many monks adhering to the precepts, destroyed their defilements, and abiding by Buddha’s dharma teachings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>klēsha nasnā bhikshū ãttēya bō sē</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>rahatun nivasanā pāya prakāsē</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sānghabō: Būlō matē mē devlō pāvā sē</td>
<td>Sānghabō: Like heaven on earth!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pēnā mepura muni shāsana vāsē</td>
<td>The shade of the many bhikkhus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Riddhiyen yannāvū nek rahatungē</td>
<td>who travel by air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sevanāllei hiru rashmiya bhangē</td>
<td>destroy hot sun rays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Gōṭhābhaya: Mānel, nelum, hā ōlu pushpādī</td>
<td>Gōṭhābhaya: I see flocks of ducks wading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Āttē pokunuvala bō jala pādī</td>
<td>in deep ponds, where stems of lotus, manel, and olu flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sēṛū pantī pantī pīnati bō sē</td>
<td>lotus, manel, and olu flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Anurādha nagaraya dān penē ossē</td>
<td>rise to the top</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vocalist sings every line twice and accompanies his voice with harmonium. A tabla player accompanies the vocal melody (disc 1, audio track 1).\(^{16}\)

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\(^{16}\) Hubert Rajapakse is the vocalist in the gramophone recording transcribed herein. The year of the recording is not known. De Silva’s songs remained popular after the gramophone was introduced to Sri Lanka at the turn of the twentieth century because the first gramophone recordings in Sri Lanka were De Silva’s *murtī* songs (Ariyaratne 1986: 27). Even when gramophone songs began to be written by taking Hindi or Tamil popular songs and setting Sinhala words to the tunes, the influence of the Arya-Sinhala movement is evident: a large portion of these songs praise Buddhism, teach moral lessons, criticize current issues like the songs “The Social Class Rift,” and “The Rise of Rubber Cost, and valorize Buddhist historical figures (see song lyrics in Ariyaratne 1986: 60-81).
In line with the Arya-Sinhala preference for *miśra* Sinhala, De Silva’s lyric features a plethora of Sanskrit words mixed with Sinhala. Sinhalese poet Mahagama Sekera
contends that the literary value of “Danno Budunge” resided in De Silva’s sensitive blend of Sanskrit (ex: shṛi dharmaskandhā, būlō, riddhi, jala) with Sinhala lexicon. Sekera also praises De Silva’s creative use of tropes found in Sinhalese Buddhist literary culture:

…De Silva has mixed Sanskrit and Sinhala in a distinguished manner. It makes the song a pleasure to hear…Further, the ideas in the song are important. De Silva’s aim is to praise the pristine qualities of the [ancient capital city of] Anuradhapura. ‘Būlō matē mē dev lōva pāva sē’ (Like heaven on earth!) is an idea Sinhalese authors frequently used in classical Sinhala poetry. In Sinhala messenger poems, they often referred to Anuradhapura as a divine city, or heaven. However, I feel De Silva contributed a new idea regarding the monks who travel through the air and cast a cooling shade on the city. This is an aesthetically rich concept. It alludes that compassion of the monks cools down the fear we feel in this worldly existence, rebirth after rebirth. (Sekera 1984: 7-8)

John De Silva’s dramatizations of Sinhalese Buddhist narratives sought to create a unique “inner domain of sovereignty” (Chatterjee 1993: 6). It was an inner domain pervaded by the aims of the Buddhist revival and the Arya-Sinhala affirmation that the authentic Sinhalese nation was rooted in North India, the Mahāvamsa chronicle, and miśra Sinhala.

**Munidasa Cumaratunga’s Linguistic Purism**

By the early twentieth century, native elites throughout South Asia had begun to consider their language as a spiritually unifying marker of cultural identity. As early as 1891, Maratha nationalist B.G. Tilak campaigned to redraw boundaries of an independent India along linguistic lines. In 1920, Mahatma Gandhi acceded his support to create linguistic provinces for independent India (King 2008: 317). Linguistic politics united the community, but violently divided self from other. Although Hindi and Urdu are structurally the same, when South Asia’s post-colonial era erupted with the 1947 partition of India, the Devanagari script for Hindi, and
Persian script for Urdu, helped justify the creation of separate Hindu (India) and Muslim (Pakistan) nations (C. King 1994).  

The modern history of linguistic politics in Sri Lanka begins with Munidasa Cumaratunga. Between 1922 and 1942, Cumaratunga sought to do for the Sinhala language what the revivalists had done, in the previous six decades, for the Buddhist religion. He believed that reforming, uplifting, and fostering loyalty for the Sinhala language would help bring independence to the Sri Lankan nation (Coperahewa 1999, 2010, 2011, G. Cumaratunga 2004, Dharmadasa 1993, 2007, Dissanayake 1989: 185-196). Unlike De Silva, who valorized the importance of Sinhalese Buddhism, Cumaratunga championed linguistic purism. E. Annamalai defines purism as “the opening of the native sources and closure of the non-native sources.” Annamalai further writes that linguistic purism is caused by the “redefinition of power relations when the social order is undergoing change” (1979: 36: emphasis mine). In Cumaratunga’s case, we can add that linguistic purism can cause societal change. His purist project to remove Sanskrit and Pali influence from the Sinhala language challenged the Arya-Sinhala dominance in the Sri Lankan social order.

In 1922, Cumaratunga resigned from his position as an inspector of Anglo-Vernacular schools for the Department of Education. Between 1922 and 1942, he reconstructed classical period (13-17th c.) works of Sinhala verse and prose. The Department of Education approved these texts, twenty-eight in total, to be used for public examinations.

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17 Many language crusades followed, including the Bengali Language Movement of 1952; fasts-until-death for a separate Telugu state in 1951-52; Sinhalese mob attacks in retaliation to Tamil resistance to the 1956 Sinhala Only language act; Fateh Singh’s fast-until-death in 1960 for a Punjabi-speaking state; agitations that divided the Bombay State along linguistic lines into Gujarat and Maharashtra; and Tamil riots in 1965 over establishing Hindi as the official language of India.
at the time (Coperahewa 2011: 9). Cumaratunga compared all the extant manuscripts of a work and reworded lines to achieve what he believed to be the original, authentic, and “pure” version. His work reconstructing texts gave him expertise in morphology, syntax, parsing, lexical choice, phraseology, and orthography of authors and manuscript scribes. This expertise would help him later fashion a “pure” Sinhala linguistic register—one rid of Sanskrit, Pali, Portuguese, Tamil, and English loanwords, and colloquialisms (Dissanayake 1989: 191, Kulasuriya 2004: 83). While he worked to reconstruct “pure” versions of Sinhala texts, he also campaigned for Sinhalese politicians to speak in their mother tongue, rather than English, standardize Sinhala grammar, and advocated that this Sinhala grammar be taught with the rigor in which English teachers taught English to Sri Lankans (1934, in Cumaratunga 2006: 7-9).

Below is an excerpt from the introduction to his second textual commentary, *Muvadev Dā Vivaraṇaya* (A Commentary on the *Muvadev Dā*), which he published in 1922:

…Although there are many poems composed in Sinhala, the *Sasa Dā* [Account of the Sasa Jataka], *Kavi Silu Mina* [Crest-Gem of Poetry], and the *Muvadev Dā* [Account of the Makhadeva Jataka] Sinhalese people considered these works to be the most important. Sinhalese poets composed these works before the [12th century] treatise on Sinhala grammar, the *Sidath Sangarāva* and therefore did not employ the “five transpositions.” These poets did not use rhyme in two or three places in the lines of quatrains. Since these poetic works contain expressions that have not suffered extreme corruption, the poetic diction is chaste. Therefore, those eager to acquire knowledge of unspoiled Sinhala should study these poems with great care.

Errors of ignorant scribes have also corrupted these works. Their errors have impeded literary appreciation…scholars [like me] who reconstruct these texts can easily tell which errors are because of a lapse or inadvertence. We have considered it appropriate, in the interest of young scholars, to produce a pure text of this poem, as best we can (Cumaratunga 1922: 1).

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18 This excerpt lists three factors that Cumaratunga believed to determine whether poetic diction is corrupt: (1) The linguistic register has been subject to the “five transpositions”—five types of diachronic linguistic
George Thomas, in his *Linguistic Purism* (1991) outlines an eight-stage process of prescriptive intervention that language reformers often use to “purify” languages. “Recognition of need” and “identification of targets” are the first two stages (84). Here, one can say that Cumaratunga both recognizes the need to purify the language found in various manuscripts of the *Muvadev Dā* and identifies fixable targets to produce a “pure text” of the poem.

We can see later stages in the purification process in a literary debate that Cumaratunga sparked, entitled *Kukavi Vādaya*, or “The Poetasters Debate.” It ran in the Sinhala journal, *Swadēśiya Mitraya* (The National Friend), from June 1925 through December 1927 (Weerasekera 1938: i):

...Among the entire corpus of Sinhala poetry, the three works *Muvadev Dā, Sasa Dā*, and *Kavi Sīhu Mina* are the flowers at the summit...However, even though the soft words in *Muvadev Dā* are charming, their authors had plundered meanings from the great Sanskrit poets. We do not, therefore, bestow great respect on these works. In the *Sasa Dā* there are several places influenced by Sanskrit verse, yet these instances have only shadows of the Sanskrit words, not the exact copies. Even though shadows appear, the poetic style is not corrupted. As it is said: [Sanskrit] “The poet imitates the shadow of another poet’s meanings. The poetaster takes the meanings. The thief takes the words.”...Those that catch thieves with their stolen goods are criticized for having a crooked mouth...Most Sinhalese scholars consider the *Kāvyasēkharaya* more distinguished than other poems. This is a serious blunder... According to the Sanskrit definitions above, the title ‘poet’ does not belong to the author of the *Kāvyasēkharaya*. (1925, quoted in Weerasekera 1938: 1)

Cumatunga’s language ideologies were contrary to the Arya-Sinhala preference for *miśra* Sinhala. Cumaratunga felt that a Sinhala poetic language heavy in unmodified change (modification in vowels, letters, words, case, and verbal conjugation) as described in the twelfth century treatise on Sinhala grammar, the *Sidath Sangarāva*; (2) There is an excessive use of *eli vāta* where letters in quatrains “rhyme,” i.e. have precise correspondence, in the syllables of each line; (3) There are “errors resulting from the lapses of ignorant scribes,” which refers to linguistic confusions, omissions, and additions, such as confusing similar letters, misinterpretation of contractions, errors in translating words of general resemblance, wrong word combination or punctuation, substitutions of synonyms, etc (see Kulasuriya 1994: 33).

19 The origin of this Sanskrit verse is unknown (Vitarana 2004: 348.n3)
Sanskrit loanwords “corrupted” the authentic Sinhala language. He praised the same three poetic works mentioned in the first excerpt of this section. Yet, here he placed the Sasa Dā on a higher literary plane than the Muvadev Dā, because the Sasa Dā contained many Sanskrit “shadows” or tadbhavas.

Tadbhavas are modified Sanskrit cognates that retain a Sinhala flavor. They are different from tatsamas, unmodified Sanskrit loanwords that Cumaratunga believed to corrupt Sinhala. Cumaratunga alleged that the poet, Toṭagāmuve Śrī Rāhula (1408-1491), did not deserve the title “poet,” because his masterwork, the Kāvyāśēkharaya, was heavy in Sanskrit tatsamas. Challenging the worth of this text was controversial. The Sinhala intelligentsia held Śrī Rāhula’s works in the utmost esteem. He was known as the “God of Six Languages.” Prominent Sinhalese intellectuals responded passionately in defense of this fifteenth century poet, using Sanskrit, Pali, Sinhala, and English poetic examples to raise questions about poetic originality and authenticity.

Cumaratunga wrote, “those who catch thieves with their stolen goods are criticized for having a crooked mouth.” He is referring to himself as the thief catcher. The thief is Toṭagāmuve Śrī Rāhula, author of the Kāvyāśēkharaya. The “goods” are the Sanskrit tatsamas Śrī Rāhula used in the Kāvyāśēkharaya. The “crooked mouth” of Cumaratunga is a reference to the criticism he received from Sinhalese intellectuals, due to his heavy use of the “ā-kāraya.” The “ā-kāraya” is the third letter of the Sinhala alphabet, which makes a vowel sound like the “a” in “cat,” pronounced in an American accent.

Cumaratunga believed the ā-karaya to be the “purest” indigenous letter of Sinhala, since it does not exist in practically any other South Asian language. He idiosyncratically
used this letter because he revered the poet Guruḷugōmi’s 12th century Amāvatura, a poetic narrative of incidents in the Buddha’s life. Guruḷugōmi heavily used the a-kāraya letter and favored Sanskrit tadbhavas over tatsamas, giving his poetic diction a distinctive hela or “pure” Sinhala flavor (Coperahewa 2010: 71). Cumaratunga and his followers suffixed the ā-karaya letter onto nouns to convey the genitive case, verbs for past participles, and prepositions for the emphatic and predication marker (G. Cumaratunga 2004: 447-44).

Deconstructing “Arya”

In 1941, Cumaratunga established the Heḷa Havula (Pure Sinhala Fraternity). It was an organization that aimed to promote the Sinhala language, while reforming its modern grammar according to the linguistic register found in 13–17th century Sinhala literature. Cumaratunga and his colleagues conceived of an alternative identity to the Arya-Sinhala model. One of Cumaratunga’s closest Heḷa Havula colleagues, Rapiyel Tennakoon, deconstructed the Arya concept in an article he published in The Helio [the English language journal of the Heḷa Havula] in 1941, entitled “The Hidden History of the Helese”:

What a shame for us Helese, to have a section of our own countrymen who believe that they are the descendents of a gang of barbarian’s robbers21 from the Lata country! According to the Island-chronicles [such as the Mahavamsa] the leader of this gang of robbers was a grandson of a highway robber who lived in a cave in the great forest region then known as ‘lata vanaya’ in South Guzarat [sic]…Their ships, dispersed by the storm, lost their way in the open sea. Some of them, including the one in which the leader of the gang was on board, reached the island of the Helese. The crew, worn out by hunger and thirst, landed on the shore behind the jungle district, well known all over the ancient

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20 See Coperahewa 2010: 72, for extracts from the Amāvatura that illustrate Guruḷugōmi’s use of this letter.

21 This refers to Vijaya and his retinue.
commercial world by the [ancient] name of [Sri Lanka,] Tommanna. (Tennakoon 1941: 77)

Tennakoon challenged the heroic portrayals of Prince Vijaya, championed by the Arya-Sinhala movement. He disgraced Vijaya as a leader of a gang of barbarian robbers.

Tennakoon rejected the belief that the Sinhalese were descendants of Vijaya, and suggested that the Sinhalese (the “Helese”) were already on the island when Vijaya and his retinue arrived.

Tennakoon deconstructed the Arya-Sinhala identity by critically tracing the term “Arya” in scholarly discourse:

According to our modern writers, these Vadakkayas [Harassers] were the first Aryan settlers of the Helese island. I do not know what they mean by the word ‘Aryan.’ The Buddhist literature says that ‘Aryans” are those who had attained to the noble eight-fold path. But we cannot believe that our modern writers mean the same sin-proof holy beings by the recently coined word Aryan.

The scholars who wanted to mention all the groups of the northern band of the fair-skinned human race in the world as a single family used the word Aryan, which is a word coined very recently in a German mint without taking into consideration that the very same name existed in ancient Indian literature to express quite a different meaning. But soon they saw that word Aryan did not give a wider sense than that given by the ancient word ‘ariya.’ As the scope they wanted to cover by the meaning of the word Aryan grew wider, they felt the want of a new word for the purpose. Then the scholars began to use the newly coined compound word Indo-Aryan. This new treatment made the patient more ill instead of curing him, for ancient “Aryans” were especially Indians. Then the scholars coined another compound word “Indo–Germanic,” to give a still wider sense than that given by the former one. But the meaning they wanted to express by that word began to spread beyond its circle…(Tennakoon 1941: 77-78)

“German mint” most likely referred to Max Müller’s popularization of the concept of the “Arya” race. This idea fed into German linguist Wilhelm Geiger’s widely praised linguistic studies (1897, 1899), which established the Sinhala language’s Indo-Aryan roots. Geiger’s linguistic categorization further established the belief that the origins of the Sinhalese were North Indian.
Cumaratunga’s Musicological Treatise

During his last three years, Cumaratunga studied with the violinist Vincent Somapala, and authored *Heḷa Miḷāsiya* (Sinhala Music) in 1942. He intended to publish three additional volumes, that treated rhythm and Sinhalese percussion instruments, but passed away in 1944, at the age of 53. *Heḷa Miḷāsiya* was a threefold work: (1) a violin self-study manual, (2) a treatise that layed the theoretical foundations for a national system of music, based on the singing of Sinhala poetry, (3) and a collection of patriotic lyrics Cumaratunga wrote in purist Sinhala. Somapala set music notations to Cumaratunga’s lyrics.

Thomas delineates two types of linguistic purism. “Offensive purism” attempts to force a radical departure from traditional usage. “Defensive purism” strives to stop the use of undesirable development (1991: 149). Cumaratunga’s post-1939 style of writing commenced with his publication of the *Subasa* (Good Language) journal, and was in full form in *Heḷa Miḷāsiya*. Cumaratunga’s post-1939 writings are the “offensive” type: a radical departure from common usage in its removal of unmodified Sanskrit, Pali, English, Tamil and Portuguese loanwords, use of the ā-karaya, and idiosyncratic purist replacements.

Thomas defines *replacement* as the provision of an acceptable alternative to undesirable linguistic elements (1991: 93). Replacement is the sixth stage in Thomas’s purification process. The word “miḷāsiya,” found in the book title, is one such replacement. Cumaratunga coined the word as an alternative for *sangīta*, Sanskrit for “music.” Mi- means sweet or pleasant, and –āsiya denotes something heard, giving
mīyāsiya the literal meaning of “sweet sound” (Aravinda 2004: 420, Cumaratunga 1999 [1942]: 5).

In his introduction to Heḷa Mīyāsiya, Cumaratunga criticized Sinhalese composers who studied classical music in North India, composers who thought little of Sinhalese music traditions:

When you mention ‘Heḷa music,’ a large group gathers around. These are the people who have studied singing and instrumental music in North India. They scoff, “What vocal music do the Sinhalese have? What instrumental music? Sinhalese singing is like the lament we hear at funerals. What is Sinhalese instrumental music, except the bera drum’s unpleasant thunderous sound that should be removed from the temple on Poya
23 days, and even from hell itself!” (5)

Cumaratunga also criticized composers who imitated the song style of the first Asian Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore:

Still there is yet another shameful thing: they compose songs according to the style of people like Rabindranath Tagore. What do our composers do? Listening to this type of song, they imitate its meter and words, and then trick all the foolish people who swoon. (8)

Because Cumaratunga desired to free Sri Lanka from Indian influence, he bestowed new Sinhala names to the standard Indian musical notes (sa, re, ga, ma, pa, da, ni). He designated the seven natural notes as si, ri, gi, mi, pi, di, ni, the sharp fourth as mu, and the flat second, third, sixth, and seventh as rā, gā, dā, and nā (ibid: 9).

Cumaratunga’s critique of Sinhalese composers who believed in the superiority of North Indian music, connected to his attempt to reinterpret the ancient North Indian roots of the Sinhalese, as narrated in the Mahāvamsa. As stated above, according to the chronicle, the Sinhalese had descended from the North Indian Prince Vijaya in the fifth

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22 The traditional Sinhalese double headed drum.

23 Poya is the Buddhist holiday that occurs on a full moon day.
century BCE. Cumaratunga argued that the real roots of the Sinhalese were with the “Heḷas,” the indigenous islanders whom Vijaya conquered. Yet, Cumaratunga also looked to the Mahāvamsa chronicle for evidence of an ancient Sinhalese musical tradition, untouched by India. As he wrote in the Heḷa Miyāsiya introduction:

...After covering the Heḷa girl traitor named Kuveni with a cloth, Vijaya, the leader of the thieves, crept closer to the Heḷa abode. What were the Heḷas doing? Pleasing their minds with singing, playing, and dancing. One would think Vijaya’s heart softened from hearing such sweetness. The Heḷas danced, sang, and played instruments not knowing they would soon be in the clutches of death [murdered by Vijaya]. (6)

Cumaratunga referred to an episode narrated in the Mahāvamsa: Prince Vijaya could conquered “the Heḷas” because Kuveni, a Hela queen, betrayed her own kin, indigenous islanders. After sleeping with Kuveni, Vijaya heard sounds of music and singing that were foreign to him. He asked, “What does this noise mean?” Kuveni replied that the music was for a seven-day Heḷa wedding festival, taking place in the city Sirisavatthu (Geiger 2003: 57). Vijaya and his retinue then went to Sirisavatthu, vanquished the Heḷas, and began to rule ancient Lanka. Cumaratunga believed that this story in the Mahāvamsa gave evidence of an ancient indigenous Sinhalese musical tradition.

Many of Cumaratunga’s lyrics contain Heḷa Havula slogans and ideology. The song lyric below praises Cumaratunga’s “triple gem” slogan that valorized the Sinhala language, nation, and country:

For any nation, except my nation, the Heḷa nation
For any land, except my land, the Heḷa land
For any language, except my language, the Heḷa language
I will never bow my head  (1999 [1942]: 63)
In the first three decades of the twentieth century, the motto of Arya-Sinhala nationalism was “country, nation, and religion.” Cumaratunga replaced religion with language. Sandagomi Coperahewa writes that this replacement “reflects the growing importance of the language factor in Sinhala nationalism and politics in the late 1930s” (Coperahewa 2011: 27). Indeed, between 1932 and 1936, Sinhalese politicians presented resolutions to the State Council to use Sinhala and Tamil, rather than English, in debates of the council, and in the administration of justice.

**From Language-as-Medium to Language-as-Identity-Marker**

Both De Silva and Cumaratunga created *vernacular* (Pollock 2000) works, vernacular in the sense that De Silva’s musicals and Cumaratunga’s musicological treatise were to be consumed *locally*. Yet, because of Sri Lanka’s proximity to the Indian sub-continent, the conditions of possibility for these musicals and musicological treatise lie beyond the island’s national borders, within a pan-South Asian cultural realm deeply affected by the Parsi Theater dramatic form, and the surge of linguistic nationalist movements.

In light of these transnational connections, Cumaratunga’s interpretation of Sinhalese origins, his ideologies of linguistic purism, and his musicological treatise, parallel concomitant music and language movements in Tamil Nadu. Cumaratunga’s conviction that the Sinhalese were not descendants of North Indians, but originally indigenous islanders of Lanka, inspired him to rename the *Indian* musical tones with *Sinhala* note names. Similarly, Abraham Pandithar, pioneer of the Tamil music movement, created a body of exclusively Tamil music theory. His music theory was based on his belief in the existence of the lost continent of “Lemuria,” wherefrom all Tamil speakers were said to have originated (Weidman 2006: 169).
Further, both Cumaratunga and Maraimalai Adigal, the founder of the Tamil purist movement, rejected their respective ethnic groups’ putative Aryan roots. They based this refutation on what they believed to be the inherent uniqueness of the Tamil and Sinhala languages: autonomy from Sanskrit (also Pali, for Sinhala). Interestingly, both Cumaratunga and Adigal were not of high caste. Their positions as rural elites, yet subaltern in relation to the high caste and urban English educated, deeply affected their outlook. Cumaratunga, however, did not publicly seek to empower the “lower” castes (the Durava), as did Adigal, in his “Non-Brahmin Manifesto” (see Kailasapathy 1979).

Despite these commonalities between Cumaratunga’s music/language reform and music/language reform in Tamil Nadu, the Sinhala and Tamil languages and cultures became increasingly polarized within Sri Lanka in the 1940s. Tamil culture had deeply influenced early twentieth century Sinhala film music, nineteenth century Sinhala drama (nādagam), and eighteenth century Sinhala song (vannama). Yet exclusory language policies in Sri Lanka in the 1940s, created a conspicuous lack of cultural dialogue between the Sinhalese and Tamils: in 1943, a year before Cumaratunga passed away, Sinhalese politicians enacted the first resolution to make Sinhala the only official language of the state. This resolution excluded Tamil. One may ask whether Cumaratunga’s lyrics that extolled the beauty of the Sinhala language in Heḷa Mīyāsiya, tacitly advocated for such majority language politics.

From a wider vantage point, we can interpret Cumaratunga’s language loyalty as the Sri Lankan case of the large-scale shift in South Asia from language-as-medium to language as marker of ethnic identity. Sumathi Ramaswamy (1997) and Lisa Mitchell (2009) detail the way the Tamil and Telugu languages came to constitute a defining
characteristic of Tamil and Telugu individuals in the twentieth century. Like the Tamil and Telugu language reformers whose campaigns contributed to this shift, Cumaratunga created a unique inner domain of Sinhalese ethnic identity with the Sinhala language at its heart.
Chapter 3: Resisting India with Bat Language and Song for the Mother Tongue

Rapiyel Tennakoon

In 1927, Munidasa Cumaratunga was appointed principal of the teacher’s training college in Nittambuwe, where he befriended Rapiyel Tennakoon, the history and geography instructor (Kudatihi 1996: 11). Tennakoon joined Cumaratunga’s Hela Havula (Pure Sinhala Fraternity), and presided as president between 1949 and 1965 (Ganevatte 2006: 8). As stated in chapter 1, Cumaratunga established this group to revive, promote, and elevate the Sinhala language. Members of the Hela Havula wrote with a classical (13-17th century) Sinhala syntax and tried to rid the Sinhala lexicon of Sanskrit and Pali influence.

Tennakoon read Cumaratunga’s Virit Väkiya (Treatise on Sinhala poetic Meters) (1938) and began to compose verse in the metered style prescribed by this book (N. Tennakoon 1996: 313).24 In two years, Tennakoon completed eleven long metered poems, four of which comprised more than one thousand quatrains apiece. Cumaratunga published three of Tennakoon’s long poems in the book series, Ruwan Väla (Chain of Gems).25 The Ruwan Väla book series exclusively published poetry by members of the Hela Havula.

24 Tennakoon acknowledged Virit Väkiya’s influence on his poetry (see 2006 [1939]: 97).

25 Wawuluwa (Bat Language) (1939), Hävilla (The Curse) (1940), and Dā Vinaya (Discipline of the Nation) (1941). The book series commenced in 1936 with Cumaratunga’s Piya Samara (Remembering Father).
Tennakoon’s poems were satirical and polemical: in Hāvilla, he lampooned zealous religious practices (Sannasgala et al. 2001: 126); Dā Vinaya satirized corrupt politics (Kudatihi 1996: 39-51, 52-62). These poems, and the poems of his colleagues in the Hēḷa Havula, like Amarasiri Gunawadu, Jayamaha Vellala, Ven. Warakagoda Silruwan, and Ariesen Ahubudu (fig. 6) were erudite and sometimes cryptic long poems, poems that deviated from the style of the first and second generation of Colombo poets.\(^\text{26}\)

Unlike both generations of Colombo poets, who wrote in the sivupada meter (quatrams with an equal amount of māṯrā (syllabic instants)), Hēḷa Havula poets used a more expanded repertoire of meters. Tennakoon, for example, favored gī meters, quatrains with uneven amounts of māṯrā (Ganevatte 2006: 10). Gī was a meter common to Sinhala poetic works composed between the 12\(^{\text{th}}\) and 17\(^{\text{th}}\) century, like the Sasadāvata, Muvadevdā, and Kavsiḷumīṇa. Tennakoon favored gī meters because he held these literary works in esteem.

Hēḷa Havula poets appended commentaries to their works of poetry. Detailed exegesis was necessary because Hēḷa Havula poets used an arcane lexicon, and commented on myths, current events, and biographical details through slight allusions, some of which seemed like inside jokes.\(^\text{27}\) The Colombo Poets, by contrast, did not

\(^{26}\) The first generation of Colombo poets began to publish in the late nineteenth century. The second generation started to publish around 1920. Generally speaking, the first generation of Colombo poets favored Buddhist, edificatory, patriotic, and children’s poetry, while the second wrote of romance, nature, and the plight of the poor (Wanshatilaka 2009: 46).

\(^{27}\) The exegeses appended onto Hela Havula poems adopted the format Sinhala literary scholars used to interpret classical Sinhala literature. In the anvaya (word order) the commentator put the quatrain into sentence syntax. In the vistara or padyartha (description, meaning) he explained the content. The tippani (gloss) followed with an analysis of challenging terms or phrases.
append commentaries on their poems because the common reader could understand the meaning.

Figure 6 "Siya Bas Waḍuwō" (Developers of the Native Language) in Subasa 1941: 61. From top-left clockwise: Rapiyel Tennakoon, Jayamaha Vellala, Ven. Warakagoda Silruwan, and Aryasena Anshuboda (later changed name to “Ariesen Ahubudu”)

Bat Language and the Ramayana

Tennakoon’s first poetic work was entitled Wawuluwa (Bat Language) (1939), a long narrative poem consisting of 551 quatrains. Because Cumaratunga was enamored with
this poem, he wrote a long introduction to *Wawuluwa* that analyzed the work’s aesthetics and characters (2006 [1939a]: 51-75). Cumaratunga claimed that *Wawuluwa* could win a Nobel Prize if translated into English (ibid: 90).

Tennakoon wrote *Wawuluwa* for two principle reasons. The first was to rewrite more Sri Lankan-friendly scenes in the *Ramayana* epic. *Wawuluwa* revolves around a conversation between an anthropomorphic male bat, *Wawula*, and female *drongo* bird, *Kāvidiya.*28 Both have a long Sinhalese ancestry that they trace back to ancient tribes in India and Sri Lanka. The two meet in the evening when *Kāvidiya*’s husband is late to come home (st. 1–21). After *Kāvidiya* tells *Wawula* about her distinguished family lineage (st. 22–45), *Wawula* reveals that one of his ancestors lived in the castle garden of Sita’s father (Sita is the heroine of the *Ramayana*). This ancestor was later exiled to the South of India, where Rama (the hero of the *Ramayana*) and Lakshmana (Rama’s brother) lived (st. 55–59).

When the bat and drongo bird tell their stories, the reader gains a different perspective on the Sri Lankan characters of the *Ramayana*: Ravana and his sister Surpanakha. In the standard Indian version (written by Valmiki) of the *Ramayana*, Ravana’s sister Surpanakha is an ugly woman who attempts to seduce Rama and his brother Lakshmana. After the brothers reject Surpanakha’s advances, she attempts to kill Sita, but Lakshmana cuts off her ears and nose. Conversely, in *Wawuluwa*, Surpanakha is a “beautiful” (*rūmat*, st. 61) and “friendly woman” (*yeheliyak*, st. 64). She does not flirt with Rama and

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28 Tennakoon’s *Wawuluwa* was likely influenced by Cumaratunga, who used anthropomorphic animal characters to criticize society in his fable-like *Magul Kāma* (The Wedding Feast) and *Hin Sāraya* (The Subtle Attack). Cumaratunga published these stories in his newspaper *Lak Mini Pahana* between 1934 and 1935. Other *Hela Havula* poems criticized society within the framework of a fable. See Jayamaha Vellala’s “Gon Maluva,” (*Subasa*, 1941: 9-14) and Tennakoon’s *Dā Vinaya*. 
Lakshmana; they crudely speak to her (st. 65-70). Tennakoon redeemed her character.

Tennakoon also redeemed the character of Ravana. In the standard Ramayana, Ravana tricks Rama and Lakshmana, abducts Sita to Sri Lanka, and demands she marry him. In Waluwwuwa, Sita wants to go to Sri Lanka to meet Ravana, the great king of Sri Lanka (st. 78). And when she is in Sri Lanka, Ravana valiantly protects her.29

**Bat Language and the Sinhala Dictionary**

The second reason Tennakoon wrote *Wawuluwa* was to criticize and satirize the Royal Asiatic Society’s Sinhala dictionary project, especially their hire of linguistic Wilhelm Geiger (Kudatihi 1996: 17). The title of the poem is a humorous allusion to this project. Tennakoon combined the Sinhala word for *bat* (*wawula*) and a suffix to denote *language* (-*uva*) to create the title, *Wawuluwa*, or *Bat Language* (Cumaratunga 1939a: 41).30 In the poem, *Wawula* (the bat) is the editor of a Bat-Language dictionary. Members of the Sinhalese intelligentsia knew of Geiger because of his book *A Grammar of the Sinhala Language* (1938) (published a year prior to *Wawuluwa*), and articles devoted to the etymologies of roughly two thousand Sinhala words (1896, 1897). The intelligentsia accepted Geiger’s argument that the Sinhalese language had Indo-Aryan origins (De Silva 1979: 29).

Geiger and chief editor Sir D.B. Jayatilake had launched the dictionary project in 1926. It progressed at a snail’s pace: part one of the first volume was published in 1935.

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29 See Tennakoon 1939: st. 110-124, and Weerasekera’s commentary pg. 235-238. Cumaratunga had written a similar heroic portrayal of Ravana six years earlier in book 4 of *Shikshamargaya* (see Cumaratunga 1933: 11-14).

30 The suffix -*uva* is found in the word *eluva*, or “pure Sinhala language.”
This slow pace prompted Cumaratunga to publish a public letter in *The Helio*, the English-language journal of the *Heḷa Havula*. Cumaratunga volunteered his services to complete the dictionary in two years (1941: 2). He was frustrated because the dictionary project was put under the guidance of *Geiger*, a foreign scholar whom he felt sorely lacked in Sinhala fluency. To vent his frustration, Cumaratunga authored thirteen sardonic letters of criticism, published in both Sinhala and English, about Geiger’s *A Grammar of the Sinhala Language*. In the ninth criticism he attacked the credibility of Geiger’s work, and the new field of comparative philology:

To Prof. Geiger [ē] and [hē] means ‘he’ ‘she’ or ‘it.’ This must indeed have come as a result of some mysterious and rigid process of highly ‘scientific’ research. [ē] and [hē] in Sinhala is equal to ‘she’ in English! It will be ridiculous to argue to the contrary. One who knows the Sinhala language will require no argument at all to be convinced that it is absolutely untrue to say that [ē] and [hē] means ‘she’, and those whose limited knowledge of Sinhalese requires the thick cover “Comparative Philology” to protect it from the atmosphere, will never come out of their fortified shelter to face any kind of argument. (Cumaratunga 1939b: 155)

In addition to these criticisms, Cumaratunga authored, in English, three “Open Appeals” in the *Heḷa Havula* journal *Subasa* (Good Language) to Sir D.B. Jayatilake, as well as to the chairman of the dictionary managing committee, and the minister of education. In his appeal to the chairman, he wrote:

Professor Geiger, the Great Authority of the Dictionary, does not know Sinhalese. His great Grammar, produced with the help of Mr. Julius de Lanerolle, clearly shows how lamentably defective his knowledge of Comparative Philology is so far at least as it deals with the Sinhalese language. A Dictionary compiled under the direction of such a doubtful authority can hardly be satisfactory however long may be the period it takes to materialize.

To one who is already well-versed in the language, who needs not run from this end to the other end of the island to learn the etymology of one small word, who need not make a forced display of his erudition by coming out in the public over and over again with the etymology of a single word, that too unearthed by someone else, two years is quite ample to complete the most comprehensive Sinhalese Dictionary. (1940: 289-290)

In *Wawuluwa* stanzas 466-469, Tennakoon subtly discredited Geiger’s credentials by
denouncing scholarship in philology about the Sinhala language:

Chapter 27. Bándana Mahe śl̄e jñāna [The Arrangement of the Bat-Language Dictionary]

[Wawula said: The assembly gathered to protect the Buddhist order but commenced the compilation of the Bat-Language dictionary!]

[Everyone in the group examined the state of Bat-Language and then entrusted the job of remedying the language to me.]

[Therefore, on the following day, I brought together all the Bat-Language books and all the scholars of those books.]

Wearersekera’s commentary for stanza 469:

Glossary: 1. Burumayeka mita vilasin: “burumaya” is a manual machine to drill wood. To penetrate the wood, one turns the handle of the drill in one direction and then in another. Tennakoon says that Wawula’s head is like the motion of the handle of this manual drill. When he reads books in the Bat-Language, his mind and head move in a focused direction. Yet, when he reads the discourse of scholars on these works, his head jerks in another direction [he is outraged at what they say]. (Wearersekera 1939 [2006]: 342)

Tennakoon’s intention was to wryly criticize foreign scholarship written about the Sinhala language, like Geiger’s etymological studies because he believed these studies
spread misinformation about the Sinhala language (Shri Nat Ganevatte interview 11 September 2011).

Although Cumaratunga had published two grammars of the Sinhala language, *Vyākarana Vivaraṇaya* (‘Exposition on Sinhala Grammar’) (1938a) and *Kriyā Vivaraṇaya* (‘Exposition on the Sinhala Verb’) (1939), the dictionary project turned down his offer to complete the Sinhala etymological dictionary. The officials of the dictionary office deemed his belief foolish, that Sinhala was as old as Sanskrit. I say this based on a small booklet written by the University of Ceylon linguist M.W.S. de Silva, entitled *Sinhalese and Other Island Language in South Asia* (1979). While De Silva praised Cumaratunga’s *Vyākarana Vivaranaya*, he mentioned Cumaratunga indirectly in this manner: “Some purists who upheld that Sinhalese was at least as old as Sanskrit if not older (rather than derived from it) had little patience with Geiger as was seen in the local press three decades ago…[the purists] have not shaken the basis of Geiger’s observations one little bit” (1979: 29).

The character of the bat in *Wawuluwa* was a satirical portrayal of Sir D.B. Jayatilake, and other members of the dictionary project who chose a foreign over native scholar. As Jayantha Weerasekera’s commentary for *Wawuluwa* in stanzas 513-514 discloses: “These two stanzas reveal a surprising character trait of *Wawula*. He doesn’t wish for his neighbors help as long as he is alive. However talented his neighbors are, he does not like to consult them. But he happily takes help from people from far away” (Weerasekera

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31 De Silva wrote: “The only native grammar of any significance which does not follow the *Sidat Sangarāva* tradition is Kumaranatunga (1938) [Cumaratunga]. Kumaranatunga’s descriptions of Sinhalese phonology and morphology has some similarities to similar descriptions within the American structuralist model despite the fact that Kumaranatunga has had no training in any school of modern linguistics” (1979: 33).
2006 [1939]: 354-55). Cumaratunga echoed this sentiment in his introduction to Wawuluwa:

Kāvidiya inquires about Wawula’s journey to Bintenne: “Why Bintenne? Can’t you learn about your own language from your own people?” No, no. Wawula likes to get help from foreigners much more than from his fellow countrymen… Should not the fact that local scholars are willing to give help from the bottom of their hearts influence the bat to accept their offers? Alas, Wawula likes to worship foreigners and would rather die than seek assistance from local scholars. (Cumaratunga 2006 [1939]: 44-45)

**Joseph John Perera’s Transformation**

In 1934, Bengali visionary Rabindranath Tagore staged his opera, Shapmochan (‘Curse Redeemed’), to critical acclaim in Sri Lanka. Inspired, a young Sinhalese Catholic music and drama teacher, Joseph John Perera, doggedly persuaded his brother for a loan to study music at Tagore’s school, Santineketan, and raised the rest by staging a performance of a Sinhala-language adaptation of Shakespeare’s Hamlet. In 1939, he set sail to Bengal to commence his studies.

After he trained for a year in North Indian classical voice, sitar, orchestration, and in Tagore’s own ruminative musical genre known as rabindrasangit, Perera decided to pursue a more rigorous study of classical music. He secured financial aid from the Ceylon government and traveled to Lucknow, to focus on Hindustani voice and sitar at the prestigious Marris College of Hindustani Music.³²

Like many Sinhalese Christians who changed their anglicized names to Sinhalese names in the mid-twentieth century, Perera adopted the Sinhala stage name of “Sunil Shanti,” around 1940 (Pranandu 2009: 17) He later adjusted his name to “Sunil Santha.” In 1944 he scored the highest marks in the first division sitar class, completed a Bachelor

³² This institution later became Bhatkhande University.
of Music (fig. 7), and returned to Ceylon.33

Figure 7 Letter of Recommendation for Santha

Back home, Santha’s uncle, Father Moses Perera gave Santha a temporary place to

33 I would like to acknowledge the generosity of Sunil Santha’s disciple Ivor Dennis. He gave me the commemorative volume that contained the photocopy of the letter of recommendation below, and shared much helpful information about Sunil Santha.
lodge. Father Perera was a member of the _Hela Havula_ and introduced his nephew to Cumaratunga’s writings. Santha began to feel that Indian music prevented Sri Lankan composers from creating a national Sri Lankan musical genre.

Santha wrote about his experience reading Munidasa Cumaratunga:

While in North India I also transformed into a North Indian…in my dress, language, customs, ideas, etc. Even when I was back in Sri Lanka, I behaved as though I were still in North India. It was a big deal for me to forget all my Sinhalese ways and act like this. When singing Sinhala songs, I would pronounce the Sinhala words as though they were Hindi words. I considered the Hindi accenting of Sinhala words to be a great thing. In short, in every single activity I pushed my Sinhalese identity away and brought forward North Indian ways of being.

One day I directed my attention to some Sinhala poetry. I read it once, twice, and a third time. I knew the verse contained an important idea. I felt transformed within. The stanzas that really penetrated my heart are these:

> On account of my country and nation
> If I were I to go to war and kill enemies
> And lose my life thereof
> Will not my glory live for a hundred years?

> Were one to live confined in a stone cave
> His life and name will never last
> Sacrifice that life to the country and nation
> Preserve your honor and remain undefeated

> May I never see a Helaya (a Sinhalese person)
> Two footed, but not doing any service
> Working earnestly for the good of country and nation
> Forget life’s cravings for a moment

(1953: 4)\(^{34}\)

\(^{34}\) I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for the _Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities_ for improving my translation.
Santha had read these three stanzas in Munidasa Cumaratunga’s musical treatise *Helâ Miyâsiya* (Sinhala Music) (1942: 85). Cumaratunga’s message deeply inspired him:

I searched for other writings penned by this meritorious hand [Munidasa Cumaratunga]. Having found them, I read with great pleasure. This writer was successful in destroying all my useless ideas. I turned in a completely different direction. I felt that my “Hindustani-ness” left me and went all the way back to India for good. Today there is nothing more important than my nation, country, and language.” (1953, in Vitarana 2001: 23)

Santha espoused Cumaratunga’s motto of “nation, country, and language” (see ch. 1).

On March 2, 1946, Santha sang the commemoration song at the ceremony for the second death anniversary of Munidasa Cumaratunga. Santha had set a melody to a poem of *Hela Havula* member Amarasiri Gunavadu, entitled “Cumaratungu Samaru Gîya” (Cumaratunga Commemoration Song).35 Gunavadu’s lyric was markedly different from popular song. During the first four decades of the twentieth century, the standard form for Sinhala gramophone song was the Hindustani *bandish*: i.e. an introductory lines of lyrics known as the *sthayi*, followed by two or three *antara* sections. The *antara* section elaborated on the theme of the *sthayi*. In performance, the *sthayi* would repeat after each *antara*. Songs began with an instrumental introduction and featured several instrumental interludes (I. Weerakkody 2008: 37). Sinhalese song melodies were often imitations of popular Hindi and Tamil songs. Sinhala lyrics were set according to these tunes’ melodic contour and rhythm. Sinhala lyrics did not conform to Sinhala poetic conventions.

By contrast, Gunavadu’s lyric obeyed the rules of Sinhala metered poetry. It is a *sivupada* (four line) poem. In addition to quatrains of equal syllabic amounts, it has *elî*

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35 This poem and song notation are printed in Santha 1948 [2000]: 10-11. The poem was also printed in G. Cumaratunga 2004: 474. Such songs are referred to in Sinhala as *pudgalâbhivâdana* (individual commemoration).
vāta, in which phonemes at specific places are alike in each line. Gunavadu’s poetic dexterity is evident in his use of eli vāta in three places: at the seventh/eighth māṭrā (boldfaced underlined ‘-svg’), the fifteenth/sixteenth māṭrā (boldfaced underlined ‘svf’) and in the final long māṭrā (boldfaced underlined ‘svf’).

“Cumaratunga Samaru Giya” by Amarasiri Gunavadu:

The poem resists easy comprehension due to its pure-Sinhala poetic lexicon:

He had a might of intellect and devoted his life to the Triple Gem
He thrilled the hearts of all and made formidable enemies into cotton that wafts in the air
He showed the way of great seers, this God of Heḷa, our Gem Munidas Cumaratunga
We will put your advice to use without rest and commemorate you every day.

The “Triple gems” refer to Cumaratunga’s slogan, “language, nation, and country” (basa, rāsa, desa).

Santha’s Songs Worlds
Santha’s first big hit was the song “Ōlu Pipīlā” (The Lilies have Blossomed). He

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36 An anonymous reviewer of the Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities helped improve this translation.
composed the lyric, music, and performed as the solo vocalist. It was the first song the Sri Lankan radio station recorded on record (Weerakkody 2001: 283). It aired from the radio station in 1946, when many did not own a personal radio. Historian Vinnie Vitarana described his experience listening to Santha’s “Ōlu Pipīlā,”

Just over fifty years ago not every home even in the Colombo region had a radio set. The second world war had just ended, and we, along with the rest of the world, were just recovering from its trauma…At Mt. Lavinia where a few of us twenty-year olds were lodged as University students, radio listening had to be done, if ever, at the junction where there were two sets at two hotels 200 yards apart. And all what we gathered from them was what our ears could manage to filter from the totality of jarring sounds that reigned over that busy area…We were on the pavement in front of the hotel and just below the radio set that fate evening at which Sunil Santha was to render his first recital live, because recording facilities were not much made use of during those times. After the preliminary instrumental bars at which re recognized a sitar, a violin and a soft tabla beating some distance away, it was Ōlu Pipīlā rendered in a voice so deep and resonant that the radio set itself seemed to vibrate visibly, and all the compounded noise at the junction appeared to be on retreat. (2001: 189-190)

These are the lyrics, in translation, of “Ōlu Pipīlā” (disc 1, audio track 2):

Sister, the lilies have blossomed and sway in the field, whiter than white
Sister, oh fair skinned maiden, shall I pluck them and weave a flower garland for you?
Mala, come in the water and give me your hand
We’ll cut the flowers, weave garlands, and adorn ourselves

Sister, the unbroken chains of fish play lovingly
Sister, The kūnis fish go jumping as if we have called them
Mala, here is the flower I picked for you, this one is yours
We’ll cut the flowers, weave garlands, and adorn ourselves

Sister, I am ashamed to be defeated by your hands
Sister, don’t be in such a rush, let’s wade slowly in the water, picking lily flowers
Mala, with the whiteness of the flowers on your body, you become more stunning
We’ll cut the flowers, weave garlands, and adorn ourselves
Sister, plucking and picking, now the flowers are heavy
Sister, let’s go put them around the top of the mountain
Mala, your younger brother is coming, let’s go quickly
We’ll cut the flowers, weave garlands, and adorn ourselves

Santha abandoned the North Indian *sthayi-antara* form, and composed lyrics with four separate verses (the fourth was not recorded). The chorus is the last line of each stanza: “We’ll cut the flowers, weave garlands, and adorn ourselves.” Unlike the bulk of gramophone songs recorded in the first four decades of the twentieth century, the lyrics attempt to incorporate structural elements found in Sinhala poetry.37 Just as Colombo poetry featured quatrains with rhyme at the end of each line, Santha hints at this by repeating the words “Nangō” (‘Oh sister’) and “māla.” (In the third line “Māla” refers to the girl’s proper name. In the fourth line it means flower garlands). Further, the stanzas’ regular syllabic structure of 26, 26, 24, and 26 also gestures towards the regular structures of Sinhala metered poetry.

The song is narrated in the first person perspective of a young male who courts a girl, Mala, near a village pond. The song lyrics evoke a lush village scenario through the usage of definite articles (the unbroken chains of fish, the white lotus swaying in the field). The honorific vocative second person pronoun of “nangō” (Oh sister!) signals the existence of another participant to whom the commands are addressed (Semino 1999: 40).

In 1946, romantic themes had only recently been introduced into Sinhala song. In the

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37 The same can be said for the songs of Ananda Samarakone. See Ariyaratne 1988.
early decades of the twentieth century, songs were predominantly Buddhist, patriotic, and edificatory (Ariyaratne 1999 [1988]: 92). Sunil Ariyaratne has credited Ananda Samarakone’s “Ennaḍa Mānikē” (Shall I Come my Precious?), recorded two years earlier in 1944, as one of the first attempts to make romance a theme for Sinhala song. Due to the thematic overlap we might consider “Ennaḍa Mānikē” as an intertext in “Ōlu Pipīlā:” both songs are set in a Sri Lankan village and narrate a boy’s attempts to woo a girl by picking flowers. Thus, Santha simultaneously affirmed his belonging to Samarakone’s innovations but simultaneously distinguished himself within it (Neal 2007: 42).

The subliminal poetic quality (Jakobson 1980) of song lyrics in “Ōlu Pipīlā” is found in lexical and phonemic parallelism. Take the famous first stanza. The color chart below emphasizes the careful attention Santha gave to repetition, assonance, and alliteration.

Figure 8 "Ōlu Pipīlā" Lexical and Phonemic Parallelism, Verse 1

Santha uses the word “ōlu” (lilies) start of three lines. He repeats the entire phrase of “ōlu neḷāḷā māḷa gotāḷa” (weave lotus and make garlands). He uses the word “māḷa” four times, and places word “nangō” (sister) at the end of the first two lines. He employs vowel assonance in veḷa veḷa denava (shaking in the pond) neḷāḷā māḷa gotāḷa (weave and make garlands), and in the third line:
Santha recorded “Laṅkā, Laṅkā, Pembara Laṅkā” (Lanka, Lanka, Lovely Lanka) shortly after “Ōlu Pipīlā.” It used a similar orchestral arrangement and simple I IV V harmonic patterns. The song was his first collaboration with the Heḷa Havula poet Ariesen Ahubudu, who wrote the song lyrics. Santha composed the tune and arrangement. Composed almost a year prior to political independence, the patriotic song equates Sri Lankan cultural history with a grand narrative of Sinhalese cultural history (Wijesinghe 1989: 81). It was also new for a radio song to address the country as a mother or princess, with the respectful second person pronoun, “oba” (Lokubandara 1989: 326). I believe this song was recorded at the same session as “Ōlu Pipīlā” due to the same instrumentation of acoustic guitar, Hawaiian slide guitar (played by Patrick Denipitiya), bamboo flute, a few violins, and a similar quality of voice produced from the microphone used at the time. This is the instrumental introduction: (disc 1, audio track 3).

Example 2 Introduction to "Lankā, Lankā, Pembara Lankā"
Chorus:

Lanka, Lanka, Lovely, Lanka
We will make thy pleased, Lanka
Sacrificing our lives we adorn thee
We will care for you, Lanka

The second stanza cites Cumaratunga as one of the great sages of the country:

Lanka, home to kings Bali Taru, Ravana, Gamunu, and Vijayabahu
Lanka, land of sages Pulatisi, Gurulugomi, Totagamuve, and *Cumaratunga*
Lanka, home to poets like Parakramabahu, a Lord Sakra of poetry
When we protect you, even the heat of a dragon is like the cold streams at Siri Pada
Lanka, land of rivers Mahavali, Kalu, Kalaniya, and Walawe, flowing in four directions
Lanka, the Samanola, Kirigala, and Pidurutala are the peaks of your hair
Lanka, in your valleys you cradle tea, rubber, and paddy fields
Lanka, if you expand into the ocean we will jump [?]

We will not allow outsiders to meddle with your affairs
If they come we will chase them into the deep blue sea
We will sing your name in land and water and all places
Being pierced by bullets [for you, feels soft] like petals of a flower

We will adorn you will necklaces of pearls
We will adorn you with garlands of flowers from creepers

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38 The Sinhala word for this phrase is “oba rakunot, lōkumbuvaṭa āpa haṭa.” According to Lokubandara (1989) the word lōkumbuwa refers to a dragon (makara). My translation follows his interpretation.
We will please you by serving the finest curd and treacle

In the end our bodies will be embraced by your soil

If we succinctly describe Santha’s early compositional style, it would be that he set very simple, yet clever and catchy melodies based in western harmonies, to poetic Sinhala lyrics (Ariyaratne 2002: 18). These melodies are predominantly written in the major scale, accompanied by I, IV, and V harmonies set in 4/4 meters and performed by the upright bass and acoustic guitar. Santha played the acoustic guitar in a “country western” style, by plucking the bass string on the beat and strumming the chord on the offbeat. He orchestrated melodic line to be doubled in octaves or sixths through various combinations of violins, flute, and slide guitar. Professor Ranjit Pranandu at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts conjectures that Santha took influence from American country western singers of the 1930s and 40s, singers heard on the Sri Lankan radio in those days (Ranjit Pranandu interview February 2012).

Though “Ōlu Pipīlā” and “Laŋkā, Laŋkā, Pembara Laŋkā” share similar musical features, the text worlds are strikingly different. If “Laŋkā, Laŋkā, Pembara Laŋkā” is primarily a descriptive text, “Ōlu Pipīlā” is a narrative text. “Ōlu Pipīlā” is sung by a first person singular male narrator to a girl he likes. Contrarily, the first person plural “we” sing “Laŋkā, Laŋkā, Pembara Laŋkā.” Songs with a “we” character are effective strategies for enhancing nationalist feelings. The song interpellates (addresses and thereby instantiates) all “Sri Lankans,” though only mentions legendary Sinhalese figures. The dominant modality of the song is what Marie-Laure Ryan calls the “obligation world”:
The obligation world... is a system of commitments and prohibitions defined by social rules and moral principles. While the social rules are issued by an external authority, the moral principles may be defined by the characters themselves. These regulations specify actions as allowed (i.e. possible), obligatory (necessary), and prohibited (impossible). A person or character’s obligation world is satisfied in the Textual Actual World if all the obligations have been fulfilled and none of the interdictions transgressed (Ryan 1991: 116).

“Lañkā, Lañkā, Pembara Lañkā” is about the moral imperative to praise, beautify, protect, and die for the country. The song reaches its lyrical climax in the fourth stanza where the future tense dominates: “we promise to beautify the nation and die on her soil.”

In contrast to the obligation modality of ““Lañkā, Lañkā, Pembara Lañkā,” the “wish world” takes center stage in “Őlu Pipīlā.” Ryan describes the wish world like this:

The wish-world of characters is defined over propositions involving the axiological predicates good, bad, and neutral…. While moral laws define goodness and badness relative to the community, the law of desire defines these predicates relatively to the individual… A desired state is typically the possession of a certain object. A desired action is an intrinsically rewarding activity such as making love, eating, or playing games. (Ryan 1991: 117)

The narrator in “Őlu Pipīlā” desires to take the girls hand, and to play with her in the pond away from the eyes of her family.

As a member of the Heḷa Havula, Ahubudu shared similar beliefs as Sunil Santha about the role North Indian music should play in Sinhala song. Ahubudu wrote an article in 1960 entitled, “Dešīya Sangīta Kramayak Ōnā” (We Need a National System of Music):

Today, a Sinhalese person will not take Sinhala music seriously. His opinion is that the Sinhalese have nothing that they can call their own. [He thinks] the base of our nation is Indian. The root of our language is Indian. The root of drama, etc. is Indian. We can think that for such a person it would be silly to even consider Sinhala music without India and its music.

…We also have strange ideas about our language. Some believe Sinhala is the daughter of Sanskrit and Pali. They are used to forming Sinhala words from the Sanskrit and Pali lexicon. They take the pains to secure the assistance of foreigners who figure out how to etymologically root the Sinhala language in Sanskrit. [Notice the reference to Wilhelm
Geiger]. Meanwhile another group…believes that Sinhala is the child of Tamil. Are we going to just blindly accept these ideas as absolute truth? (Ahubudu, Dinamina January 11, 1960, Page 4)

In a Cumaratunga-esque transition, Ahubudu changed the topic from music to language in a seamless manner since both the Sinhala language and Sinhala song, according to the Heḷa Havula vision, were corrupted by Indian cultural influence.

**Literary Grammar**

Santha was inspired by Munidasa Cumaratunga’s call for a more grammatically “correct” Sinhala. His lyrics in “Ōlu Pipīḷā” employed subject-object agreement found in classical literary Sinhala. Cumaratunga had believed that standardizing the grammar of Sinhala was an essential requirement for a ściṣṭa or “cultured” society. He “used metaphors of law and society to define the relationship of grammar to language” (Coperahewa 2011: 869). Cumaratunga wrote, “Just like a society without laws, a language without laws would plunge into confusion. The Sinhala language is facing disaster. A course of action to prevent this is immediately called for...[A standardized] grammar is utterly necessary for a cultured society” (Cumaratunga 1938a: 1).

Taking these campaigns to heart, in 1946, Santha published Heḷa Ridī Walāwa (The Heḷa Silver Cloud) (fig. 9). It was a book of lyrics and notations of sixteen songs, two of which were “Ōlu Pipīḷā” and “Handa Pāṇē” (‘In the Moonlight’). In “Ōlu Pipīḷā” Santha used the rare future tense, neuter/masculine plural suffix, –ō (-_secondary) for conjugating

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39 In this analysis I draw on Alavattage (2009: 34-40), and Vitarana (2009: 104-110). Alavattage commends Santha for his lyrics’ literary grammar, lack of many Sanskrit words, Heḷa-Havula lexicon, and encyclopedic references to forgotten aspects of village life. Vitarana praises Santha’s poetic imagination as expressed through metaphors, similes, and vyangārtha (allusion, suggestion).
the verb root ‘yana’ (go) into ‘yannō.’

Ex. 1, from “Ölu Pipīlā” (1946):

Kūnissō uḍa pāna pāna yannō apa kāndavā nangō
Sister, the kunisso fish go jumping [as if] we have called them

Figure 9 Cover of Santha's Ḥeḷa Ridi Walīwa

40 See Gair and Kaunatilake 1974: 244-245 on future tense conjugation in literary Sinhala.
We find another rare future tense conjugation in “Handa Pane.” Santha employed the feminine future tense suffix, –ī (♀), for conjugating the root nāla- (to be lulled) into nālāvenṇī.

Ex. 2, from “Handa Pane” (1947):

mage poł nangī kiri illā
My little sister, requesting for some milk

dōta nangā maha ihaḷa balā
raises her hands way up high

‘කුංජින්දු’ මැටියට සම්බන්ධයන්නි
Ambiliyō kiyamin nālāvenṇī
She sways back and forth singing Oh Moon!

ඡජජාවය ගිණුමක්
In the glowing moonlight

As with the previous example, this is a literary form that lyricists did not use in gramophone or radio songs. In addition, Santha, like the Heḷa Havula poets added an ā-kāraya letter to words like pāṇā pāṇā, nālāvenṇī and bābālēna, which gave the lyrics a pure-Sinhala touch.

Resisting India, Modern and Ancient

Cumaratunga’s language ideologies also affected Santha’s musical style. Just as Cumaratunga sought to remove North Indian influence in the Sinhala language, Santha greatly rid his songs of North Indian music influence. In his book Dēšiya Sangīṇa (National Music), Santha lashed out against Sinhalese musicians who sang Hindustani

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41 That said, Santha did compose a few songs in Indian rgas. For instance his “Rama Vallapilla” (Rama’s Lament) is composed in Bhairavi raga (Nishoka Sandaruwan interview 3 January 2012).
music, contemptuously labeling them *Sinhalastankārayō*, the “The ‘Sinhalastan’ [Sinhalese + Hindustan] crowd”:

There is a reason why [Sri Lankan] national music and national music education is bitter like a poisonous *kaduru* nut. There is a reason why everyone who trains in Indian classical music transforms into a Hindustani person and feels that our national music should be Hindustani music: these people have no affection, consideration, or love for their country, nation, or language. (Santha 1953, in Vitarana 2001: 25).

Santha studied classical Indian vocal music and scored the highest marks in the first division sitar class at the Marris College, yet his music has a marked absence of Indian music ornamentation. Sunil Ariyaratne emphasizes Santha’s Catholic upbringing:

Sunil Santha’s voice was trained from childhood in Catholic music of the Church…His voice sounded new to Sinhala music connoisseurs. It was uniquely different from vocalists like Sadiris de Silva, H. W. Rupasinghe, Don Manis Pattiarachche, N. Romlas de Silva, even Ananda Samarakone. These musicians who trained in North India, used all the ornamentations like *kan swara* and *meend* found in Hindustani classical music…Sunil Santha rarely used these ornamentations. He moved straight from note to note. He also pronounced the words better than all the other Sinhalese musicians who trained in North India. (Ariyaratne 2002: 18-19)

In a similar vein, D.P.M Weerakkody has written:

Sunil Santha was influenced not only by Cumaratunga’s linguistic style and philosophy but also by his views on music. Although at a later date Santha criticized the limitations of the *Heḷa Miyāsiya*, initially it appears to have made some impact on him. According to Jayantha Aravinda…this impact explains the simplicity of many of Sunil Santha’s melodies and the predominance of natural [unornamented] notes in them. (Weerakkody 2001: 287)

Members of the *Heḷa Havula* like Rapiye Tennakoon, Jayantha Weerasekera, and Ariesen Ahubudu authored introductions to Sunil Santha’s songbooks. Tennakoon’s essay in *Heḷa Ridi Walāwa* was nearly impenetrable because he used a dense purist dialect. In this introduction Tennakoon bemoaned ancient North Indian influence onto Sinhalese music:

India, like Dikpitiya, pretends they are going to help us get to the other side of this samsaric ocean of sadness but they are really the biggest obstacle, curse, and evil influence. The sounds of the *pas anga turu* [the five types of instruments] pierce our ears.
and we praise it, saying sādu sādu [amen, amen]. Then the seventh of the eight precepts kills off our music even more, making it stale. The world of the pious Heḷas, who were blindly following Indian culture, became bitter. The pious Heḷas began to view music as something bad. (1947: ix)

Tennakoon compared India to a cunning character named Dikpitiya found in the Buddhist Jataka tales. In the Ummagga jataka tale, a man named Kalugola and his wife cannot cross a shallow river because they fear it is deep and filled with crocodiles. To take Kalugola’s wife, Dikpitiya volunteers to help them cross the river. He takes the woman on his shoulders and when he gets to the middle of the river, he goes on his knees and pretends the water is deep. He then persuades her to abandon her husband.

Tennakoon believed India had “tricked” Sri Lanka with its cultural influences. He contended that when Theravada Buddhism came to Sri Lanka from the Indian subcontinent in the third century BC, it influenced how Sinhalese Buddhists conceived of music. The religious doctrine required novice monks to accept ten precepts, in which the seventh read: “I undertake the precept to refrain from dancing, singing, instrumental music, and seeing entertainment.” Since music was one of the five sensual pleasures that lead to craving and attachment, it was considered a hindrance to the goal of emancipation from the realm of samsara (Seneviratna 1984: 15). For Tennakoon, this was an unwelcome Indian influence that corrupted the indigenous Heḷa music tradition.

Tennakoon sarcastically referenced the pas ānga turu, the five ancient instrument types according to Pali commentaries. A sixth century Pali commentary on the Mahāvamsa entitled the Vamsatthappakāsini whose authorship is unknown, shows the influence of the Sanskrit [read: Indian] instrument classification scheme of ghāna (idiophone), avanaddha (membranophone), susira (aerophone), and tat (chordophone).
Tennakoon felt that this Indian instrument classification scheme also prevented Sri Lankan music from having its own identity.

**The Ratanjankar Controversy and “Dudan’oda Binda”**

In April 1952, Radio Ceylon rehired Santha’s former principal, S.N. Ratanjankar, to audition and grade Sinhalese musicians. Ratanjankar was the principal of the Marris College of Hindustani Music in Lucknow. Santha boycotted the auditions and controversially quit his post as an A-grade musician. He felt that hiring Ratanjankar was a repeat of the Geiger controversy that Tennakoon lampooned in the final chapter of *Wawuluwa*:

> I do not believe that we should wish for a foreigner to come to Sri Lanka to advise us on how to create a national music just because we brought a German to advise us on the Sinhala language. (Santha, *Lankādīpa* May 5, 1952)

> Not only me, what happened to the artist Solias Mendis? [The painter of the Kelaniya Temple murals who worked for free and was under appreciated in his time]. In this country there is no space given to those who do good work. Now see, the dictionary…Cumaratunga Sir said, “I’ll finish the whole thing in two years, just hand it over.” Did they entrust the project to him? Now how many years have passed? They still have not finished the *a-yanna* [the first letter of the Sinhala alphabet] section…So it is not only me. (Santha in a 1966 interview, Senaratne 107)

In 1953, Santha wrote in protest to the *Lankādīpa* newspaper and published a small booklet, *Dēśiya Sangītaya* (National Music). In these publications, Santha expressed anger at station officials who refused to support local talent: “Those in charge of the Sinhala department of the radio station will support Ratanjankar’s project to draw upon [North] Indian music [for a national Sri Lankan music]. They will consider those artists

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42 His first visit was in 1949. That year Ratanjankar bestowed an A-grade onto five musicians: Lionel Edirisinghe, Ananda Samarakone, Deva Surya Sena, Sunil Santha, and S. Amarasinghe (Colombo 1980: 83).
[like myself] as weeds, although I was fashioning a truly national music” (April 23, Lankādīpa).

Around this time, Santha and Rapiyel Tennakoon collaborated on the song “Dudan’oda Binda” (Kill this Cruel Creep). Tennakoon originally published the text in the second chapter of Hāvilla (The Curse) (1940), his second long poem. In the poem, he narrated the plight of a helpless village woman and satirized her fanatical religious practices (Chandrasekera 2002: 30-34). As with Wawuluwa, Munidasa Cumaratunga prefaced Hāvilla with a literary analysis, and Jayantha Weerasekera appended the poem with a commentary.

In the second chapter, a thief steals the hens of the poor village woman, leaving her unable to earn a living. She makes pilgrimage to the town of Kataragama and curses the man. She pleads with the God Kataragama to avenge the crime and destroy the criminal. Santha set music to this emotional scene.

Tennakoon’s poetic verses are included in nearly every compilations of modern Sinhala poetry. One reason is that he fashioned a unique poetic meter that oscillates between quatrains of six and twelve mātrā and teems with a battery of rhyme and alliteration (with the “c” da-yanna letter). These poetics conjure the woman’s desperation (tbl. 2).

Santha wrote a small revealing statement about his inspiration for this song. In it, he criticized S.N. Ratanjankar’s credibility as Radio Ceylon’s Sri Lankan music consultant. Because Ratanjankar had not resided in the village areas, he lacked in an intimate knowledge of the people’s lives and behaviors:
I am accustomed to experiencing our village women’s behavior when they lose something valuable. They curse the gods and take vows. I have often heard them raising their hands and saying in a thundering voice, things like “Oh God of Kataragama! Please just cut this criminals neck off!” When I was setting music to poem “Kukulu Hävilla”…I followed the rhythm of this woman’s plea.* How successful this composition is, is not my job to decide.

* I do not know whether S.N. Ratanjankar has heard our woman’s cries, laments, and curses. (Santha, 1950, August 7, 1950, Lankādīpa, quoted in Vitharana 2001: 30)

Table 2 "Dudano’da Binda" Text and Translation, Lines 1-8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Sinhala Text</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>දුඟඳුෂ හෙලියෙලු</td>
<td>du da no’da binda</td>
<td>Kill this Cruel Creep!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>අග්ලා පඡිය මේ මෙ</td>
<td>banda teda kanda</td>
<td>Oh Splendorous Wondrous King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>මෙ සජීමොඩුලු</td>
<td>kanda dev rada</td>
<td>God Kataragama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>මාතිකමේ,</td>
<td>sāminē</td>
<td>My Sweet Lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>ක්කුලා සමුහ මහා ආරෝ</td>
<td>mage kukulā nasū ekā</td>
<td>This bugger has destroyed my hens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>ක්ර්කුලා කු සිබ්බු මහා ආරෝ</td>
<td>dadaya obage pālu yakā</td>
<td>And plundered your totem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>මා සැමිඩු නිවාස මහා ආරෝ</td>
<td>tava eka buda dinak takā</td>
<td>Destroy him before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>මාතිකමේ මා කුලා මහා ආරෝ</td>
<td>innata ida no dī makā</td>
<td>Next Wednesday’s worship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Tennakoon 1940: 39-40)

Composer W.D. Amaradeva’s analysis of “Dudan’oda Binda” explores how Santha’s music and pronunciation of the words evoke the village woman’s desperation, and her devotion to God Kataragama:

Santha was able to transform Tennakoon’s poem into a song of the highest level because he expertly utilized the medium of music. He infused into music sounds like cursing, pleading, and crying that we hear in village settings…His composition possesses national features distinct from the popular Indian way of singing. We hear the way Santha, for every cluster of two mātrā gives extra emphasis on pronouncing the da-yanna letter. He does so to evoke the cursing woman’s resolute state of mind, and abhorrence of the thief. After these three lines, Santha composes music for the word “samine” that conjures a pleading woman making a vow to the deity of Kataragama with the highest humility and devotion. (Amaradeva 1993: 3-4)
In the opening phrase, Santha accommodates Tennakoon’s alliteration of (mostly) three da-yanna letters per poetic-line, with melodic phrases of mainly three repeated notes (BF#F#, EEE, D#D#D#, C#C#C, BBB) (disc 1, audio track 4).

**Example 3 Three-Note Phrases and Three Da-yanna Letters (Boldfaced) Per Poetic Line**

Amaradeva further scrutinizes the composition’s chorus as a kind of sound painting:

Santha’s further displays his skill by creating an audible painting with these words:

- digata āndi Prostrating on the ground
- nāga pāhādī Rises fulfilled
- maha handa dī And with a loud voice [shouts]
- dewiyanē Oh Lord!!

This chorus conjures a portrait in the mind’s eye of a women stretched out on the ground in worship, humbly pleading for help from the diety. Music connoisseurs should listen to the way Santha carefully and beautifully pronounces these words…Although this song was originally based on a classical poetic verse, it has a special rasa as a song. (Amaradeva 1993: 3-5)

Santha evokes a “truthful portrait” of the desperate woman’s full-body prostration to God Kataragama with a five-bar melismatic phrase, on the word “āndi…” (prostrating) (disc 1, audio track 4: 1:33-2:01):
Modernist Reform for the Mother Tongue

Tennakoon opposed the *Ramayana’s* portrayal of Sri Lankan characters, and the dictionary office’s failure to consult competent indigenous scholars. His colleague in the *Hela Havula*, composer-vocalist Sunil Santha, had similar objectives. Santha’s radio song and Tennakoon’s poetry oblige us to rethink Partha Chatterjee’s assertion that colonial-era South Asian nationalism, “launches its most powerful, creative and historically significant project—to fashion a ‘modern’ national culture that is nevertheless not Western” (Chatterjee 1993: 6). Chatterjee assumes only two players in the development of South Asian cultural nationalism: the East and the West. We will see how Santha’s music turns Chatterjee’s contention inside out: Santha used Western musical influences to fashion a modern Sinhalese national music that was not North Indian.

Santha’s compositions typify what ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino has termed “modernist reform:” reform of local arts based on “cosmopolitan” aesthetics, ethics, and worldviews (2000: 16). *Modernist reform* describes the way in which musicians must maintain a unique local identity on the international scene. Santha’s songs, very popular amongst the Sinhalese English-educated elite, also appealed to the British on the island,
because of his song’s western harmonies, instruments, and catchy melodies.⁴³ Because Santha’s songs mixed local (Sinhala language) and cosmopolitan (Western music and instruments), we could say he satisfied the requirements of modernist reform.

In addition to composing a national song genre, Santha sought to put the Sinhalese English-educated elite back in touch with songs in their mother tongue. In the introduction to his songbook *Sunil Hanḍa* (*Sunil’s Voice*) (1947b), he remarked:

> Those assimilated to Western food and drink, clothing, customs and habits, etc., have driven our language into the kitchen. These people are ashamed to talk in their mother tongue….They do not like any Sri Lankan music. Some of them joke and say, “This is Sinhalese music.” They then start to imitate pāl kavi, karatta kavi, sivpada, and vannama [various Sinhalese folk songs]…I find our current situation quite upsetting. This is why I brought out [my first songbook] *Ridī Walāwa*. Must I say anything about the service I have rendered through the songs like “Ōlu Pipīlā,” and “Handa Pāne”? Those who gagged from distaste from the Sinhala language and gave prominence to English, now happily sing these lyrics. Now they will familiarize themselves with songs in their mother tongue. This is one of the goals of my new music. (1947b: 4)

Santha printed two songbooks, *Sunil Santha Song Folio* (1948), and *Song of Lanka* (1950), especially for the Westernized Sinhalese elite in Colombo. Because many members of Sinhalese high society had studied Western classical music, Santha transcribed the songs in Western notation. Instead of transliterating his songs into English script, he printed Sinhala script under the notation. It is striking to note how he used western notation to appeal to the tastes of this class, yet simultaneously re-familiarized them with “songs in their mother tongue” (fig. 10).

Figure 10 "Ōlu Piplā" in Western Notation, from Sunil Santha: Song Folio, 1948: 3
Chapter 4: Setting up New Citadels with the Sinhala Radio Opera

Chandrarathna Manawasinghe was born in 1913, in the village of Puwakdandawe, in the Sri Lankan Buddhist Southwestern coastal region. His father, John Gerard Suriarachchi Mohotti,\(^{44}\) was a village headman (gampatiyek), the head of the village bureaucracy. As the son of a village headman, Manawasinghe came from the upper ranks of what the Sinhalese called, the “five great forces” (pancha mahā balavēgaya) of Buddhist monks, ayurvedic physicians, Sinhala-medium teachers, cultivators, and workers. This constituency’s vote swept the power away from the UNP and brought victory to the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) in 1956, a vote that put in place the first modern Buddhist-nationalist government in Sri Lanka.

The colonial administration had created the position of village headman to effectively govern rural areas. The headman was the “trouble-shooter in the village, and the link between the village and the administration” (Warnapala 1974: 344). The British recruited these men if they were well connected to traditional aristocracy, and if they wielded power in the village (Warnapala 1974: 339-347). A 1935 Report on the Commission on the Headman System states that recommendations for appointments should consider “social standing, family, and position of each candidate, and particulars with regard to any landed property which he may posses in the district where the vacancy exists” (1935: 16, in Warnapala 1974: 341). Village headman attended to their duties from their

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\(^{44}\) “Mohotti” is a title for a village officer.
personal residence, wore a Western jacket, and carried an umbrella in all weathers to distinguish themselves from village dwellers (Wriggins 1960: 41).

It was not young Manawasinghe’s fate to take over his father’s position. In the 1940s and 1950s he and his fellow Marxist colleagues sought to abolish the village headman system. They attacked it for institutionalizing caste favoritism and functioning as a cog in the colonial machinery.

It was the boy’s destiny to become a Buddhist monk. At the age of 12, he received initiation and permanently moved into the Puwakdandawe Buddhist temple. As a samanera or novice monk, Manawasinghe nurtured his literary talents: he studied Sanskrit, Pali, astrology, and Sinhala poetry composition with a monk named Saranankara, who was the incumbent priest at the Varanagiri residence for monks in Yatigala (Ariyaratne 1991: 5, 235).

Manawasinghe described the Puwakdandawe temple as a thriving center for the study and discussion of Sinhala poetry (1957: 3). There was a group of poets from the village, some of whom were ayurvedic physicians, who made an influence on the young monk. Manawasinghe read much of the classical Sinhala literary canon around this time. He

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45 Their chief duties were to “assist the Government Agent in general administration, especially in the preservation of law and order; to serve as a channel of communication between the illiterate and inarticulate masses and the Government; to supervise the minor headman of various categories; to supervise crown forests and the issuing of licenses and permits; to supervise land colonization schemes and irrigation works; to assess crops of tea and rubber estates as required under the Tea and Rubber Control Ordinance; to revise the list of voters; and also provide information required by the Government as licensing authorities” (Report on the Headman Commission 1935: 15, in Warnapala 1974: 343). Many played important roles in the gamsabhava, or village council, to arbitrate disputes and debts.

46 In 1963, the government, seeking to modernize the administration, abolished the village headman system and replaced it with the more impartial Grama Sevaka Service, which nevertheless retained some features of the headman system (Warnapala 1974: 347-48).
specifically mentions reading works by Toṭagāmuve Śrī Rāhula, Widāgama Maitraya, Karatoṭa Dharmarāma, Kirama Dhammadāna, and Alagiyavanna Mukaveṭi (1957: 3).

When he was transferred to a temple in Kataragama, the young bhikku met a woman from Bengal who sang Sanskrit verses:

Surrounding my temple, the large forest in Kataragama was a beautiful place. I often walked along the banks of the river, under the shade of the Kubuk trees, in the middle of the forest, far away from human contact. There was a small hermitage here that some referred to as “little Kataragama,” although it was hardly a village or even a house for that matter. There I had the opportunity to meet a young Bengali woman who sat by the banks of the river playing the sitar with delicate fingers, and singing Sanskrit verses from Jayadeva’s *Gita Govinda.* I closed my eyes and devoted my full attention to experiencing the rasa of the Sanskrit verses she sang. (1957: 5)

Behind Manawasinghe’s individual enjoyment of Sanskrit verse and Indian mythology—that would later find expression in his song lyrics and radio operas—was a belief that North Indian culture formed a foundation for Sinhalese literature. In a radio lecture he delivered circa 1957, Manawasinghe observed, “[Sanskrit literary characters like] the Brahmin, the cupid, and goddess Saraswati are routinely found in classical Sinhala verse. The Sinhala poetic tradition grew out of Sanskrit literary culture” (1969: 27).

**Manawasinghe’s Indian Cultural Imagination**

Manawasinghe’s invocatory “Saraswati Gītaya” (Song for Goddess Saraswati), composed in 1961, is a song robust with Sanskrit language and literary influence. On account of its Sanskrit-inflected linguistic register, the song lyric is hard to comprehend

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47 The *Gita Govinda* is a Sanskrit poem composed by an Indian poet known as Jayadeva, a Vaishnava Brahman who lived in what is now the state of Orissa, in the 12th century. The poem narrates stories about the divine love that the female cow herders, or gopis, had for the young Krishna. We know Manawasinghe studied this Sanskrit poem in depth because he references the work in lectures delivered on the aesthetic appreciation of literature and music broadcast for Radio Ceylon in 1957-58 (see Manawasinghe 1969: 5, 28).
for the everyday listener. Composer W.D. Amaradeva, who set the poem to the North Indian rag *behag*, remarks,

Due to the many unmodified Sanskrit loanwords, we must assume that Manawasinghe composed this song completely based on Sanskrit verse. He has even included phrases in the lyric that are not found in Sinhala. For example, Manawasinghe coined the word “kumbhamiwa” found in the phrase “pūrṇa kumbhamiwa pīṇa payōdhara” (The immortal nectar of your clay-pot shaped breasts). The word is a blend of Sanskrit and Pali and means a *kalayak, ghatayak*, or clay pot…such linguistic forms not found in Sinhala. Due to such powerful linguistic constructions, I had a strong desire to turn this poem into an unforgettable composition. (2007: 59)

Amaradeva composed a stately free rhythm introduction to “Saraswati Gītaya” (disc 1, audio track 5).

**Example 5 "Saraswati Gītaya" Introduction**

In the song lyrics, Manawasinghe invokes the blessings of the Hindu goddess Saraswati with strings of honorable titles: the Cosmic Enchantress, the Sweetness of Song, the Pleasant Maiden of White Lotus Ponds, and the Gently Smiling Immortal Queen.
### Table 3 "Saraswatī Gitaya" Sinhala Text, Transliteration, Translation, Lines 1-4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Sinhala Text</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>සරාස්‍වතී එවි - ගැං පොන්ද</td>
<td>jagan mōhinī madhura bāshinī</td>
<td>O Cosmic Enchantress, Sweetness of Song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>සරාස්‍වතී එවි - එකෑ සේනි</td>
<td>chāru dēhinī kamala vāsinī</td>
<td>Pleasant Maiden of White Lotus Ponds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>සරාස්‍වතී එවි උයනයි</td>
<td>saraswatī dēvī vandē</td>
<td>O Goddess Saraswati! We worship you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>සරාස්‍වතී එවි</td>
<td>saraswatī dēvī</td>
<td>Goddess Saraswati</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4 "Saraswatī Gitaya" Translation, Lines 5-14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gently smiling Immortal Queen⁴⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Thou give light to all acts of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>O Queen Saraswati!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>We bow to you, Queen Saraswati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Thy dazzling anklet bells tinkle and shake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>From venerable dancing in the white lotus lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Having fish shaped eyes, and born in a lotus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The immortal nectar flows from your clay pot shaped breasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Taking the form of a meritorious beautiful goddesss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Your hands signify a mudra of auspiciousness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁴⁸ Amaradeva does not sing this stanza in the song.
The Appeal of Marxism

While at Kataragama, Manawasinghe became entangled in a bitter and violent temple ownership dispute, between a low country (the southwestern coastal region) and high country (the central province) faction. He argued on behalf of the low country claimants. The conflict escalated and Manawasinghe’s friend murdered a man from the opposition. When the police mistakenly came to arrest Manawasinghe for the crime, he absconded to the city of Dambulla and went into hiding as a shop worker. A few days later, the police arrested him and put him in a lineup. He was later cleared after a witness identified the perpetrator who was sentenced to execution by hanging (Ariyaratne 1991: 7).

After this incident, Manawasinghe worked in the Dambulla shop for a few years before returning to monastic life. In the late 1930s, a monk in the Angurukaramulla temple in Negombo initiated him into the monkhood for a second time. While in Negombo he read widely on astrology, ayurveda medicine, and mantras, and developed a reputation as a talented writer of *vas kavi* (curse poetry) and *set kavi* (blessing poetry) (Ariyaratne 1991: 9).

Manawasinghe’s second renunciation of monkhood reveals the tense class relations between the village-born Buddhist elite and the city-born Christian elite. While traveling to Kandy by bus in 1939, Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranaike approached on horseback. The bus driver, then, halted the bus, descended, and prostrated in deference to

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49 George Bernard Shaw, the Irish playwright visited the shop where Manawasinghe worked. Shaw asked his travel guide why the Buddha is portrayed with a halo around his head. The guide was unable to answer, and Manawasinghe gave a detailed response (Ariyaratne 1991: 7). Manawasinghe composed a song in honor of Shaw after getting word of the poet’s death. He published it in *Komala Rekha* (1957: 46).

50 Solomon Bandaranaike’s son was S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister who came to power in the transition year of 1956.
Bandaranaike and the noble class that he represented (Bandaranaike and his father held the position of *Maha Mudaliyar*, the principal Ceylonese aid to the British Governor (Manor 1989: 14)). Seeing this hierarchical pageantry is said to have left Manawasinghe disillusioned with the class system. He subsequently joined the newly formed Bolshevik Leninist (later, the Trotskyist *Lankā Samasamāja Pakshaya*, or *The Lankan Equal Society Party*) of Dr. Colvin De Silva. It was the first official Marxist organization on the island.

Manawasinghe became an outspoken party member for roughly the next thirteen years. He delivered lectures and published two Marxist booklets in the 1940s (Ariyaratne 1991: 19). He was an asset for the party. Many early Marxists, like De Silva, had studied in English medium in London, and lacked intimate contact with the villagers and workers whom they sought to represent. Manawasinghe, however, had many contacts in the villages. Further, he was a talented writer, poet, and orator in the Sinhala language.

The Sama Samāja party was the first serious anti-capitalist and anti-British imperialist party of Sri Lanka. They campaigned for the end of the caste and traditional headman system, as well as for “social justice, workmen’s compensation and legal determination of minimum wages, maternity benefits, improved health and educational services, and the prohibition of exploration of children in domestic and factory work” (Lerski 1968: 22). In 1944, Manawasinghe was imprisoned for criticizing the British colonial administration in a public speech. While in prison, he worked to secretly publish a Sama Samāja paper (Ariyaratne 1991: 10).
Three Separate Intimate Publics

In 1941, the “Radio Club of Ceylon” (later, Radio Ceylon) hired a commission in response to the public’s dissatisfaction with the station’s low artistic standards and lack of Sinhalese and Tamil broadcasts (Karunayake 1990: 153). As independence drew nearer, the station received many complaints that Sinhalese and Tamil broadcasts were not an adequate number of hours, island talent was neglected, the Sinhalese and Tamil programs lacked the variety found in the Western programs, the time allotted for “Oriental” (Sinhala and Tamil music) concerts was insufficient, and program producers indiscriminately selected Oriental gramophone records. Sinhalese listeners demanded that the station endorse the “musical and cultural advancement of the Sinhalese people, and the spread of modern knowledge in Sinhalese” (ibid: 154). These complaints reveal greater public participation in state institutions.

Two years after independence, however, the British influence on Radio Ceylon was still substantial. BBC official and General Director John Lampson reorganized Radio Ceylon in 1950, by introducing three separate radio services (Sinhalese, Tamil, and English) based on language (Karunanayake 1990: 201). Jason Loviglio observes that, “the tension between intimacy (interpersonal communication) and publicity (mass communication) was the defining feature of early [American] network radio, its central problem and its greatest appeal” (2005: xvi). He further writes that radio broadcasting in America in the 1920s and 1930s, “created a new cultural space”—the intimate public—that was “marked by tensions between national and local, inclusion and exclusion, publicity and privacy” (xvi). Creating separate Sinhalese, Tamil, and Western services to
negotiate the country’s linguistic diversity reified ethnic differences between Sinhala, Tamil, and English speakers. It fostered three separate intimate publics.

Lampson also created three positions called “program organizer” (ibid: 108). The program organizer would be responsible for the output, administration, and organization of the Sinhalese, Tamil, or English service. Lampson also introduced a system of dual transmission that enabled the Sinhalese, Tamil, and English services to broadcast more hours per day (ibid: 107). The daily broadcasts in Sinhala increased from three hours and twenty minutes to five hours. The Tamil service also expanded, from three hours and twenty-five minutes, to four hours. The English service saw the greatest augmentation, from over three, to over nine hours (ibid: 108).

With more airtime for music, Lampson endeavored to improve the Sinhalese music programs. In his administration report of 1951, he wrote:

The standard of both light and classical [Sinhalese] music programs has left much to be desired. This was mainly due to the lack of trained artistes and the common and undesirable habit of slavishly copying Hindustani film music. (1951: 6, in Karunanayake 1990: 290)

Lampson went as far as to send a letter to all the musicians on staff at the station that discouraged them from imitating Hindi film songs (ibid: 290).

**Setting up New Citadels**

In December of 1952, the station replaced Lampson with M.J. Perera, Radio Ceylon’s first Sinhalese Director General. A year later—five years after the island peacefully obtained independence from British rule—Perera launched a project that aimed to nurture Sinhalese cultural heritage through radio programming. He felt that the Sinhalese had to “catch up” with Tamil music and literature:
Those in charge of the development of music, drama, literature, and poetry in a country like Ceylon, have a very serious responsibility at this time. I am thinking in this context particularly of the Sinhalese section of the public because that is the section, which is specially confined to this Island, and for whom no standards can be set up by anybody from abroad. The two other language groups, namely the English and Tamil-speaking minority are luckier in this respect; and have no problem at all. We do not aim at setting standards for them here. The Tamil speaking people have a population many times their number in South India where their literature, their music, and their culture receive considerable attention, and standards, which have been set up long ago, specially in music are being maintained. But when it comes to the Sinhalese population which compromise the majority of the listening public in Ceylon, outnumbering the next largest community by 7 to 1, there is a pathetic story to tell. We have no traditions in music or drama. In poetry and literature, experiments are now being tried and old citadels have been broken and new ones have not yet been set up. Therefore, this broadcasting station, which can cater to this section of the people, has a responsibility, which at present at least, I find difficult to fulfill (1953: 134, in Karunayake 1990: 201-2, emphasis mine).

Given the history of Sinhala *nurthi* and *nadagam* dramatic forms, *berava* drumming traditions, as well as many genres of folk song, Perera’s assertion that the Sinhalese have no traditions of music or drama is clearly exaggerated. His repeated use of the word “standards,” exposes a general anxiety that the intelligentsia felt at the time: they felt their cultural arts to be wanting in comparison to Tamil literature and music.

Perera’s metaphoric conception of modern Sinhalese literature, music, and drama (as “new citadels yet to be set up”) reveals how state patronage both can harness a subjugating power, and serve as a symbolic “point of refuge” for ethnic communities of the nation state. Indeed, stage patronage, like that of the radio station, was indispensable for the Sinhalese cultural revival of the 1950s. Due in large part to fears of the strong and threatening Tamil culture, the rural intelligentsia chose to use *all* the resources of the state to nurture a purely Sinhalese art (Wriggins 1960: 241).

This portrayal of Tamil culture is part of a “narrative of beleaguerment” that pervades Sinhalese nationalist thought (Rambukwella 2008: 6). The grand narrative of Sinhalese history includes a chronic fear of invasion whether from Tamils, Christian missionary
activity, foreign colonial empires, or from minority groups like the Muslims. After Bandaranaike’s ascent to power in 1956, the threat began to shift primarily to the Tamil community, “whose assertiveness in the post-independence nation was seen as a threat to Sinhala selfhood” (ibid: 6).

Despite Lampson’s complaint in 1951 about “slavishly copying Hindustani film music,” the Sinhalese rural elite held this musical tradition in great esteem. In 1954, at a meeting in the Sinhalese Section of Radio Ceylon, ministers in the Post and Radio Broadcasting Ministry, the Education Ministry, Education Department, and representatives of the State Arts Institution (Lalita Kalā Ayatanaya), and Lankan Arts Commission (Lankā Kalā Maṇḍalaya), unanimously decided that Sinhalese artists should develop their musicianship by training in North India. They further decided that musicians with a strong grounding in North Indian classical music and Sinhala folk music should raise the standards of Sinhalese music (Colombage 1980: 107).

Officials at the government radio station were not the only ones anxious to develop a purely Sinhalese art form. In January of 1955, Sinhalese intellectuals like author Martin Wikremasinghe, Kandyan lawyer N.E. Weerasuriya, and artist J.D.A Perera formed the “Guwanviduli Komisama” (Radio Commission). They collectively authored an article to the Dinamina newspaper that demanded Radio Ceylon raise the standards of Sinhala songs. They requested the station to prohibit the broadcasting of songs with Sinhala lyrics set to already-composed Hindi and Tamil tunes (Ariyaratne 1997c: 98-99).

In response, Radio Ceylon producer Tewis Guruge conceived of a musical form that would consist of an opera-like libretto, accompanied with North Indian ragas. He
presented his idea for a “radio opera” to Perera, and to the director of the Sinhalese service, P. Dunstan De Silva. The station requested Chandrarathna Manawasinghe to pen a 45-minute libretto that would be the first Sinhala radio opera (Abeysundara 1959: 387). Manawasinghe completed an opera entitled “Manōhari,” De Silva set it to North Indian classical music, and Radio Ceylon broadcast it on December 8, 1955.

The radio opera was a corrective measure that the officials of the Sinhalese serve in Radio Ceylon undertook to counterbalance the tendency for musical imitation. Reflecting the Sinhalese intelligentsia’s belief in the ancient connections between Sinhalese culture and North Indian Sanskritic culture, Manawasinghe sought to convey the feeling of dēva katā, mythological stories about Hindu gods found in Sanskrit literature (Udaya Manawasinghe interview 5 February 2012). De Silva drew on his musical training in North India, to bring Manawasinghe’s poetic vision to life.

**The Sinhala Radio Opera’s Theater of the Mind**51

In the beginning of “Manōhari,” we hear the xylophone play the fifth and tonic. Vocalist W.F. Wimalasiri sings an alap, a free-rhythm melodic gesture in a North Indian rag. This melody, however is not confined to this radio opera. The narrator in Wimal Abeysundara’s radio opera, Nishādī (1959), sings his poetic stanzas in this melody. It is

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51 I use the phrase “theater of the mind” in the way Americans used to refer to radio: “For most Americans in the mid-twentieth century, radio was an amazing invention. With just a twist of the dial a listener could tune in the greatest personalities in world affairs and show business. Radio brought current events and entertainment directly into the home, and it required little of a listener except time and imagination. *It was often called a “theater of the mind” because broadcasting, as an audio-only medium, was fully realized only in the mind of the listener.* Each person in the audience provided his own mental imagery of friendliness and sincerity when the pleasant voice of President Roosevelt began chatting with him from in front of an imaginary fireplace. It was the individual listener, too, who mentally provided the props and stage effects for the broadcast of a Shakespearian drama, and the substance that spoken words only suggested in an adventure or mystery program. (MacDonald 1979: ix, emphasis mine)
further interesting to note that Buddhist priests often sing this tune when reciting k\textit{avi bana} (Buddhist speeches sung to poetic verse), and performers recite Sinhalese classical poetry in this melody.\textsuperscript{52} (disc 1, audio track 6: 0:00-0:33).

Example 6 Traditional Melody in "Man\text{"h}hari" Introduction

In a radio lecture Manawasinghe gave circa 1957, the poet discusses the emotional powers of Indian music ragas and anthropomorphic portrayals of ragas in Sanskrit literature:

Singing notes of ragas can awaken, surprise, sadden, delight, and arouse lust. As sexual activity arouses sensuous feelings in a newly married couple, \textit{ragas} and \textit{raginis} have the power to stir up our feelings. When we sense such a \textit{rasa} [aesthetic pleasure], our eyelids close, or perhaps our eyes open wide. Not only our mind, the raga’s \textit{rasa} physically influences us. Our bodies are enlivened. Our chests perk up. Not everyone, however, has the sensitivity to be affected. Our simplicity has deteriorated to some extent by our various life objectives. The less sensitive we become, the less we can imbibe the power of music.

Singing of notes is categorized according to the raga type. The doyens of the distant past embedded anthropomorphic features into their creations of raga forms. For example, \textit{shankarabharana} is a beautiful and illustrious woman, who dances in a lotus flower, dressed in golden cloth. \textit{Hindola} raga is one who rocks back and forth like a palanquin bouncing to and fro on top of the shoulders of one ornately decorated with white lotus flowers. \textit{Bhupali} ragini is an immaculate woman whose gait is like the swaying of a palanquin on a jungle journey. She is a mix of gold and saffron, and adorned with golden bracelets. (Manawasinghe 1969: 47-48)

\textsuperscript{52} This is a video of a young unnamed Sinhalese girl reciting Sinhalese poetry to this melody: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjwNxdlEg9o
Perhaps inspired by the affective power of such symbolism, each character in “Manōhari” is a representation of a natural force in the universe. (disc 1, audio track 6: 0:00 – 1:55).

Narrator: “Manōhari.”

Giving nature anthropomorphic forms, Shri Chandraratna Manawasinghe has composed a Gandharva deity story in song. To facilitate understanding we will first present to you a list explaining what the characters of this musical drama represent:

Sōma Kumaru [Manōhari’s Lover] – The Moon
Princess Manōhari – Universal Beauty
The Dancing Garments – Flowing Mist of the Winter Season
King Jagatpati – The Universe
Divāpati [Manōhari’s Groom-to-be from an Arranged Marriage] – The Sun
The City of Vasanta – The Spring Season
Soldier Beams – The Rays of the Sun
Hemanta, the Princess’s Servant – The Winter Season
Dark Clouds – Rain Clouds
The City of Sarada – The Autumn Season
Samīrana, the Messenger – The Wind
The Prince of Heat – The Summer Season

In one domain are people and their roles: Manōhari is the princess, Jagatpati is the king, etc. In the other domain we have a collection of inanimate natural entities: the universe, moon, sun, rays of the sun, the seasons, etc. The entire story hinges on a metaphor that maps the source domain of forces of nature, onto the target domain of

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people in various roles (king, princess, groom-to-be, lover, servant of the princess). The conceptual metaphor could be summed up as PEOPLE ARE FORCES OF NATURE. Character roles serve as analogies for natural forces of the universe. When the Sōma Kumaru (the moon) and Divāpati (the sun) fight over princess Manōhari, for example, it represents the moon and the sun “fighting” over the beauty of night/day.

P. Dunstan De Silva set the opening poem to the rag khammaj. This rag uses both the raised seventh on the ascent, and the flattened seventh in the descent. De Silva, a flutist, was the third Sinhalese musician to receive a “Sangeet Visharada” degree from the Marris College of Hindustani Music in Lucknow, North India (the first was Lionel Edirisิงhe and the second was Sunil Santha) (Ariyaratne 1997c: 88). He thus had a special preference for North Indian musical forms. Like John De Silva, he was a member of the Sinhalese elite that believed Sinhalese music should be based on the North Indian tradition. Edwin Samaradiwakara led the Sinhalese orchestra at the station, composed of xylophone, sitar, sarod, flute, upright bass, violins, and tabla. In Sinhala radio operas, the melodic instruments performed brief instrumental introductions, interludes, and accompanied the vocal melody in unison or octaves.

Manawasinghe composed the opening song lyrics with lines of twelve syllabic instants. This framework made it easy for De Silva to compose a melody in a 6/8 meter. The lyrics introduce the main characters of the radio opera. (disc 1, audio track 6: 1:56-5:40).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sinhala text</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>විකල්ප විෂ්ණ පීත් පතලයේ</td>
<td>porana jagat pati raju gē</td>
<td>Alluring and famed daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>මුෂன්හාරී ආභ්ග ආභ්ගයේ</td>
<td>manōhāri naming patala</td>
<td>Of Old King Jagatpati,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>වැබල ආභ්ග නියදු අතැ පො</td>
<td>rūbara diyaniyak vunā</td>
<td>The Gandharva deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>මුෂන්හාරී විශ්වාසම්පු දෙයේ</td>
<td>gadamba dev kulē</td>
<td>Manōhari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>මුෂන්හාරී මහ මහ විද් අතී</td>
<td>dik wijayata namagena sita</td>
<td>Was to marry the Majestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>මුෂන්හාරී ඛාලයේ ආභ්ගයේ</td>
<td>teda bala āti divā patita</td>
<td>Mighty one, Victorious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>මුෂන්හාරී විෂ්ණ ආභ්ගයේ</td>
<td>manōhāri pāvā dena</td>
<td>In all lands, known as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>මුෂන්හාරී විෂ්ණ ආභ්ගයේ</td>
<td>lesin sārasunā</td>
<td>Divāpati.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>මුෂන්හාරී ගුහෝ කොට්ටලේ</td>
<td>divā patige hädi dādi gati</td>
<td>Disliking Divāpati’s rough nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>මුෂන්හාරී ගුහෝ කොට්ටලේ</td>
<td>nokāmati siyumāli kumariya</td>
<td>Soft Manōhari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>වැබල ආභ්ග නියදු අතැ පො</td>
<td>sōma kumaru samaga nitara</td>
<td>Remained in constant love with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>මුෂන්හාරී විෂ්ණ ආභ්ගයේ</td>
<td>pemin pasu vunā</td>
<td>Soma Kumaru.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>මුෂන්හාරී විෂ්ණ ආභ්ගයේ</td>
<td>māligayē nila mehewara</td>
<td>Hemanta,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>මුෂන්හාරී විෂ්ණ ආභ්ගයේ</td>
<td>karavana hēmantā nam</td>
<td>A maid servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>වැබල ආභ්ග නියදු අතැ පො</td>
<td>raja dāsiya manōhāri</td>
<td>Holding a royal position,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>වැබල ආභ්ග නියදු අතැ පො</td>
<td>kumari sānasuwa</td>
<td>Consoled Manōhari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example 7 Manōhari Song 1

Raga: Khamaj
Sthayi Section

Raga: Khamaj
Sthayi Section

Antara Section

7

mā_ li ga yē - ni la me he va ra mā_ li ga yē - ni la me he va ra ka ra va na hē -

mā_ li ga yē - ni la me he va ra mā_ li ga yē - ni la me he va ra ka ra va na hē -

7

mā_ li ga yē - ni la me he va ra mā_ li ga yē - ni la me he va ra ka ra va na hē -

mā_ li ga yē - ni la me he va ra mā_ li ga yē - ni la me he va ra ka ra va na hē -

7

mā_ li ga yē - ni la me he va ra mā_ li ga yē - ni la me he va ra ka ra va na hē -
In the first stanza, Manawasinghe describes Manōhari as the “Gandharva deity who is the alluring and famed daughter of Old King Jagatpati.” At first glance he seems to simply explain to the listener that King Jagatpati is princess Manōhari’s father. He evokes the “father-child subframe” of the more general kinship frame (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 140). It is a statement expressing “I is the Y of Z.” Jagatpati (I) is the father (Y) of Manōhari (Z). The words father and daughter may conjure ideas about family structure, genealogy, or the father-daughter relationship, etc.

However, according to the introduction, Princess Manōhari represents the beauty of the universe. Her father Jagatpati is the universe. Now, “father” in the sentence “Jagatpati is the father of Manōhari” has more conceptual complexity: a father is to his daughter, what the universe is to beauty. When we understanding this analogy, we use what Fauconnier and Turner call “word projection” (2002: 141). That is, we selectively project ideas associated with the word “father” (begetting, responsibility, affection, authority) into the schema of universe-beauty. We think that the father begets the daughter like the universe begets beauty.

The listener will experience these blends throughout the radio opera. As the plot unfolds we continually blend the father-offspring input (responsibility, affection, protection, guidance, authority, etc.) with the input of universe-beauty. One might feel there is a connection between a father who wants to give his daughter away in marriage to Divapati (the sun), and the preference the universe has for the sun, since it is the superpower of our solar system.
In the third stanza, Manawasinghe describes the princess in Sinhala as *siyumäli*. *Siyumäli* means “soft” or “tender.” In English we would say that she has a “soft heart.” This conceptual metaphor structures the heart in terms of an object that is agreeable to the touch. We feel a “soft hearted” person to be one who is kind or sensitive. We sense that to interact with a “soft [hearted]” person is an agreeable experience like touching a soft object. Such a person is emotionally responsive to the feelings of others, like a soft cloth will be responsive to our touch.

Here, “soft,” however, does not only refer to Manōhari’s personality. The complete phrase is “Soft [hearted] Manōhari remained in constant love with Sōma Kumaru.”\(^{54}\) We will blend the input of _lover-beloved_ with _universal beauty-moon_ (remember that in the scheme outlined in the radio opera’s introduction, Manōhari symbolizes universal beauty, and Sōma Kumaru symbolizes the moon). This sounds abstract, yet it might instantly make sense to someone who lives in Sri Lanka. After all, who can appreciate beauty in the hot day sun? On the other hand, on Poya, the Buddhist holiday that occurs on a full moon day, one can relax outside in the cool evening and appreciate the beauty of nature. Such a metaphor speaks to the way in which metaphors are based in our cultural experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

In the following scene, Manawasinghe further maps the source domain (the interplay of nature), onto the target domain (the interactions of people in various roles). Here, Manōhari (universal beauty) and Sōma Kumaru’s (the moon) rendezvous represents a _beautiful evening_. Their meeting on the castle’s verandah of King Jagatpati (The

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\(^{54}\) The Sinhala phrase is “siyumali kumariya Sōma Kumarsamaga nitara pemin pasu vuna.”
Universe) represents the aesthetic beauty of the evening moon within our universe. The morning that dawns threatens their rendezvous. Likewise, we can imagine that beauty and the evening moon must “separate” when the morning comes. Manōhari decides to run away from the castle with Sōma Kumaru, and hide in her servant’s salu nāṭuma (literally “dancing garments”), the flowing mist of the winter season (disc 1, audio track 6: 5:41-10:35):

Narrator: Manōhari and Sōma Kumaru’s passionate rendezvous on the verandah of Jagatpati’s castle.

Sōma: My Manōhari
Renowned daughter of Jagatpati,
In my eyes you shine
O Gandharva deity!
(Interlude)

Manōhari: Dearest Sōma,
The birds silent in the night
Now rise singing song
In the morning light
(Interlude)

Sōma: Just a glimpse
Of your tender face
And flowers smile in bloom.
Who could alight from a pādda boat
Wade alone in the floret lagoon?
(Interlude)

Manōhari: I will leave with you
Depart from castle lands.
How can I possibly bear
To be alone when
My heart is in your hands?
(Interlude)

Sōma: Then let us not delay!
As Divapati’s Soldier Beams
Take post on then castle floor
Once the conch reaches our ears
We will not get out the door
(Interlude)

Manōhari: Through the help of Hemanta
We’ll avoid the hot sun rays
Take the aid of her Dancing Garments
Which conceal even hermits in caves

Sōma: Yes we’ll hide in the
Dancing Garments that flow
Like the Milky Ocean.
My dear let us now go!
(Interlude)
(Forest Noises)
(Introduction – Background – Drums-Cymbals etc.)

Musical Representation

In Conceptualizing Music: Cognitive Structure, Theory, and Analysis, Lawrence Zbikowski explores conceptual blending between poetry and music in German art song.

In his analysis of the song “Im Rhein” (In the Rhein), he argues that the music of song “makes possible a conceptual blend whose emergent structure includes a narrative considerably more extensive than that of the text alone” (Zbikowski 2002: 245).
Zbikowski theorizes that syntactic correspondences between language and music make possible conceptual blends between music and poetry (254).

In the next song, composer P. Dunstan De Silva skillfully uses the raga *durga* to simulate the flowing mist portrayed in *Manōhari*. I believe that the conceptual blending found in the song “Salu Nāṭuma” (Dancing Cloth) is possible because of correspondence in contour: the melodic contour of the rag in performance, and the visual image of the mist as portrayed in the poem.

“Salu Nāṭuma” (disc 1, audio track 6: 10:35 – 14:00).

Narrator: The Dancing Garments (Raga Durga)

Mixed Chorus: The cloth of mist

Rolling and rolling

Into the jungle, entering, entering

Waves not ebbing

Silently moving

Slowly dragging along, Slowly dragging along

It swallows

The small branches

And flowers

Into the Milky Ocean, sinking, sinking

Moon and crescent beams sinking, sinking

This is a stream

Of flowing nectar
Falling to the ground

In the month of Durutu
In the morning, it is
Slowly dragging along, Slowly dragging along

(Music continues – Durga Alap on Sarod)

The first input in our conceptual blend is the pentatonic rag *durga*. It is comprised of the tonic, major second, major fourth, fifth, and major sixth. The rag has long and slow glissandos in the interval between the major second and major fourth, and between the major sixth and the octave. The other input is the poetic description of mist, slowly rolling over the jungle. It is where Manōhari and Sōma Kumaru will hide from Divapati’s “Soldier Beams,” his sunrays. When we listen to the song we blend both inputs into an emergent structure: THE FLOWING MIST (target) IS RAG DURGA (source). One senses that the rag is “playing the part” of the rolling mist.

The melodic contour used in the phrase “slowly dragging along, slowly dragging along,” highlights this blend. The musical phrase set to the text, “slowly drags along,” oscillates in slow tempo between the major fourth and second, and then between the tonic and the major sixth. When we think of the ascent and descent of the scale (sa, ri, ma, pa, da, sa) as “rising” and “falling” (fig. 11), we can, by extension, diagram the melodic contour and rhythm of the phrase “slowly dragging along, slowly dragging along” according to such rising and falling notes (fig. 12). Such a diagram plays on our everyday conceptual metaphor that PITCH RELATIONSHIPS ARE RELATIONSHIPS IN VERTICAL SPACE (Zbikowski 2002: 66).
The song “Salu Nāṭuma” has a six beat rhythm cycle. The phrase “Slowly dragging along, slowly dragging along” begins on the downbeat. The bolded letters of figure 12 represent the beginning of each six beat measure.

Example 8 Notation of Phrase "Slowly Dragging Along, Slowly Dragging Along"

Figure 12 Phrase's Mist-like Contour

D D ,
P M , M , ,
R , R ,
S S , , , , , D ,

S
D D
P P
M M
R R
S
When we relate the image of the dragging mist to the contour of the rag *durga*, we mentally compress what Fauconnier and Turner call vital relations (2002: 101) ⁵⁵ If we want to structure ARGUMENT in terms of WAR, we must “compress” the many differences between them. Imagine if someone says, “he attacked your strong points like the U.S. attacked Germany’s in WWII.” This statement involves the compression of time (the time in which the argument took place vs. the time of the war), space (the place where the argument took place vs. the place where the war was fought), and part-whole differences (the part is the argument and the whole is an entire war). These differences are conceptually put aside in order to run the blend.

In “Manōhari,” we are dealing with a particular type of compression: representation. Here, “one input corresponds to the thing represented; the other, to the element that represents it—as with paint of different colors on a canvas. In the blend, the representation link between the thing represented and the thing representing it is typically compressed into uniqueness” (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 97). We compress the differences between musical tones and droplets of water into an emergent structure in which the raga “acts out” the mist.

Broadcast in December of 1955—just four months before the village-level elites won the 1956 election—“Manōhari” was a far cry from imitative music that dominated the airwaves during the first twenty-five years of radio in Ceylon. The conditions of its possibility lay in the anxiety of the Sinhalese rural intelligentsia to raise the standards of Sinhalese music by developing a state-sponsored music-culture they could proudly call

⁵⁵ They list as vital relations change, identity, time, space, cause and effect, part-whole, representation, role, analogy, disanalogy, property, similarity, category, intentionality, and uniqueness (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 101).
their own. Born to a father who was village headman, trained as a Buddhist monk, and later avowed Marxist, Chandrarathna Manawasinghe was an influential member of this newly empowered population. Manawasinghe’s “Manōhari,” in its symbolic play and North Indian classical music, was a sophisticated musical form that the rural intelligentsia could enjoy as a unique Sinhalese art form.
Chapter 5: Music, Metonymy, and Metaphor for the Majority

S.N. Ratanjankar first came to Sri Lanka in 1949 to grade Sinhalese musicians for radio posts. The Sinhalese revivalist elite revered Ratanjankar because he was principal of the Bhatkhande Music College in Lucknow, North India, a school where many aspiring Sinhalese musicians and composers studied North Indian classical music. In April of 1952, the general director of the radio station invited Ratanjankar back to the island to give advice about how to fashion a Sri Lankan national music. During his second visit Ratanjankar graded a new batch of artists (716 musicians appeared for auditions (Karunanayake 1990: 292)), and delivered an influential lecture.

A group of musicians aligned with Sunil Santha, boycotted Ratanjankar’s auditions of 1952. As we read in chapter 3, Santha felt affronted that the radio station consulted a North Indian musician (his former principle) for the improvement of Sri Lankan music. There were others in the music community, however, who praised Ratanjankar’s second visit, because of a lecture he gave at the Royal Asiatic Society.

Ratanjankar delivered this lecture in English at the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. His lecture was titled, “The Place of Folk Songs in the Development of Music.” In it, he expounded on the antiquity and purity of folk music, and encouraged Sinhalese musicians to create a modern song based on folk poetry and folk music. His concerns, then, were the familiar concerns of “musical nationalism”—the incorporation

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56 You can see his signature at the bottom of Sunil Santha’s letter of recommendation, on page 63.
of folk elements into art music to evoke national sentiment, preserve tradition, and venerate a disappearing rural way of life (Turino 2000: 190).

Ratanjankar suggested that deep commonalities exist between Sinhala and North Indian “rural music” because of shared Indo-Aryan genes:

I have had recently occasion to hear, during the auditions, the genuine folk music of this country. This folk music is absolutely pure from any mixture either of Western music or of the modern Bengali music, film music or the Ghazal Qouwali of the Muslims of India. And I cannot resist the conclusion that this folk music is exactly like the rural music of India. This music and its traditions are very old. They have probably come into this country along with the first migrants from India 2,000 years ago. These people were not Tamilians. They were from the North-Eastern part of India, most probably Orissa. (1952: 115)

He contrasted superficial urban popular music with genuine folk music:

It seems the Ghazals and Qouwalis, the Gujarati [sic] theatrical music [Parsi Theater], Late Dr. Tagore’s [Rabindranath Tagore] songs, and the Hindusthani Film songs have impressed a lot of listeners of the towns of this island. At least one comes to such a conclusion when one hears the popular modern compositions. The Westernized melodies also appear to be quite popular. This music maybe called DESHI [local] because the common listener likes it. But it is not the music of Lanka. (1952: 119)

Ratanjankar believed true Sri Lankan music was found in the villages. He appealed to musicians to create a “refined” modern music, albeit one based on folk music. He also encouraged scholars to undertake a systematic musicological study of this music:

The proper DESHI SANGEET [local music] of Lanka is in its villages. The Vannams, Astakas, the Sivupadas, the Stotras, the Pirits are the proper DESHI SANGEET of Lanka. They are still retained in their traditional forms. But much refined music can be built upon the basis of these. I have already pointed out one or two instances, which supply the basis for full-grown melodies that can be treated and composed on artistic lines. These folk songs, as they are in their present forms, have more emphasis laid in them on Tala.

An analysis of the syllables produced on the several drums and the relative time measures of these syllables will provide a valuable and scientific basis for fresh creation and a system of music will evolve out of this material of which we may well be proud. The people of this land have this music and the rhythm in their blood; and possessing a genuine love for music, good quality of voice and fairly good ear for music as they, there
is no reason why Lanka will not have a national art music of her own. (1952: 119-120, emphasis mine)⁵⁷

S.N. Ratanjankar’s romantic nationalism struck a deep chord with lyricists at Radio Ceylon like Madawale Ratnayake, and composers like W.D. Amaradeva. Ratnayake has noted the importance of Ratanjankar’s suggestions:

A few people understood the importance of Ratanjankar’s speech. In them, a desire was born to create compositions that preserve national traits of the Sinhalese. Others blindly lost their way. We wonder whether that was because they did not have the capacity to carry out a systematic research into the syllables of jana kavi (folk poetry). (Ratnayake 1977: 9-10)

In his collection of essays, Nāda Sittam (Sound Paintings) (1989), W.D. Amaradeva spoke highly about Ratanjankar’s message, and argued that a uniquely national modern song ought to be rooted in folk music:

For the last half-century, our musical works have been mostly influenced by Indian, specifically North Indian music…When we analyze this music, we find that although the song lyrics are in Sinhala, the music flows from the Indian tradition. S.N. Ratanjankar, who came to Sri Lanka to audition musicians for the radio, gave a speech about thirty-five years ago. It stated that we, the Sinhalese, have not created a complete musical form that we can call our own. This still rings true today.

Even if we do not create a complete Sinhalese musical form, we possess a folk music that possesses native features that ought to be fused into Sinhala music. Using Sinhala folk

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⁵⁷ Ten years later, in his treatise on folk music, Heḷa Gī Maga (The System of Sinhala Song) (1962) W.A. Makuloluwe took seriously Ratanjankar’s proposal for a musicological study. Makuloluwe sought to standardize, and conceptually unify Sinhala poetry recitation, folk song, and drumming under the rubric of one Sinhalese music theory. In the introduction Heḷa Gī Maga, Makuloluwe writes:

There are a few important recent events. In 1952 Radio Ceylon brought esteemed Professor S.N. Ratanjankar from the music faculty of Bhatkhande College to grade the Sri Lankan musicians. He was also entrusted to grade the folk singers. He had to visit all the regions in the island to hear men and women sing folk song. After acquiring an understanding of folk song, dance, and instrumental music he gave a speech enriched with value at the Ceylon branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, entitled “The Place of Folk Songs in the Development of Music.” He, who had written many books on the classical music of India, explained the musical roots in folk song and devotional song with musical examples. He also emphasized that in Sri Lanka too, the regional folk songs, poems, vannamas, etc. could be transformed into a national song. We ought to remember with great gratitude that this speech was very helpful to encourage effort to create a national song form. I have cited many sections from this speech on page 122 (Makuloluwe 1962 [2000]: v).
music to create a Sinhalese musical form would partake in a time-honored praxis of musicians around the globe.

It is not difficult to promote features of our folk song in modern song. From time immemorial, we have used folk song as a medium for our thoughts and aspirations. There is no other form of music as suitable as folk song to please our people who have grown up in the Buddhist religion, and are used to a more moderate way of life. (Amaradeva 1989: 65-66)

Ratnayake and Amaradeva created radio songs from three types of Sinhalese musical forms that Ratanjankar specifically singled out in his speech excerpted above as “proper local music”: vannama, sivupada, and strōtra. The vannama inspired the song “Ran Van Karal Sale” (The Golden Paddy Shakes), the sivupada poetic genre (a particular form found in a village exorcism ritual) influenced the song “Min Dada Hī Sara” (The Cupid Arrow), and the song “Bambareku Āwāi” (A Bee Came) was based on strōtra, or praise poetry.

Ratnayake infused the above-mentioned songs with various aspects of these traditional texts: rhythms, lexicon/grammar, and semantic content: For “Ran Van Karal Sale,” he took the rhythm of the vannama and used it to create a new lyric. Ratnayake wrote “Bambareku Āwāi” based on a dialect found in sivupada verse recited for a ritual to ward off bad planetary influence. In “Min Dada Hī Sara,” he experimented with the meaning of a fifteenth century Sinhala panegyric, or praise poem.

The Scriptwriter

In 1953, The Minister of Information and Broadcasting at All India Radio, Dr. B.V. Keskar, created an alternative popular music, by establishing "light music units" at various stations. These units employed classical musicians and poets to compose two songs a week (Lelyveld 1994: 121). That same year, Radio Ceylon appointed a
commission that recommended the appointment of “scriptwriters” to the Sinhalese service (Karunanayake 1990: 116).

Hired in 1954, Madawale Ratnayake (1929-1997) was one of the first to officially hold this position. M.J. Perera, director general of Radio Ceylon between 1952 and 1956, recalls,

> When I held the position of director general at Radio Ceylon, we worked to raise the standard of the Sinhalese service. We created new positions and Ratnayake was the suitable candidates. I do not recall whether he was working for our news department at the time. I do remember that he had worked in the radio program section as a lyric writer. He joined others that were hired to develop the Sinhalese section like Dunstine De Silva (music), P. Walikala (drama), and Karunarathna Abeysekera (broadcaster, scriptwriter). (Perera 1997: 67)

It was also Ratnayake’s duty to review all the new song lyrics before they were broadcast. If he deemed a lyric was “vulgar,” he would hand back the composition to the lyricist who had the option to edit the song, and submit it again for review (Sunil Ariyaratne interview 25 March 2012).

Ratnayake produced three popular radio shows that featured his original songs: “Jana Gāyanā” (Folk Singing) (1954, 1957), “Rasa Miyuru” (Sweet Aesthetic) (1961) and “Swara Varna” (Tone Colors) (1964). He revealed his objectives for his first program:

> “Jana Gāyanā” consisted of five radio programs based on Sinhala folk songs. In some of these broadcasts, the radio program contained several sections. Some were limited to a half hour. One such program was the first show that we called “Tikiri Liya” (Village Damsel)...When we experimented with the tunes of folk songs, we started to just weave a story in between the songs...What we were interested in doing was to bring folk song to the listeners. In the style of churningka [prose sentence that expound on the purport of Buddhist gatha] I have joined the songs to each other in a story in an attempt to preserve the essential values of the village and rural life. (Ratnayake 1992: 9)


59 Verse from the Pali canon of Theravada Buddhism.
Ratnayake’s intention was to allude to Sinhalese Buddhist culture in the dialogues between songs. This he did by styling the conversations that interspersed songs, according to the exegesis of Pali-language verses of the Theravada Buddhist canon.

Ratnayake had launched “Jana Gāyanā” in 1955. When the press criticized it for “destroying” folk music, Ratnayake became discouraged and stopped the program (Ratnayake 1977: 9-10). He restarted the show in 1957 with composer W.D. Amaradeva, and it met with critical acclaim (Ratnayake 1977: 10, Karunanayake 1990: 293). It was a year after the shift of power into the hands of the Buddhist majority of the rural elite. Perhaps the Sinhalese public was ready for such a show.

The Eternal One

Ratnayake recollects,

W.D. Amaradeva returned to the island after training in North Indian music. I then restarted the program with his assistance. We modeled our songs on folk song. The first one we created was “Ran Wan Karal Salē” (The Golden Paddy Sways) for the radio program “Ti Kiri Liya.” In later radio programs…we would showcase songs influenced by the vannama (this genre is discussed below), bali kavi (poetry sung in rituals to ward off bad planetary influences), goyam kavi (sung poetry for farming), and nelum kavi (sung poetry for cultivation). (1977: 10-11)

It seems natural that the show become popular after W.D. Amaradeva (b. 1927) joined—his singing voice and compositional style have consistently articulated the Sinhalese rural elite’s deepest yearnings for high standard music in the cultural terrain of post-1956 Sri Lanka. Born to a Methodist mother and Buddhist father, Amaradeva’s original name was Don Albert Perera. At the age of seven, he began learning Hindustani music on the violin from his older brother, who was studying with M.G. Perera (Amaradeva 2007: 17-18). M.G. Perera had authored Gīta Shikshaka (Song Trainer) (1933), perhaps the earliest Sinhala-language book on North Indian classical music.
performance. At an early age, little Albert Perera became a proficient mandolin player. He would carry it to the theater to play along with Hindi film songs (ibid: 18).

Circa 1946, he met “Master” Mohammad Ghouse (1910-1953), at a Colombo art school known as the Shanti Arts Institution. Originally from Bangalore, South India, Ghouse was a household name in Ceylon as the leader of a popular orchestra, and as composer for musicals and records of Sinhala music released on the Columbia label (Ariyaratne 1997a). At the time of their meeting, Ghouse was composing songs for what would become the second Sinhala-language film, Aśōkāmāla. Young Albert Perera quit school to join Ghouse’s orchestra.

Figure 13 Ghouse's Orchestra. Amaradeva (Albert Perera) stands at the far right. Ghouse is in black. Instruments include violin, mandolin, guitar, banjo, tabla, gāṭa bera, mridangam, sitar, esraj, flute, and harmonium.
In 1947, Ghouse invited the young violinist to accompany him to Madras, to perform violin on the *Aśōkamāla* soundtrack. He also requested Perera to compose instrumental introductions and interludes for the movie songs. Ghouse was so pleased with Perera’s work that he listed his name in the credits as *Sahāya Sangīta Adhyakṣaya (Assistant Musical Director)* (Madavatte 2001: 9).

In 1949, Radio Ceylon hired the budding musician and composer as a “C-grade performer” and “C-grade soloist.” Three years later the audition chair, S.N. Ratanjankar, would award him with an unheard of “super grade.” The same year, Perera composed music and sang in playwright E.R. Sarachchandra’s drama, *Pabavati*. This prompted Sarachchandra to put an advertisement in the *Lankādīpa* newspaper that raised enough money to send the young violinist to the Marris College of Hindustani Music, for higher studies. Around this time, Sarachchandra bestowed an honorable title to Perera that stuck: “Amaradeva.” *Amara* is “eternal” and *deva* is “god.” This stage name-turned-surname became a signpost of the central place W.D. Amaradeva would come to occupy on the Sinhalese music scene throughout the second half of the twentieth century. In North India, Amaradeva primarily studied with the violinist V.G. Jog, a disciple of the well-known teacher, Allaudin Khan. In 1956, Amaradeva won the All-India first prize in violin performance, completed the *Sangita Visharada* degree, and returned home.

**Tale of the Buddha and its Rhythms**

In 1957, Ratnayake and Amaradeva created a well-known song entitled “Ran Wan Karal Salē” (“The Golden Paddy Sways”). Ratnayake had attempted to create lyrics strictly aligned with the spoken rhythms of a *vannama* composition. The *vannama* were commissioned by King Narendrasinghe, who was the last Sinhalese King of Kandy.
between 1707 and 1737. Married to a South Indian princess, King Narendrasinghe is remembered for patronizing the arts of South India (Jayaweera 2004: 50). He solicited a monk of the Malwatta chapter of the Siyam nikāya (monastic order) to compose poetic verse, and a Tamil musician named Ganithalankara to set the texts to South Indian raga-based melodies (Kulatillake 1976: 23-24). These pieces were originally vocal compositions, but the king’s court musicians used the rhythmic texts as the basis for a new Kandyan dance style. It had roots in the Sinhalese ritual dance, the Kohomba Kankariya (Jayaweera 2004: 51). Many of the vannama texts describe the behavior of animals, while others narrate stories of deities like Sakra, Ishwara, and Ganesh.

The turanga vannama describes Prince Siddhartha’s escape from the castle, with his charioteer Channa, on the back of the horse Kanthaka. They arrive at the Anoma River, where Siddhartha reaches enlightenment and becomes the Buddha:

Prince Siddhartha, born with compassion to all beings desired to don robes. He commanded Channa to bring the steed Kanthaka and mounted it. The three proceeded together and the Gods muted the sound of every step of the horse. Going from place to place the three arrived at the river and on their way they contemplated a course common to all. With Siddhartha on the back and Channa clinging to the tail, they jumped across the river Anoma. By virtue of that noble crossing of the river, the movements the world inherited from the handsome Prince Siddhartha were composed into this description of the horse. (Translated by C. de S. Kulatillake 1982: Appendix: IV)

This is primarily a “behaviorist” narrative (Herman 2010: 157): it presents only the character’s surface behaviors while excluding comment on internal dispositions, thoughts, attitudes, and memories.
The rhythm of the *turanga vannama* (The Vannama of the Horse) forms the basis of “Ran Wan Karal Salē.” It is derived from mixtures of vocables called *tānama* in Sinhala (Sykes 2011: 293).[^60]

### Table 6 Tānama of the Turanga Vannama

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line Number</th>
<th>Tanama</th>
<th>Numerical subdivisions of rhythm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tat tat tanat tanena</td>
<td>12 12 123 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tat tat tanat tanena</td>
<td>12 12 123 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tat tat tanat tanena tā nā</td>
<td>12 12 123 123 1234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>tana tanena tana tanena</td>
<td>12 123 12 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>tana tanena tana tanena</td>
<td>12 123 12 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>tana tanena tam danena tā nā</td>
<td>12 123 123 123 1234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Herath 1997: 226)

### Example 9 Rhythm of the Turanga Vannama (ll. 1-3), Aligned Lyrics of "Ran Wan Karal Salē," and Melody

[^60]: I do not focus on the Sinhala text of the *vannama* here, but to give a sense of how the words align with the *tānama*, this is the first line of text and its underlying *tānama*:

**text:** sat vet mahat adara lat yut sidat kumara gat sit tosat pāvidi angā

**tanama:** tat tat tanat tanena tat tat tanat tanena tat tat tanat tanena tā nā
This melody is both the original melody of this *vannama* and the melody that W.D. Amaradeva employed for the setting of lines 1-3 in “Ran Wan Karal Salē”

**Table 7 "Ran Wan Karal Salē" Text and Translation, Lines 1-9**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line Number</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ran wan karal sälē</td>
<td>The golden paddy sways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>sansun kamin barava</td>
<td>with profound calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>sil gat sitin yutuvu katasē</td>
<td>like the woman who observes the precepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>mada sulanga hā samaga</td>
<td>In the gentle breeze,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>banda salana vita gamada</td>
<td>the paddy husks shake, and the village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>pem mal udā karati sato sē</td>
<td>blossoms in happiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>gan hō jalen pireta</td>
<td>Because of overflowing tanks and rivers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>govī bim palin susādi</td>
<td>the paddy fields are flowering and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>duk domnasin ivata ādunā</td>
<td>sadness drifts away</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Golden Paddy and the Buddhist Woman**

While Ratnayake retains the rhythm of the *turanga vannama*, his lyrics depart thematically (disc 1, audio track 7). The text of the turanga vannama depicts an episode of Siddhartha’s life. Ratnayake’s song tells the story of a prosperous paddy harvest. He references tanks, or reservoirs, and paddy fields, and suggests the existence of Buddhist temples where the woman who sways like the golden paddy would observe the Buddhist precepts. The imagery of tank, temple, and paddy field, is striking because the rural elite popularized these three elements (*vāva*, *dāgāba*, and *yāya*) as authentic markers of
Sinhalese culture in the twentieth century (Spencer 1990: 286). They are metonyms for authentic Sinhalese culture. Metonym is a trope in which a part stands for the whole. In the Sinhalese nationalist imagination, these three parts represent the ethos of Sinhalese culture.

Further, lines 1-3 feature the metaphor, “Ripened Paddy is like a Buddhist Woman.” This metaphor draws from the popular conceptual metaphor found also in English: PEOPLE ARE PLANTS (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 5). Lakoff and Turner’s analysis of English yielded many examples in which people are viewed as plants, with respect to the life cycle. We commonly say, for example, “she is a young sprout,” “the elderly man is withering away,” and “he is in full bloom,” to cite a few examples (ibid: 6).

In Ran Wan Karal Salē, a woman is plant-like because of her calm swaying. The source for the metaphor is the ripened paddy swaying in the field. The target for the metaphor is a Buddhist woman observing sil, the precepts of Buddhism. Paddy will “calmly” sway in the wind when it is ripe and heavy. Similarly, the woman who observes precepts will sway back and forth as she mindfully paces the sand of the temple, practicing sakman bhāvanavā (walking meditation).

The second and third stanza elaborate on the idealistic scene sketched out in the first verse. The words pem mal (loving flowers) in the second stanza, are usually used to connote a couple in a love story. Here it means that the village people are pemen bāndenavā, or “joined in love and affection,” because of the good harvest. Traditionally,

61 Observing sil typically begins with a visit to the temple and the recitation of the pan sil (the five precepts). The day is spent listening to bana kata (sermons), reading gātha (Pali verses), or śloka (aphorisms), and practicing meditation. While observing sil one should not sit on chairs, lie on bed, or chat with others. In the temple it is customary to wear white and refrain from eating meat.
after a harvest, the villagers would get together, pluck rice, and sing songs. If their aṭukoṭu, or storage rooms, were filled with rice, the village would have food for the season.

The year was divided into two periods yāla (first six months) and maha (latter six months). The farmers would start seeding in January and again in April or May. According to the variety of rice, some could be cropped after four months and some could be cropped after six.

The third stanza references the importance of water for rice cultivation. Cultivation is possible if the rivers or tanks are filled. In this idyllic scenario, water is plentiful and the flowers of the paddy fields are blossoming. Because there is enough water to cultivate the fields, the people are joyous.

Amaradeva’s musical setting of this stanza enhances the textual imagery. The group singing the text represents villagers singing in harmony. Amaradeva uses an udākki folk drum to reinforce the mental association with the village, and works with a particular raga, expands the turanga vannama melody—confined to five notes, as is much Sinhalese folk music—to the range of an octave.

I tried to elaborate on the music of the Turanga Vannama. The original composition was limited to the first five notes of the scale. [ll. 4-6] I expanded it to the octave…Although my composition has a form of the sthayi and anthara [the structure of many North Indian compositions], I carefully blended the musical style found in the vannama with a rag in a way that would not compromise the national melodic style…I endeavored to free the composition from mere imitation of Indian classical music…I crafted this composition in such a way so that the sthayi – anthara is not evident to the listener. (Amaradeva 1968, in Amaradeva 1989: 69)
Ratnayake’s first novel, *Akkara Paha* (The Five Acres) (1959), strikingly mirrors “Jana Gāyanā’s” objectives to create new music based on folk song. Sena, the protagonist of *Akkara Paha*, is born to a family of farmers. They send him to the city of Kandy to receive a prestigious English education. The story documents the rude awakening Sena has in adjusting to the ways of urban life. This is especially so when he falls desperately in love with a city girl, Theresa, who only wants a fleeting romance. In a defiant concluding act, he returns to his village, marries his village sweetheart, and takes up farming. Ratnayake prefaced the novel in this way,

> After I moved from the city back to the village I began to feel that national development of any historical period begins with those who hold the nation’s most fundamental occupation—farmers…When I wrote *Akkara Paha* those who passed the senior English exam could find teaching positions without any problem. I have no doubt that is why readers found it nearly impossible to believe that the protagonist of *Akkara Paha* rejected his English education and began working as a paddy farmer. I can still remember when I published this story, a friend of mine said, “You disgrace people who like the protagonist have studied [English] well.”…If the ending is so hard to believe, why did I write this? I felt that it was necessary to show that those who work with the pen, and those who work with the plow have equal rights in this society. Our country will never develop until those who are educated also pick up the plow, or until the idea is demolished that farming is a “low” position. This dream has become a reality today. (1959 [2011]: v-viii)

Though Ratnayake never explicitly explains why his “dream become a reality,” it is likely he was referencing the political shifts of 1956 and the bureaucratic changeover from English to Sinhala. The spirit of populism and the celebration of farming culture that run deep in this novel and in songs like “Ran Van Karal Salē” epitomize and legitimized the new era ushered in that year.

K.M. De Silva has written that a primary feature of the period between 1956 and 1965, during which this novel was published and “Ran Van Karal Salē” broadcast, was the “acceptance of Sinhalese and Buddhist predominance within the polity, and a sharp decline in the status of ethnic and religious minorities” (De Silva 1981: 526). From the
standpoint of the socio-political fabric, then, it makes sense that the “scriptwriter” of the government-run radio station would be someone like Madawale Ratnayake. He was a member of the rural elite and composed songs and stories that spoke to the Sinhalese rural voter, who was now very much the “arbiter of [Sri Lankan] politics” (ibid: 525-526).

The Language of Deity Propitiation

Ratnayake wrote “Bambareku Āwāi” (The Bee Came) in 1964 for the radio program Swarna Varna (Tone Colors). The lexicon in the song lyric is reminiscent of Sinhala ritual poetry to appease the gods or ward off bad planetary influences. The song has specific grammatical constructions like the colloquial imperative (varen, “come”), and the literary question marker (-dō) found in the poetry sung for the Kohomba Kankariya.

The Kohomba Kankariya is a village ritual that propitiates deities believed to reside in the Sri Lankan city of Kandy (see M. Dissanayake 1988, 1998, and Reed 2010: 23-73). Samantha Herath explains the connection between Ratnayake/Amaradeva’s song with the Kohomba Kankariya: “If you compare this song with the Kohomba Kankariya’s parade of the Guruge mālāva [Garland of the Teacher], one can understand the influence on Ratnayake” (Herath 1997: 234).

The “guruge mālāva” is a comedy portion of the Kohomba Kankariya, where a dancer plays a priest from South India who speaks with a Tamil accent. Another dancer, or drummer, plays the straight man, a Sinhala person who asks the guru questions (Reed 2010: 63). Herath quotes two stanzas from the Guruge mālāva, where the guru performs blessing rituals (set santiya) in order to ward off misfortunes (dos).
ahase gosin ahase  sāṅgavunādō
polove gosin väli yata  sāṅgavunādō
müde gosin rala yata  sāṅgavunādō
leda kala dēvatā kotanaka  giyāḍō

ahasē gosin ahasē sāṅgavanat  varen
polowē gosin väli yata sāṅgavanat  varen
müde gosin rala yata sāṅgavanat  varen
leda kala devata kotānaka giyat  varen
(Stanzas in Herath 1997: 234)

Did you go hide in the sky?
Did you go hide under the earth?
Did you go hide under a wave in the sea?
Deity of sickness, where did you go?

Even if you are hiding in the sky, c’mere
Even if you are hiding under ground, c’mere
Even if you are hiding under a wave in the sea, c’mere
Deity of sickness, wherever you went, c’mere

Ratnayake’s song lyric, “Bambareku Āwāi” imitates these ritual stanzas. Like the ritual stanza above, he ends questions with the literary-Sinhala question particle “-dō” (ll. 5-8), and the familiar-imperative for “come,” (varen) (ll. 10, 12).
### Table 8 "Bambareku Āwāl" Text and Translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>bambareku āwai niriya</td>
<td>The bee came from the southwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>hada pāruvayi miyuru</td>
<td>Stung the heart with the sweet rasa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>mal paravūvayi sōkēti</td>
<td>The flower withers from all the sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>kandulu gālūvayi elō</td>
<td>Tears overflow and I am in another world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>sīta hīṃē lenakata pīvisunādō</td>
<td>Do you have a cave in the beautiful in snow mountain [better than what I provide you?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>āṭa epīta gri kulakata giyādō</td>
<td>Did you go to a cave on a mountain peak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>māṭa mepīta mē adehima lagidō</td>
<td>Will you come and reside in my heart?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>dāṣa anduru vī mā tani vunādō</td>
<td>Am I alone because I was blind?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>salamin sumudu podi attatu miyuru saren</td>
<td>Shake your soft wings and make a sweet hum,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>nala mudu suvanda vindagannata giyat varen</td>
<td>Its ok you left for the wind’s aroma, come here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>bala binda damā hiru yanavīta avara giren</td>
<td>When the sun sets on the mountain west</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>balamin pipunu mal pāni bonu risiva varen</td>
<td>Come drink the sweet honey of [my] flower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

W.D. Amaradeva further comments that the suffix “ēya” (ll. 1, 2, 4) is an example of “bali-bas,” the language used in the bali rituals:

I wrote the music of this song for the radio program “Swara Varna.” Most of the songs of “Swara Varna” were composed according to folk materials. Madawale Ratnayake has penned these song lyrics closely aligned with Sinhala folk poetry. Here he has been influenced by the bali ritual. That is why one finds the linguistic register of this ritual in the song. “Digēya,” “Rasēya” etc. are examples of this diction…It is clear that he is drawing on folklore, yet Ratnayake’s reinterpretation articulates a modern experience. Thus we can say that the tradition may be very old but this composition is modern. (Amaradeva 2007: 52-53)
Bali is a ritual performed to minimize or ward off bad planetary influences (Obeyesekere 1984: 46). In this way, “Bambareku Āwāi” is like “Ran Wan Karal Salē.” “Ran Wan Karal Salē” evokes the vannama composition yet has a different theme, while “Bambareku Āwāi” conjures the bali ritual yet tells a different story: it is an allegory for a patient woman in love (disc 2, audio track 1).

**Loyal Women**

“Bambareku Āwāi” uses a poetic metaphor: the bee and the flower represent a human couple. The bee is a promiscuous man. The flower is a loyal and ostensibly Sinhalese Buddhist woman. In their first encounter, the woman feels emotionally stung by the man. When he leaves, she “withers” in sadness. Ratnayake focalizes the second stanza through the woman’s first person perspective. She inquires into the whereabouts of the man and resents that he could find someone better. She wonders if her loneliness is because she was blind to the deceitful character of her lover. In the third stanza, the woman asks her man to return and stay. She will forgive him and grant him the pleasure he seeks.

WOMAN AS FLOWER is a conceptual metaphor for an ideal gender role. Hoda Elsadda writes that such representations of gender roles, “not only define and shape the contours of national identity and national futures, they are also cultural interventions in ideological contestations over the image of the nation” (2012: xiii). This metaphor resonates with the woman protagonist, Sandawati, in Ratnayake’s novel that I discussed above, Akkara Paha (Five Acres) (1959). Like the tolerant Sinhalese woman of “Bambareku Āwāi,” who tolerates a man that cheats on her, such is Sandawati’s love for the protagonist, Sena. Although Sena leaves the village and has a romance with a “Westernized” Christian girl, Sandawati’s love for him never wavers.
In the end, Sena returns to the village, renounces his Western education, chooses to work the “golden” land as his father before him, and marries Sandawati. This novel was widely popular among the Sinhalese reading public throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Director Lester James Peries made it into a Sinhala film in 1969. Arguably, stereotypical gender roles like Sandawati, and the woman of “Bambareku Āwāi,” are part of a larger narrative about the loyalty of the rural Buddhist woman and the village where she lives.

In the orchestration for “Bambareku Āwāi” (ex. 10) Amaradeva composes with violins, sitar, and guitar. He also oscillates between a traditional Sinhalese percussion instrument, the raban, and the North Indian tabla (the raban plays on the chorus, and the tabla on the two verses). The sound of the raban, like that of the udākki for “Ran Wan Karal Salē,” coincides with Ratnayake’s objective to create more folk-based radio songs. Amaradeva has violin perform a tremolo as a mini-sound painting that signifies the fluttering of the bee’s wings. The raga of the song has an ascent of C D F G A C and descent of C Bb A G F Eb D C, and contains the foreign notes of the natural 7th and natural 3rd.
Medieval Praise Poetry

Ratnayake and Amaradeva’s “Min Dada Hī Sara” (The Cupid’s Arrow) (1964) evokes a Sinhala poem that is the earliest complete Sinhala panegyric, or praise poem, available (Godakumbura 1955: 22). These poems are known in Sinhala as strōtra, or praśasti. This particular one is titled Pārakumba Sirita (The Character of King Parakramabahu VI) (1415). Its unknown author was most likely a poet in the court of King Parakramabahu VI, a king consecrated in 1411. King Parakramabahu set up his kingdom in Kotte, in 1415, beginning what is known as the “Kotte Era.” He
was the last to unite the entire island under the governance of one Sinhalese king’s sovereignty.\(^{62}\)

*Parakumba Sirita* consists of one hundred and forty quatrains, and each stanza has *eli vāṭa*, wherein the last phoneme of each line of the quatrain is alike. *Parakumba Sirita* is told almost exclusively from the standpoint of an omniscient narrator who praises the King Parakramabahu’s ancestors, and the events of his life (Godaikumbura 1955: 222). Stanzas 127 through 129, however, are told from the perspective of a first-person feminine narrator. She is a dancing courtesan who longs to meet King Parakramabahu in the evening. In the 129\(^{th}\) stanza, she pleads with the king to visit her. Ratnayake and Amaradeva based their song “Min Dada Hī Sara” on this particular stanza. This stanza from the *Parakumba Sirita* has rhyme in three places (underlined and boldfaced):

*Parakumba Sirita*, Stanza #129:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{bāndā} & \text{ min dada mada aravāndā sarala sarā} & \text{yāne} \\
\text{mandā} & \text{ nila turanguta negemāndā viyowaga nan} & \text{vāne} \\
\text{chāndā} & \text{ nalalesa viya neta njindā noladimi tani} & \text{yāne} \\
\text{kāndā} & \text{ vare pārakum naranāndā sakisanda sanda} & \text{pāne}
\end{align*}
\]

[Hoisting the fish flag, and preparing the bow with the lotus arrow,

Cupid comes on the horse of soft breezes fanning the fire of separation.

The moon is like fire. I could not sleep with my eyes closed all alone on the bed.

---

\(^{62}\) His forty-five years of rule were marked by literary achievements. Vidāgama Maitreya Thera, the king’s family preceptor, and Tūtagamuwē Śrī Rāhula, a poet and Buddhist monk connected to the royal court, composed their canonical works of classical Sinhala verse on behalf of the king. Maitreta Thera’s *Hamsa Sandēśaya* (The Message of the Swan), urges another Buddhist monk to recite a sutta 100,00 times to invoke the blessings of deities, and strengthen the power of Parakramabahu VI (Holt 1991: 110). Śrī Rahula’s *Parevi Sandēśaya* (The Parrot’s Message), and the *Ṣālalihini Sandēśaya* (The Brahminy Kite’s Message), plea to the gods, to bless the king with an heir to the throne (ibid: 111).
Good friend, please summon King Parakramabahu here in the moonlight.]

(Wikramasinghe 1970: 57, 250-251, trans. 284)

According to C.E. Godakumbura, the unknown author selected the meters of the stanzas to “suit the drum and other instruments used at the court to accompany the dancers and the girls who sung these verses” (1955: 222).

This stanza is about a woman frustrated in love. The unknown author’s use of figurative language conjures a rich world of the consort’s emotional and physical state. In the first two lines, the cupid and his accoutrement are a metonym for her erotic love. He hoists his flag, prepares his “lotus arrow,” and rides into the woman’s room on the horse of the gentle blowing breeze. The poem suggests that the lotus arrow has pierced her heart. She tells her friend to summons the king to visit her at night.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* reveal conceptual metaphors for LOVE in the English language. Their work inspired Zoltán Kövecses (1986, 1988, 1990, 2000) to research into the structure of the concept LOVE. He argues that “inherent in [everyday] expressions [about love] is a conceptual model of love” (1990: 44). Kövecses shows how the intensity of love is often understood in the English language in terms of heat.

The same is true in two expressions of this Sinhala stanza: “Cupid comes on the horse of soft breezes fanning the fire of separation,” and “The moon is like fire.” These two metaphors have the underlying conceptual metaphor of LOVE IS FIRE.

Kövecses writes,

This metaphor highlights the intensity of love (“fire,” “flame,” “sparks,” “consume,”) the existence of love (“on fire”), the waxing and waning of love (“kindle,” “go out”), its duration (“flame”), the cause of love (“kindle,” “set on fire”), the frustration caused by love (“get
burned”), and how it can render a person unable to function normally (“consumed”).
(Kővecses 1988: 44-45)

He further analyzes the correspondences between the source and target domains that manifest the conceptual metaphor of LOVE IS FIRE.

Source: FIRE   Target: LOVE

—Being burned by the fire is the frustration caused by love.
—The burning of the fire is the existence of love.
—The intensity of the fire is the intensity of love. (1988: 45)

Parakramabahu VI’s consort blames her frustrating love experience on the wind and the moon. They are the entities that make her burn with love. The wind that blows into her chamber is like the Indian cupid (mada) riding into her room on the back of a swift horse. Though the soft and cool breeze is usually a relief from the hot evening, here, it exacerbates the burning feeling. Likewise, the moon is a metonym for her burning love. She says explicitly “the moon was like fire.”

Music for Mental Images

In the song “Min Dada Hī Sara,” Ratnayake departs from the strictures of this stanza’s meter and rhyme, yet tells of a similar scenario from the point of view of a woman who longs for her partner (disc 2, audio track 2).

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63 chandā nalalesa viya (chandra anala lesa viya) (see Wikremasinghe 1970: 150).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>mindada hī sara vādī sālena hada</td>
<td>Do you hear my sad song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>nanvana duk gī obata āhenavada</td>
<td>From my heart that quivers from the cupid’s arrow?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>chandana mal aturā āti yahanata</td>
<td>The sandalwood flowers are scattered on the bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>kanda kapā pāyan ran pun sanda</td>
<td>Oh moon, please rise beyond the hill!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>turangaku pita nägi nila valākulu</td>
<td>[Cupid] rides on the back of the horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>guvan gābin oba ādena velē</td>
<td>The clouds are drawn away from the womb of the sky.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>pibedena dāsin balā hindimi mama</td>
<td>I am waiting with eyes awake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>kusum sinā kān hada puravā</td>
<td>With a smile in my heart blossoming like flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>metuvak kal muva mandala vasā siti</td>
<td>Having covered my face and smile for this long,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>andhakāra salu patin mudā</td>
<td>Emancipated from the cloth of darkness,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>net mini pahanin pahan karanu māna</td>
<td>Please light up my future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>anagātē man peta pādā</td>
<td>With your lamp of gem eyes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ratnayake uses the metonym of cupid-for-love, as found in the *Pārakumba Sirita*. The waiting woman in Ratnayake’s reinterpretation, though, is optimistic. She also is awake and restless in the night, but there is a “smile in her heart blossoming like flowers.” She expects her lover will come shortly, at his own will.

Amaradeva uses a major scale (ex. 11) because it reminds him of the recitation of Sinhala panegyrical poems. He describes his method for composition that entails matching

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64 The idea is that the bed is ready for two lovers.

65 She wants night to come so that her lover will pay a visit.
musical phrases to the “word paintings” or “mental images” that the poetry evokes in his mind. Amaradeva also reveals to have been influenced by the ideologies of musical nationalism:

I first sang this song, penned by Madawale Ratnayake, for the Swarna Varna radio program. This is a very erotic song. It is a plea for love. The songwriter has obtained the influence of this strōtra stanza:

\[
\text{bandā min dada mada aravindā sarala sara} \quad \text{yāne} \\
\text{mandā nila turanguta negemindā viyowaga nan} \quad \text{vāne}
\]

For the musical composition, recitation of strōtra poems influenced me in no small manner. Thus I have used only natural notes. There is not a single flat note in the song.

This song became very famous. It must be because it was based on folk music…I composed the music according to the musicality of the [Sinhala] language. Music imitates the path of language; composers create songs by composing music to language. Joseph Machlis, Professor at Queens College in New York, has written:

[In English] ‘Melodic line follows the natural inflections of the language. For this reason, vocal music reflects the speech patterns of a nation and is rooted in the native soil. It is that which makes Debussy’s vocal line seem so French, Brahms’s so German, Stephen Foster’s so American.’ (Machlis 1955: 90)

With regards to the song’s cumulative effect, there is one special feature of “Min Dada Hī Sara.” This is the chittarupaya (mental images) or padachitraya (word paintings). It is obvious what we see here. Because the music is blended with themes from this fantasy, the music has a very real quality to it. (Amaradeva 2007: 98-99)

Interestingly, Amaradeva further contends that the phonetic sounds Ratnayake drew on from the stanza in Pārakumba Sirīta, are more powerful than the literal meaning of the song lyric.

From its inception until today, the song “Min Dada Hī Sara” remains very popular. It features Ratnayake’s poem, and my composition and vocals. When the song was written, some people did not know the meaning of “Min dada” (cupid). Yet this was no obstacle to the song’s popularity. That is why I have expressed the idea that it is the sound of the words, and not the song’s meaning, that really determines the beauty of the song. For a song to become complete, the combination of lyric and the melody must be suitable.

While I was engaged in supplying sound to the feelings of the lyric, I could hear the sound patterns of the lamentation of separation from the Pārakumba Sirīta. “Bandā min dada mada aravindā sarala sara yānē” is the stanza I am referring to. While composing the music to Ratnayake’s “Min Dada Hī Sara,” his lyric really brought me to a frenzied state of appreciation. (1997: 118, emphasis mine)
The Great and Little Traditions

I will close this chapter by exploring how Ratnayake and W.D. Amaradeva ideologically position Sinhalese songs within a pan-South Asian cultural sphere. A metaphor from cultural anthropology has shaped Ratnayake and Amaradeva’s thought on this matter. They both contend that Sinhala song is part of the “Little Tradition” of South Asian expressive culture.

Robert Redfield conceived of the “Great” and “Little” distinction in the 1950s. Redfield worked on a project to study the relationship between civilizations (Great traditions) and peasant villages (Little traditions). In 1954 Redfield and Milton Singer organized a “Comparison of Cultures” seminar to study civilization “from the bottom up” by focusing on the Indian village (Guneratne 1992). Robert Redfield’s Peasant Society and Culture (1958) would later articulate a theory of the “Great and Little Tradition.” In May 1962, Singer held a conference at the University of Chicago that marked a “shift in
the kinds of societies US and (U.S. trained) anthropologists were studying in the years following the Second World War — ‘peasant’ rather than ‘tribal’ societies” (Scott 1994: 176).

Gananath Obeyesekere’s seminal “The Great Tradition and the Little Tradition in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism” (1963) attempted to map the Great/Little metaphor onto Theravada Buddhism/Sinhalese Buddhism. Before Obeyesekere, the study of Buddhism was mainly textual. Academic writing had “no connection to a living tradition of religious practice…and where living people who called themselves Buddhists were not openly disparaged for corrupting Buddhism, their practices were simply neglected” (Scott 1994: 177). Obeyesekere wrote,

As we see it, in any civilization there is a great tradition and a great community, and on the other hand, many peasant societies or little communities. In Ceylon, the religious great tradition of the civilization is Theravada Buddhism, with its corpus of Pali texts, places of worship, and a great community of monks. The doctrines of Theravada Buddhism are embodied in this corpus, and their expositors are the Buddhist order of monks. But what about the little community or the peasant society, which is after all the focus of anthropological inquiry? Could we view its culture as compounded of a great tradition and a little tradition? Methodologically, nothing is gained by approaching the religion as Buddhist in a great traditional sense. It is best to see what the existent reality is, for it is too much to hope that the speculations of orthodoxy would be the equivalent of the whole or part of the religious tradition of the masses, whether of the village or the town. (1963: 141-142)

Beyond Buddhism, scholars could superimpose the metaphor of Great/Little onto many components of expressive culture:
Table 10 Great and Little Traditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Great Tradition</th>
<th>Little Tradition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Non Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Cosmopolitan languages</td>
<td>Vernacular languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Sanskrit, Pali, etc.)</td>
<td>(Sinhala, Tamil, Kannada, Hindi,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Punjabi, Marathi…)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>Epics, grammatical</td>
<td>Folklore, folk poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>treatises, long poems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Buddhism, Hinduism,</td>
<td>Sinhalese Buddhism, Burmese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jainism</td>
<td>Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Large expanses of land</td>
<td>The Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ruled by powerful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kingdoms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>Folk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It possesses a corpus</td>
<td>It has little written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of musical treatises</td>
<td>documentation and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and a unique body of</td>
<td>varies from region to region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>theory. Practiced by the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>elite.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ratnayake equates Sinhala song with a “poem of the Little Tradition.”

It is correct to identify song as a poem of the Little Tradition. Song resounds in our ears for only a short moment. In that very moment, the meaning should become clear. That is why we need to give special consideration to the song lyric. If the lyric expresses a meaningful experience, the listener will remember the song for a long time. Likewise, if the listener has knowledge of classical literature, they can appreciate the literary aesthetic. If not, engaging the listener in the experience depicted in the lyric is not easy. Songs are poetic when composed by lyricists who have a sound understanding of colloquial Sinhala and classical literary Sinhala. These songs become famous among the people. Song is the Little Tradition’s poem. Both the composition and its appreciation will be unsuccessful if the lyricist has no understanding of literature. (1984, August 19, in Herath 1997: 235)

Elsewhere, Ratnayake adds:

When we look at the last several decades, it is makes me happy to see the development of our song. Someone may ask, without development in singing, how can there be progress in only musical compositions? That, [the fact that the improvement in singing must develop alongside lyric writing] is true. Listeners become familiar with songs because of the vocalist. People that choose to appreciate a lyrical composition without vocals are very small in numbers. Only if the song causes the listener an enjoyable internal experience will he or she will begin to appreciate the literary value of the lyric. When we listen to the four aspects of song—vocals, lyric, tune, and performance, we experience pleasure that exists for a significant amount of time. The listener will try to understand the literary value of a composition he or she likes. For the song to be filled with literary features, it must be a poem. Song is a poem of the Little Tradition…Song does not only fulfill the need for entertainment but also is a service to literature. If we want to make the
audience aware, it is our responsibility to create a song rich with the aesthetics of poetry… A song based on these fundamentals might not become instantly popular. The reason is that its contents are hard to understand. Yet, songs that are instant hits are forgotten just as quickly. (Ratnayake 1992: v-vi)

Amaradeva endorses Redfield’s concept of the Great and Little traditions:

We can discern the rhythm, sound, and pronunciation of colloquial language in any given country’s population from the names of their instruments. The ‘pipa’ of China, the ‘koto’ of Japan, the ‘piano’ of Germany, the ‘gamelan’ of Bali, the ‘anklung’ of Indonesia, the ‘esraj’, ‘dilruba’, ‘sarangi’, ‘sitar’, ‘veena’ of India, represent the regional languages of its countrymen. The Sinhala people have instruments that strongly resemble Indian instruments. We cannot find a separate non-Indian influenced set of instruments in Sri Lanka from either archaeological evidence or modern usage. At this juncture, we also should remember that the Sinhala language has similar features with Indo-Aryan languages like Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi, Bengali, and Urdu.

I accept American anthropologist Robert Redfield’s conclusion that there is an intimate relationship between Sri Lankan and Indian culture. We ought to take the terms “Great tradition” and “Little tradition” objectively as theoretical anthropological concepts. We should not think of the words “great” and “little” as containing praise or insult. A thorough analysis of Sinhala music, Sinhala verse and literature, Sinhala ayurvedic medicine, Sinhala drama, and even the Buddhist religion of the Sinhalese people shows that it all grew out of connections with the arts and philosophies of Indian culture. We should take Ananda Coomaraswamy’s idea seriously that Sinhala arts are like a window into the tradition of Indian art. (Amaradeva 1989: 87-88)

Madawale Ratnayake and Amaradeva thus felt that Sinhalese culture belonged to a larger South Asian complex.
Mahagama Sekera (1929-1976) wrote songs that grew out of literary projects. He was fond of Sinhalese Buddhist literary culture and the Sinhalese nationalist pastoral imagination, but also Victorian English literature, and romanticism. Raised in a Sinhalese Buddhist family, he grew up in the village of Radavana, just outside of Colombo, and studied in state-subsidized Sinhala-medium schools. At the age of 16, he completed a course at the Government College of Fine Arts, and in 1950, obtained admission into the Nittambuwe Teachers Training College (fig. 14). In 1951, the young graduate obtained his first job as an art teacher at the Hewavitharana College (Moratuwegama 1978: 190-194).

Although he found employment, the economic reality was very bleak for the majority of students who studied in the Sinhala medium (and in Tamil medium). The salary and status of English teachers was double than that of the Sinhalese and Tamil instructors. Teachers in Sinhala and Tamil medium schools were expected to teach a variety of subjects, in schools with poor equipment and lack of textbooks. The English-medium teachers had first-rate equipment and specialized teaching duties (Wriggins 1960: 338).

Sinhalese schoolteachers believed that these disadvantages would disappear if Sinhala became the official language of the state. Howard Wriggins conducted interviews with Sinhala-medium teachers in 1956 to discuss their motivations for making Sinhala the official language:

Most of these disadvantages would disappear, it was argued, if Sinhalese were made the sole official language. All the status that previously adhered to English when it was the
“official language” would become associated with the Sinhalese language and thence to Sinhalese teachers. They were, after all, the experts in Sinhalese culture and language, and if their proficiency received state recognition, naturally they themselves would rise in status. If Sinhalese were made the state language, differential pay, educational facilities, and job opportunities would no longer favor the English speaking elite. And, as it was seen from the village, vast numbers of government jobs would immediately be opened to their students in English were displaced and Sinhalese promoted. (Wriggins 1960: 337)

Figure 14 Mahagama Sekera, Seated First from Left at Nittambuwe Teacher's Training College (Courtesy of mahagamasekera.org)

Sekera’s intensely persona mission to locate a sense of authentic Sinhalese Buddhist selfhood was part of the “cultural revolution” that scripted the nation as Buddhist.66 I say “part of,” with a caveat—some of Sekera’s aesthetic predilections effectively challenged, from within, the more nativist forms of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. When poet

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66 I draw on Harshana Rambukwella’s characterization of Sinhalese nationalism as “a personal quest attempting to locate a sense of authentic selfhood, but more often than not it is a political discourse attempting to script the nation as essentially Sinhala and Buddhist” (2008: 4).
Gunadasa Amarasekera criticized Sekera for using the “foreign” free verse style, instead of Sinhala poetic meters, Sekera replied,

Meter limits freedom. It forces the poet to create within the confines of the length and width of a fixed frame. Meter and rhyme impose a “childish sweetness” on the poem, restricting the poet’s authentic voice. Just because free verse is a poetic structure used in foreign countries, does not mean we cannot adapt it for our country. Some argue that free verse is not appropriate to the tradition of Sinhala poetry. They claim that free verse poetry in Sinhala has never improved our own poetry and they oppose it just because it is unloaded from a foreign country. Though it is something foreign, in the hands of an expert poet, it becomes fitting for our country. That is true only if the poet is one whose mind and heart is of the land. (Sekera 1966, in D. Abeyesinghe 2000: 117-118).

After the 1956 General Election and the Official Language Act, “the principle of nationalization became a major aspect of economic policy…to free the economy from the control of the European and Indian capitalists” (Warnapala 1974: 277). This economic milieu is evident in how Sekera metaphorically conceives of a European poetic style in terms of a corrupting foreign import (“unloaded from a foreign country”).

In the introduction to Sekera’s long free verse poem Rajatilake, Lionel, saha Priyanta (1967), Sekera writes,

‘Traditionalism’ does not mean blindly following our ancestors’ path. It is not something that you can consciously strive for. It is an effortless expression of the artist’s personality. Tradition is something that ought to naturally flow into the artist’s work. It is embodied…Based on the artist’s own nationality, their craft will befit their country’s tradition. When someone writes with thoughts and aspirations of a Sinhalese person born on the Sinhalese land, and who has knowledge of Sinhala literature, it will naturally gel with the national tradition. (2006 [1967]: vii)

Gayatri Spivak terms such ideologies as “strategic essentialism,” the way subaltern groups forge collective identity by reinforcing essentialist claims. Sekera posits an inherent Sinhalese base identity, (“when someone writes with thoughts of a Sinhalese person born on the Sinhalese land…”), but emphasizes its dynamicity in relation to the “ancestor’s path.” Believing that any literary style could be transformed into
something authentically Sinhalese, Sekera was surprisingly tolerant of English literature.

   Literary scholar W.A. Abeysinghe writes that Mahagama Sekera learned to write good lyrics by composing songs for theater (2005: 70). Sekera’s Swarnatilaka (1959) and Kundalakeshi (1961) (analyzed below) are musicals. Hansa Gitaya (Swan Song) (196?) was a mix of dialogue and song. Early on, he also wrote songs for dancer Chitrasena’s popular ballet Karadiya (Sea Water) (1961) and Gunasena Galappati’s play Mudu Puttu (Sons of the Sea) (1962). E.R. Sarachchandra’s groundbreaking drama Maname (1956) initially inspired Sekera to write his first musical, Swarnatilaka (Sekera 1972: 6). Sarachchandra attended Swarnatilaka and authored a personal letter to Sekera, praising the young writer’s effort. He must have seen great potential in Sekera; it was at his recommendation that Radio Ceylon hired Sekera as director of programs in 1960 (Moratuvagama 1978: 191). The same year P. Dunstan De Silva, director of the Sinhala service at Radio Ceylon, appointed W.D. Amaradeva as conductor of the Sinhala Music Orchestra at Radio Ceylon. Sekera teamed up with Amaradeva to create a radio program they called “Madhuwanti” that broadcast their original songs. All the songs analyzed in this chapter,


68 For a comprehensive list of Sekera’s dramas and literary works, see Moratuvagama 190-208.


70 Handwritten letter accessed at Sekera’s website: http://mahagamasekera.org/about/main.asp?link=l1&abSel=tl
except for “Anna Balan Sanda,” were composed for this radio program in the early 1960s.

Sekera’s personal experiences were the raw material for the language of his song and poetry:

It is difficult to say exactly how a poetic thought arises in the heart of the poet or lyricist. [Yet we know that] there is a treasury in our minds that stores our experiences. When life causes us to direct our minds toward these moments, poetic thoughts are stirred up. Therefore it is necessary for the lyricist or poet to have obtained a range of experiences. (1972: 7)

He conceived of language of song as a special product created by removing unnecessary parts until a “distilled” experience is left:

You can create a good lyric if you have ruminated on it for a long time. The writer makes use of his creative power during these moments. He or she works with their experience, cutting and shortening it, binding the necessary parts together, and removing all the unnecessary parts, until it is a distilled expression of an experience common to everyone. He or she dwells over appropriate phrases to vividly capture the incident. When deciding the wordings, one must also considers the larger structure of the composition. And because song lyrics are written with a certain rhythm, one must express their feelings with a certain rhythmic feel. I do not mean the melodic rhythm. That is the composer’s work. The lyricist must first create a song lyric according to a poetic rhythm that matches the feelings he or she is expressing… Ruminating over the lyric, gradually the lyricist removes the unnecessary words and a smooth song is created in the mind. If the lyricist is satisfied, he or she writes it down on paper and gives it to the composer. (1984: 24)

The language of song is analogous with poetic language, yet poses different challenges:

Poetry and song are verbal art. Both are a mix of shabda rasa [the aesthetic of sound] and artha rasa [the aesthetic of meaning]. Like twins who come from the same womb, yet differ from one another, song and poetry have inherent contrasts: we relish a poem by reading; we enjoy a song by listening. Although we can read a poem many times, we can only hear a song once. Unlike poetry, the shabda rasa must be very evident in a song. The lyricist does not have as much room as the poet to express his or her experiences. They must express their experiences very concisely. Repetition is considered harmful to good poetry but beneficial and necessary in a lyric. (Sekera, quoted in Abeysinghe 2005: 73)

Composing song lyrics is more challenging than writing poetry. Unlike poetry, one must write songs with a minimum amount of words. The lyricist does not have as much
freedom as the poet has in terms of selecting words. The poet only cares whether the word is filled with feeling. The lyricist must compose with a lexis that has the same feeling but also a soft and tender quality. (Sekera, quoted in Wettasinghe 2002: 93)

Translation

In 1957, Sekera completed an external English-medium degree from the University of London in the subjects of Indian History, Sinhalese, and Pali, and began working at the State Language Department as a Sinhala-English translator. In March 1958 he published a Sinhala translation of Edward Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* in the journal *Rasawahini*. Scholars are convinced that Fitzgerald’s translation was the most frequently published English literary work in the twentieth century (Paas 2011: 127), and “for a while, the most famous verse translation ever made into English…its extraordinary popular success [lasting] for perhaps a century, from about the 1860s to the 1960s (Davis 2011: 1). Sekera’s poetic translation consisted of forty-five stanzas composed in non-rhyming quatrains. Each line had 16 mātrā. He skipped over a total of thirty-two stanzas in the original,71 combined two stanzas into one (25 and 27), and jumped out of order a bit (stanzas 22–26 are analogous with Fitzgerald’s 29, 32, 31, 34, and 38). Sekera’s translation of Fitzgerald’s work was just one among many others undertaken in South Asia in the twentieth century. South Asian poets translated the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* from English into at least eleven languages.72

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71 Sekera omitted stanzas 4-6, 9, 18, 23, 33, 35, 36, 39, 41, 43-45, 47-48, 51-55, 57-66, and 68.

After translating the poem, Sekera composed songs indebted to Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. In addition to “Gī Potai, Mī Vitai” (analyzed below) are “Gala Bahina Jaladharavak Se” (Like a Flowing Current of Water) based on the 28th and 29th stanzas, and “Oba Ma Turule” (You, in my Embrace) a translation of the 11th and 37th stanzas. To see such translations in Sri Lanka a decade after independence, reminds us that even after Sinhala became the official language, English still possessed cachet as a cosmopolitan lingua franca in Sri Lanka.

73 These songs are printed in Sekera 1972: 49, 59.

XI

Here with a loaf of bread beneath the bough
A Flask of wine, a Book of Verse and Thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness
Oh Wilderness were Paradise enow

(Fitzgerald 1932 [1859]: 46)

In “Gī Potai, Mī Vitai” (disc 2, audio track 3), Sekera parodies Fitzgerald’s eleventh stanza. He likens his lover to the woman who sings beside Khayyam in the wilderness. Sekera praises her beauty in ways that evoke, yet contrast, with Khayyam’s pronouncements. Khayyam’s wine, book, and woman make the wilderness into paradise. Sekera rejects the literal wine and book, and professes his love for the “book of her eyes” and the “wine of her lips.” The song is structured with metaphors—the poet’s lover whispers secrets to him like a book “whispers” to its reader. Her red lips make the poet “drunk” with joy, like the red wine of the flask. He wants access to her body as the drunkard wants to enter the tavern.

**Table 11 "Gī Potai, Mī Vitai" Text and Translation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line Number</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>gī potai</td>
<td>A flask of wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>mī vitai</td>
<td>A book of verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ēdekama mata epā</td>
<td>I don’t want either.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>yuga nayana gī potai</td>
<td>The book of your eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>rata lawana mī vitai</td>
<td>The wine flask of your red lips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>mā patana gī potai mī vitai</td>
<td>The flask and book I truly wish for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>oba satuyi</td>
<td>Is in your possession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>avanhala nāti surā</td>
<td>The affection of your smile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>lavan vita pura purā</td>
<td>Is a drink with no tavern,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>vahas bālmen nurā</td>
<td>Your beauty fills my cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>rahas gī kiya kiyā</td>
<td>While you whisper secrets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>magē hadavata eyin</td>
<td>From this, my heart,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>sadākal mat karan</td>
<td>Make drunk forever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>kisimak gīyak lovē</td>
<td>There is no song of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>ā taram rasa novē</td>
<td>As enjoyable as this</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

W.D. Amaradeva translates the five-syllable meter in Sekera’s poem into a 5/4 composition, and is the vocalist of the song. The composition typifies the “Amaradeva sound” which became the model for classical Sinhalese song: violins singing in unison with occasional harmonies, sitar interludes that segue between chorus and verse (notice the segue from A’ to C), and tabla setting the pace. However, here he also employs an oboe and in the later updated version, an electronic drum pad. The form of the strophic song is AB A’ C A’ C AB.74 The pitches of the raga move in scalar leaps and arpeggios in the major scale, but Amaradeva also uses the raised fourth. The melody is based on rag behag.

74 The song can also be heard here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nj6QnnfkG5E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nj6QnnfkG5E)
The Pastoral Imagination

Sekera and Amaradeva collaborated on two songs rich in the “search for the essential cultural configuration in the way of life of rural agriculture” (Spencer 1990: 288). Sekera and Amaradeva’s well-known song, “Pilē Pādura,” is based on Sekera’s poem, “Dukata Kiyana Kavi Sivpada” (Sivupada Poetry Sung for Sadness) found in his second collection of poems Sakwā Lihini (The Brahminy Kite) (1962: 83).

Table 12 "Dukaṭa Kiyana Kavi Sivpada" Text and Translation, Stanzas 1-6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line Number</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>pilē pādura hēnata aragena</td>
<td>enavā Take verandah mat, to the field bring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>elā pādura māssē ehi</td>
<td>sātapenavā Spread it on the loft and lay down resting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ratā wiyapu at deka mata sihi</td>
<td>sīhiwenavā Two hands that wove it, in my mind lingering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>hitēn dukata etakota kavi</td>
<td>kiyawenavā For sadness in the heart, this poem start to sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>îra pāyā îra avarata</td>
<td>giyādō “Does the sun rise and does the sun set?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>handa pāyā handa avarata</td>
<td>giyādō Does the moon rise and does the moon set?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ändū kandulu mūdata ek</td>
<td>wunādō Will fallen tears and ocean stay unmet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>lamă lapati nānā koyi</td>
<td>giyādō Where have you gone my sweetheart Annette?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>egodat bālimi egodat numa</td>
<td>nātēyā Over there I watched but you never came</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>megodat bālimi megodat numa</td>
<td>nātēyā Over here I watched but you never came</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>degodama bālimi degodama numba</td>
<td>nātēyā Even watched both paths, the result the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>sivpada kiyana mama taniyama</td>
<td>pālēyā I am all alone, singing in this small hut frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>egoda godē ula lēnā andannē</td>
<td>The spring squirrel chirps, chirps over the way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sivupada poems are quatrains with end rhyme and an equal amount of syllabic instants per line.
| 14 | megoda godē mama sīpada  | kiyannē  | I am right here singing sivpada today |
| 15 | degoda hariya gevilā pini | vätennē  | The dew falls all over and time passes on |
| 16 | degoda godin kotanada numbā sitinnē | | What has become of you, whereabouts do you stay? |
| 17 | sīta karana unduvap maha  | duruttē | These freezing months of December and January |
| 18 | sītala uhulanda mata bāruvā | sattē | I cannot bear the frozen dreary |
| 19 | kālē maduru māsi karadara tora nāttē | | Pesky mosquitoes and flies bother me always |
| 20 | pālē ginna vitarayi taniyata | āttē | All I have for my loneliness is the fire’s blaze |
| 21 | umbē karata mal mālā  | gotannata | Just to knit a flower garland for your neck |
| 22 | madu mal pipenawā hēnē váta digata | | From the seasonal flowers that bloom on the fence |
| 23 | umbē katin gī sīpada  | ahannata | The parrots of the jungle still come near |
| 24 | tavamat girav enavā pera  | puruddata | For sivpada from your mouth to hear |

The song “Pilē Pādura” is this poem condensed into the first, second, and sixth stanzas (disc 2, audio track 4). The text transports us to the fictional world of a Sri Lankan village. A farmer takes his verandah mat to the paddy field where he intends to rest. After he sees the pattern design of the mat, he remembers his lover’s hands that had woven it. Flooded with sadness, a poem comes to his mind. The woman is identified as “nāna,” the daughter of the man’s aunt or uncle, who he would traditionally be expected to marry. Exploring his feelings of loss, the man asks rhetorical questions about nature, heavy with feeling: “Does the sun rise and set? Does the moon appear and disappear? Do tears rejoin the ocean?” In contrast with the cycles of the sun and the moon, his lover has

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76 The song can also be heard here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZbADsanGh4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ZbADsanGh4)
not returned. In stanza six, the farmer sees the flowers blooming along the fence that have returned for the spring, and the parrots that have come to listen to her folk songs. The narrator is beset with the pain of separation. Sekera starkly juxtaposes nature’s returning cycles with the absence and lack of return of the girl.

Mark Johnson believes that conceptual metaphor is only possible through patterns of repeated bodily experience that give rise to what he calls “image schemata.” He argues that image schemata provide the basis for effective conceptual metaphors (1987). Some of the schemata he proposed are perceptual such as VERTICALITY, a structure grasped in thousands of perceptions such as climbing stairs, looking at a tree or forming any mental image for that matter, of vertical structures (Zbikowski 2002: 68).

Mark Turner has suggested that there are non-perceptual image schemata, such as CEASING TO EXIST. He writes, “We can invent new [conceptual] metaphors by figuring out the image-schematic structure of the target and finding a source that matches it. If we observe that in death something goes out of existence with no return, then we can hunt about for some other event [a source domain] that fits this structure [target domain]” (Turner 1991: 174).

Sekera did precisely what Turner was suggesting: he used CEASING TO EXIST as the image schemata for a compelling conceptual metaphor: HUMAN LIFE AND DEATH [target domain] ARE PROCESSES OF NATURE [source domain]. The target domain of coping with the loss of loved ones and hoping for their return, matches well with the source domain of the regular disappearance of the sun, moon, flowers and birds, and their eventual return in daylight, evening, and spring.
W.D. Amaradeva’s musical setting for “Pilē Pādura” does not contain sharp juxtapositions between beginning and end. As are most of Amaradeva’s musical compositions, the piece is strophic with a few variations. However Amaradeva punctuates what is on the surface, a simple skeletal melody, with very syncopated and triplet-heavy rhythms. The song is in a 6/8 meter. Each melodic phrase is four measures long. The most memorable contrasts occur specifically in the second and third stanza, between Melodic Phrases C’ and D. These two segments are compelling because Phrase C’ is the only one repeated in the song. It reaches the composition’s highest pitch, the major third above the octave. The emotion invested in this phrase is then contrasted in phrase D’s flat third. I will restrict my musical analysis to these two phrases.

Example 12 The Melancholic Musical Third in "Pilē Pādura"

Stanza 2
A’ Does the sun rise and does the sun set?
B1 Does the moon rise and does the moon set?
C’ Will fallen tears and the ocean stay unmet?
D Where have you gone my sweetheart Annette?

Stanza 3 (stanza 6 in the poem)
A’ Just to knit a flower garland for your neck
B1 From the seasonal flowers that bloom along the fence

C’ The parrots of the jungle still come near

D For sivpada from your mouth to hear

Melodic Phrase C’ in stanzas 2 and 3 is the only repeated phrase, and it reaches the composition’s highest pitch, the major third above the octave. Amaradeva starkly juxtaposes this emotional climax in phrase D, with the melancholic flat third (Db) that appears in poetic lines that explicitly—“Where have you gone my sweetheart Annette?”—and implicitly—“The parrots of the jungle still come near”—evoke the lover’s absence.77

Amaradeva composed this music to enhance the fictional world of the poetic text. He explains that “Pilē Pādura” is styled after a genre of sung poetry called pāl kavi (hut song). Sinhalese men recited pāl kavi stanzas throughout the night, in small watch-huts to drive away forest animals that might trample the paddy fields. He writes:

77 Amaradeva writes: They say that five scalar notes at least must be present to pleasure the listener. In our sivupada we have only use five notes. The Buddha prohibited his followers to sing songs in more than two or three notes because of the aesthetic pleasures. Anyways, I based this song on five notes. Truthfully, I consider “Pilē Pādura” unique because it is a song with origins in a modern folk poem. In the song there is a foreign note [the minor third], which is not usually used in pāl kavi. (Amaradeva 2007: 113-114)
I created this song when I was the conductor of the radio orchestra and Sekera was a radio program producer. Those days I went with Sekera to [his childhood home in] Radavana. I composed this song there. Sekera created the song lyric from his poem “Dukata Kiyana Kavi Sivpada.” He had written this poem influence by sivupada poetry. When I saw the poem I could almost hear my wife singing a sivupada like “Lassana Himavate Mā Vi Pāsenne.” According to that pāl kavi, I composed “Pilē Pādura.”…In a suitable manner I used the raga tilak kamod. (Amaradeva 2007: 113-114)

Amaradeva references a well known pāl kavi stanza that begins with the words, “Lassana Himavate Mā Vi Pāsenne:”

(From Dissanayake et al 23, see slight variation found in P.K. Ariyaratne 156)

Ranjini Obeyesekere translates it in this way:

In lovely lonely fields the big grain ripens
Tormenting beasts and elephants wild I drive away
Protect me gods, it is this rice that I exist on
But because I’m poor, in watch-huts I spend my days

(Obeyesekere 1974: 102)

In just one stanza the persona of the hut watcher vividly situates the listener in his context. He accomplishes this by referencing his surroundings, dangerous job, faith, and poverty. Pāl kavi quatrains are independent, that is, they do not have connecting narratives and do not follow any specific order. One stanza is a complete story. However, Sekera works with the sentiment of loneliness found in pāl kavi quatrains and tells a story.
In the quote above, Amaradeva references *tilak kamod*. *Tilak kamod* is a late evening raga. Reciters of *Pāl kavi* would sing throughout the night. In this way, Amaradeva blends the extra-musical associations of the raga with the situational context of the poetry. Amaradeva also uses an *udākki* in the arrangement. It is a traditional Sinhalese folk drum, a percussion instrument with a sound that further complements Sekera’s fictional world.

Amaradeva has written elsewhere that,

“Pīlē Pādura” is a poem transformed into a song. Because I limit the majority of the melody to the five tones found in Sinhala *sivupada* recitations, my melody suggests sadness of the *pāl kavi* reciter’s lonely environment. Further, I have repeated the third line [Melodic phrase C’] to diversify the structure and make acute these feelings of loneliness. (Amaradeva 1989: 68)

Sekera and Amaradeva further situate the listener in a pastoral fictional world in the song “Ihala Velē” (In the High Paddy Field). The text is Sekera’s poem “Kekatiya Mal” (Kekatiya Flowers), found in *Sakwa Lihini* (1962: 94). With its references to the vegetation, irrigation system, and food, “Ihala Vele” is like an encyclopedia of Sinhalese cultivation culture (disc 2, audio track 5).

**Table 13 "Ihala Velē" Text and Translation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ihala velē ismattē</td>
<td>In the high paddy field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>diyahabarala mal gollē</td>
<td>Amid bundles of <em>diyahabarala</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>nīla varala lamāda helālā</td>
<td>Dark black braids falling beyond her chest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

bimata namī oya kawudō  bending to the earth

palē nelannē  picking pala.\(^79\) Who are you?

nīla nuwan dālavarān  Rain showers from

vāssa vassinē  both sides of blue eyes

pahala velē puran velā  The low paddy field is fallow,

val bihi vī giya kumburē  Desolate and teeming with weeds.

mama taniyama kānsiyen  All alone,

kumbura kotanavā  I plow the paddy.

āta inna umbē mūna  Your distant face

hitē āndenava  Appears in my thoughts...

nava vāssata vāva pirilā  The new rain fills the tank

kekatiya mal uda adilā  Kekatiya flowers come up to the surface:

ē atatayi mē atatayi  Bending and waving.

nāmī vānenavā  This way and that way.

ē vaturen vela saruvī  The water of the lake irrigates the field,

goyama pāhenavā  The paddy ripens.

nīla goyama kiri vādilā  The paddy ripens from green to milky white

ran asvan nelana dāta  On the day of the golden harvest,

nangō apata āmbul aran  Sister, bring some āmbula and

velata varennē  Come to the field!

\(^79\) Types of edible green leaves.
Sekera tells this story from the first person perspective of a farmer who works in the fallow pahala (low) paddy field, farthest from the irrigation tank. He sees a beautiful woman in the distance who is working in the ihala (high) field. It is nearest the irrigation tank, where bunches of diyahabarala (Alocasia) plants grow. The farmer returns to his lonely work in the desolate pahala field, but the image of the woman’s face appears in his mind. Rain comes and the paddy ripens. Finally, he calls out to his cousin to bring ämbula, rice that she would carry in a vaṭṭiyak (open basket) on her head, to the paddy field for the workers.

It is likely that lines 14-23 portray the imagination of the man who plows alone: after the face of the distant girl appears in his mind, the reference cohesion of the poem slips away. Sekera does not provide a first person pronoun, or a causal conjunction to signpost a connection with the previous text. Because the previous stanza references her beauty, I assume that the mind of the man who plows alone in the field wanders from seeing the girl’s face in his thoughts. He imagines what it would be like to spend his life with her. The new rain and the golden harvest are metaphors for the joy he feels in this daydream. However, Sekera leaves open the possibility to literally interpret this text as future moments in time.

The ihala (high) and pahala (low) portions of the field nearest and farthest from the irrigation tank, have traditionally been referenced in nelum kavi, Sinhala cultivation songs. In an article published in 1884 in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, entitled “The Language of the Threshing Floor,” British official J.P. Lewis documented the unique linguistic register Sinhalese cultivators used. Lewis quotes a folk poem with similar imagery as “Ihala Velē”
Bring the paddy from the highest tracts and pile it on the threshing floor
Bring the paddy from the lowest tracts, and pile it on the threshing floor
From *atuva* and *koṭuva* bring paddy to fill this threshing floor

Even the woman’s wonted share [the portion paid to the woman as hire for their labor] must help to fill this threshing floor

(The *atuva* is a store for paddy, either a detached building or under the same roof as the house. The *koṭuva* is a shelf or platform used for the same purpose, and supplementary to the *atuva*). (trans. and note, Lewis 1884: 270)

Sekera composed this song at a time when Sinhalese nationalists invested cultural pride in cultivation culture, especially works of ancient irrigation. The third-century Minneriya reservoir, for example, has a circumference of about 20 miles, and utilized an ancient form of hydraulic engineering. Anthropologist Jonathon Spencer has written about the way in which nineteenth century British administrators, and later the Sinhalese literati of the 1950s, “subscribed to an ideal of the Sinhala peasantry as essentially irrigated-rice farmers (even though many peasants made their living from swidden agriculture)” (1990: 286). Spencer further notes how the first wave of Sinhalese nationalist politicians in the 1930s devoted energy to rebuild and repair irrigation systems. In 1952, Sinhalese author Martin Wickramasinghe would write: “among the things that bear witness to the unique skill and culture of the Sinhalese, pride of place must go to the [irrigation] tank” (1952 [1963]: 9, in Spencer 1990: 286).

In “Ihala Velē,” vocalist Lionel Algama sings in a style that evokes an image of a farmer who sings improvisatory verses in the wide expanse of a paddy field (disc 2, audio track 5).80 He repeats lines in an indeterminate way while a bamboo flautist and violinist

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80 The song can also be heard here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1NJJbuKuJg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1NJJbuKuJg)
embellish his vocal line, a sitar player accompanies with an ostinato of the fundamental and fifth, and a tabla player establishes the 6/4 beat (ex. 13).

**Legend**

In 1961, Sekera completed a full-length musical, entitled *Kuṇḍalakēśī*. Composer Somadasa Elvitigala (1925-1990) set Sekera’s script to music, and P. Walikala produced the musical that year at Colombo’s Havelock Theater. Sekera based his musical on the legend about the woman named *Kuṇḍalakēśī*. This particular legend was written down in the thirteenth century by the Buddhist monk, Dharmasena Thera, in the collection of Buddhist stories, known as the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya* (The Jewel Garland of the True Doctrine).

It is likely that Sekera’s earlier work as an English-Sinhala translator influenced his desire to compose a musical like *Kuṇḍalakēśī*. Five years earlier, Sekera had translated Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The White Company* (1891) into Sinhala, with the publication, *Dhāwala Senankaya* (1956). We can perceive the influence of Ceylon’s colonial history in this undertaking. Conan Doyle wrote *The White Company* when England’s colonial regime was at its peak of power. His story was an adventure novel that glorified the chivalry of the British during their fourteenth century struggles with France over territories that would eventually be incorporated into the French Kingdom.

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81 Elvitigala had studied the sarod in North India under the direction of sitarist Ravi Shankar’s guru, Ali Akbar Khan.
Conan Doyle’s novel was a “commentary on the [British] fourteenth century seen through nineteenth century eyes” and also “an act of love for England, a profession of faith in the chivalric code” (Harvey 1962: x). Likewise, Kuṇḍalakēśī was a commentary
on the Sinhalese thirteenth century seen through twentieth century eyes, and a recreation of the Sinhalese Buddhist past.

In this analysis, I focus on the early scenes of the Kuṇḍalakesī legend:

*Kuṇḍalakesī* was the daughter of a rich man from Rajagaha. She had led a very secluded life; but one day, she happened to see a thief being led out to be killed and she immediately fell in love with him. Her parents had to pay for the freedom of the thief, and they married her off to him. Although she loved her husband very dearly, her husband being a thief, was only attracted to her property and her jewels. One day, he coaxed her to put on all her jewelry and led her to a mountain saying that he wanted to make some offerings to the guardian spirit of the mountain because that guardian spirit had saved his life when he was about to be killed. Kundalakesi went along with her husband but when they reached their destination, the thief revealed that he intended to kill her and take her jewels. She pleaded with him to take her jewels, and to spare her life, but it was of no avail. She then realized that if she did not get rid of her husband, there would be no way of escape for her. She felt she must be cautious and crafty. So she said to her husband that as they would be together only for a few moments more, she wanted to pay respect to him for the last time. So saying, and going round the man respectfully, she pushed him off the crag, taking him unaware. *(Tin 1990: 239-241)*

In the opening songs of the musical, Sekera constructed a storyworld from the legend’s opening scenes by experimenting with new perspectives. He replaced the omniscient narrator of the *Saddharmaratnāvāliya* with a commentator, singing troupe, and executioners.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Translation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sinhala Text</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commentator:</td>
<td>ගොඩංගොඩක් දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ රජකොළයේ කාලයේ මිලියන් නවතුරුවක්.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There once lived a callous rogue in Rajagaha town</td>
<td>මහා නම් දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ විලියම් පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was so rough that in his heart, could a stone be found</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One glance of his great shape seen from balcony above</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suddenly a smitten Princess fell so deeply in love</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singing Troupe:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When two from different worlds attempt to join together</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a love in which a break lies in the nether</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the love that seemed eternal quickly hate does fill</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hands that saved a life will be the hands that kill!</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commentator:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now I’ll weave a poem that tells a great old tale</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you listen if I slip up please don’t stand and yell</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The time is right to begin, let us no further delay</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With your consent we’ll raise the curtain and begin this play</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Executioners (marching in a procession to the top of a hill where the thief</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>will be pushed off):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are the thieves today!</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We raise our swords and say</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We shook with fear before</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today all that’s no more!</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’ll push him off the hill</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For innocents he killed!</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice him to death</td>
<td>මහා දේශීය විස්තරකුවේ පාලක ක්‍රීඩිකයෙකු.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Put our troubles to rest

Those who have gathered a lot

Forget that in death there’s not

Chance to take wealth along

Commentator:

Rough and tough and cruel and buff is he

Who stirs up the countrymen, this leader of the thieves

Towards the Murder Hill march all the townsfolk

In afternoon to avenge the murdering stealing bloke

They reach the King’s Castle to get the final order

Bring him to the Palace gate, right to the royal border

On the balcony was the beautiful Princess

Who saw the thief and in her heart longed for his caress

Executioners:

What is this the Lovely Princess is ordering us to do?

We cannot believe what are ears tell us is really true

She wants to bribe us just so we will release this man

Free him from the clutch of death and hell’s burning sand

He lit fires in our hearts making us tremble in fear

We were scared that we would fall prey to this devil here

Now tell us, what is it to you to save this killer’s life?

Why on earth should we not put him to the death knife?

(Original text in Sekera 1985: 11-12)
Lubomir Doležel (1998: 199-226) terms such a literary process as “literary transduction.” Doležel defines literary transduction as a supplementary fictional world that authors construct, which provides new perspectives, and fills in gaps from the “protoworld.” The protoworld in our case is the way that Dharmasena Thera narrated the legend in the Saddharmaratnāvaliya. In this literary transduction, our experience is newly focalized through the perspective of the executioner, commentator, and singing troupe.

The most popular song of Kuṇḍalakēśī was “Anna Balan Sanda” (Come See the Moon). To write this song, Sekera elaborated on an unelaborated scene in the Saddharmaratnāvaliya: the walk of the princess and thief to death mountain. In the Saddharmaratnāvaliya, Dharmasen Thera mentioned this walk only briefly:

“Wear your best clothes and adorn yourself in your richest ornaments” he [the thief] said, “And since it is a pleasure trip, let’s leave all your relatives and kinsmen behind.” Determined to win his steadfast affection, she did exactly as he wanted. When they arrived at the foot of the rock he said, “Dear One, from this point on only you and I should proceed. We must not take our retinue. If many people accompany us there, they will be sure to dirty and litter the sacred area, and it will be impossible to stop them from doing so. Therefore, let just the two of us go. Besides, the offering is for the gods, so you yourself should carry it.” She did just as he suggested. The thief accompanied her to the top of the rock from which robbers are hurled. (Translated in Obeyesekere 2001: 119, emphasis mine).

The only reference to their solitary walk is this sentence: “The thief accompanied her to the top of the rock from which robbers are hurled.” Sekera, however, created a possible fictional world within the constraints of the legend: the thief and princess sing a love song duet while walking together up the mountain. At this point, the princess does not know she is being tricked. The thief is trying to keep her calm, before he attempts to
murder her at the mountaintop. Whereas in the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, Dharmasena Thera focalized the story through only Kuṇḍalakēśī’s perspective, in “Anna Balan Sanda,” Sekera introduced the perspective of the thief as well. In the song, the otherwise dangerous forest becomes a romantic setting for the couple. It is filled with the aroma of flowers and vines on trees that entwine like two lovers in embrace. (disc 2, audio track 6).

Table 15 "Anna Balan" Text and Translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>anna balan sanda ran tāṭiyen</td>
<td>Thief: See the golden disc of the moon,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>sudu sīta gangul galanā</td>
<td>Its white chilly river flows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>hada sōka tävul nivanā</td>
<td>Allaying your heart’s sadness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>vandana pāllava kōkila kūjana</td>
<td>Branches bear new leaves on red sandalwood trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>sangītayē pātalī</td>
<td>And the kokila bird sings a symphony of music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>sundara mē vana gulma yahan gāba</td>
<td>Beautiful is this bedroom of a forest!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ādana bas kiyanā — handa —</td>
<td>My voice whispers endearing words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>dēvini! kan pinanā</td>
<td>And plesases the queen’s ears...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>an pasuren turu pembarayan banda</td>
<td>Princess: The creepers are like lovers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>bandā senē sitini</td>
<td>wrapped around each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>liya vāl pātalī gosinī</td>
<td>with love and affection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

82 Interestingly, Sekera had written monologues from the perspectives of Kuṇḍalakēśī and the thief, a year earlier in his first book of poems, *Vyangā* (1960). In addition to poetry, Sekera published experimental prose entries in this book (see Field 2013). In one such entry, entitled “Rata hā Norata” (Lust and Disgust) (2005 [1960]: 48-51), Sekera authored two streams of consciousness from the perspectives of Kuṇḍalakēśī and the thief. Sekera employed a colloquial Sinhala dialect so that the reader in 1960 could relate to the scenario.

83 This song can be heard here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZGkFPmAwfs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZGkFPmAwfs)
The flowers bloom and the pollen wafts,
Mixing with the wind,
This is an intoxicating dance.
See the beauty that resides here,
Oh my lover and Lord!

**Modern Poetry**

I conclude this chapter with an analysis of Sekera’s “Galā Ennē Kalpanāwen” (Flowing Maidens of Thought). The song betrays romanticism that conceptualizes art as a mirror of the individual. The lyrics of “Galā Ennē Kalpanāwen” were an abbreviated version of Sekera’s poem, “Sankalpanaya” (Conception), a poem he published in his first book of verse, *Vyanga* (Suggestion) (1960).84

Literary scholar W.A. Abeysinghe maintains that this poem articulates a central tension in Sekera’s entire poetic oeuvre: realism vs. escapism (2005: 12). The poem is about the kind of experience Sekera describes here:

> Artists must draw upon personal experiences. Yet the creative process is a unique personal experience itself. The artist engaged in the creative process forgets the external world. Distracting thoughts disappear. He or she focuses on his or her objective. Like one who has entered a higher level of concentrated attention through meditation, the artist’s thoughts are purified of defilements. Even hunger and thirst are trumped by the joy he obtains from his work. (1972: 8, italics mine)

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84 Modern Sinhala poetry is divided into five schools: the first and second generation of Colombo poets; the *Heḷa Havula* (Pure Sinhala Fraternity) poets; the Peradeniya poets; and the People’s poets of the 1970s. The “Peradeniya School” commenced with Gunadasa Amarsekera’s 1954 *Bhāva Gīta* (Meaningful Song), and Siri Gunasinghe’s 1956 *Mas Lē Nāṭi Āta* (Fleshless, Bloodless Bones). Sekera’s poetic style is very reminiscent of these poets. Early on, he experimented with Amarasekera’s five and seven beat meters that filled the pages of *Bhāva Gīta*. Sekera found his niche in his fourth publication, *Mak Nisāda Yat* (The Reason Is), a long poem in Gunasinghe’s free verse style. Sekera would remain faithful to his rambling *vers libre* style up through his last work, *Prabuddha* (The Sage), published posthumously in 1977, a year after his untimely death.
Abeysinghe reveals that Sekera pays homage to this very experience in the poem “Sankalpanaya” (Conception):

When we study this poem carefully we find that the poet is not calling out to his lover. He is addressing the creativity that is growing within him... Comprehending this early poem is crucial to understanding Mahagama Sekera, the poet. His poetry is sunk halfway in the world of fantasy and illusion, and halfway in the real world. (Abeysinghe 2005: 12, emphasis mine)

The “you” in “Sankalpanaya” is an supernatural feminine personification of the first person narrator’s experience of creativity.

[Flowing and flowing along my stream of thoughts. From the waves of far away seas, from gusts of lonely mist draping cold crags, and from chilly sloping brooks and tear soaked valleys, you reach my heart.]

අඹය්සිංගහේ මෙන්ම මෙන්ම කළමාන්‍ය මෙන්ම
ඨියඹි රෙළිනි පැල්ල කළමාන්‍ය
ඏලේ ජිබෝ ඉදිරියේ අදායමක්
බුද්ධ කතාව ඉවිදින් කළමාන්‍ය
නෝදු නිහාලි පැළකු අදායමක්
රක්කු පැළකු අදායමක්
ඥමු දෙකු අදායමක්
යෙසින් පැළකු අදායමක්
භාවිතාවට මෙන්ම මෙන්ම කළමාන්‍ය
[You raise your hands skywards, drop those tiny hips and grin to commence life afresh. This mildly boiling melancholy disappears and my mood turns light. Wherefrom do you dance?

Drifting toward my soul, dancing to shattering *bera*\(^{85}\) beats, you fly atop a rainbow bridge, bound to the foamy clouds, near the sky-creek’s precious stones. Splash of bluish black!

Absorb me in your embrace.]

[In my dreams, you come to me laughing, stepping in rhythm to the silence of an invisible dance, bedecked by the half moon’s soft beams wrapped around your forehead. Cover me with your embrace! Only you are my spirit, my breath. In separation the rest is nothing to me.]

\(^{85}\) The Sinhalese double-headed drum.
Like “Gī Potai, Mī Vitai” the song exists in a world teeming with wishes and desires: the narrator pleads for the embrace of the symbolic woman who can bend the actual world’s laws of perception and non-contradiction:

[Protect me from this world, and plunge me in your dreamland, so I can delight in unsung verse, find joy in unseen places, and search for sentiments like a cloud wandering bird]
Flowing, flowing, from time to time you arrive."

“Sankalpanaya” contains a propulsive meter of fourteen 举办的 syllable instants). Sekera articulates these fourteen 举办的 as two groups of seven, grouped in two 3 and 4 beat phrases. The transcription below shows the beat pattern, transliterated English, Sinhala text, and a literal translation. These are the first three lines of the poem. To illustrate the 3 and 4 beat phrases, I boldfaced the three-syllable words in the transliteration, and left the four-syllable words without boldface.

Table 16 "Sankalpanaya" Three and Four-Beat Phrases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ga</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ga</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>s</td>
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<td>v</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>a</td>
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<td>ma</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>r</td>
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<td>o</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>s</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ga</td>
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<td>a</td>
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<td>n</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Flow (conj. part.) coming (emphatic present) Flow (conj. part.) coming (emphatic present)\(^{86}\)

The whole poem has this rhythm. We know Sekera was preoccupied with rhythm in language, because he devoted his PhD dissertation, “Sinhala Gadya Padya Nirmānahanhi Ridma Lakshana” (Rhythm in Sinhala Prose and Verse), to the rhythm of Sinhala prose,

\(^{86}\) The combination of the conjunctive participle for “flow” and the verb “come” implies a sense of continuous flowing. The repetition of the phrase adds to that sense. For a similar example see Gair, Karunatillake, and Paolillo 1987: 150.
verse, and spoken language. He began to write this dissertation in 1974, and it was published posthumously in 2001.

With the help of his collaborator W.D. Amaradeva, Sekera transformed the poem “Sankalpanaya” into the song “Galā Ennē Kalpanāwen” (Flowing Maidens of Thought). To make “Sankālpanaya” a song, Amaradeva translated the seven-beat meter of the poem into a seven-beat rhythm cycle, kept by the tabla. He sets Sekera’s poem to the North Indian rag jog, and cleverly compliments the poetic theme of “flowing” with an ostinato (a persistently repeated musical motif).

We know from his writings that Amaradeva chose rags according to their extra-musical association’s compatibility with a song’s poetic theme. Amaradeva was a virtuoso North Indian classical violinist, yet he strove to compose music that drew attention to the meaning of the poem. In this song, he employed an oboe (or is this a shennai?) in the arrangement, as well as a sarod, sitar, and flute. (disc 2, audio track 7).  

Table 17 "Galā Ennē Kalpanāwen" Text and Translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>galā ennē galā ennē</td>
<td>Flowing on and on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>kalpanāwen anganāwō</td>
<td>Maidens of Thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>sihina lōken galā ennē</td>
<td>From the world of dreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>kalpanāwen anganawō</td>
<td>Maidens of Thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>galā ennē galā ennē</td>
<td>Flowing on and on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>āta muhudē</td>
<td>In the faraway seas!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>rālla madden</td>
<td>From the midst of waves!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

87 The song can also be heard here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vpu7Uv7ps8&feature=youtube](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vpu7Uv7ps8&feature=youtube)
| 8  | āta ahasē   | In the distant sky! |
| 9  | nilla mādden | From the midst of the blue [clouds]! |
| 10 | sītā kandurāli | From chilly sloping brooks |
| 11 | sōka kandulāli | Valleys of tears |
| 12 | pālu mīdumā | Gusts of lonely mist |
| 13 | keren matuvi | It reaches me |
| 14 | pālanda aḍasanda | Bedecked by the half moon’s |
| 15 | nalala vāṭa koṭa | Soft beams, wrapped |
| 16 | sinā sandakāṁ duhul lā gata | Around your forehead |
| 17 | nihanda sangitayaṭa pāṭala | Stepping in rhythm to the silence |
| 18 | tabā nopenena nāṭum nāṭumaṭa | Of an invisible dance |
| 19 | sunil pāha diya | Bound to the foamy clouds |
| 20 | mānik taru piri | Near the sky-creek’s precious stones |
| 21 | ahas nadiyē valā pena mata | Splash of bluish black! |
| 22 | bānda dēdunū pālamē nāṅga | Dancing to shattering bera[^88] beats |
| 23 | mēgha berahaṇḍa anuwa di ranga | You fly atop a rainbow bridge |

“Galā Enṇē Kalpanāwen” is a highly modified version of “Sankalpanaya.” Sekera cut out nearly two pages of stanzas devoted to describing the narrator’s ecstatic experience. And he left out a concluding section about the narrator’s difficulty to face the harsh real world. Amaradeva’s choice to incorporate a female voice changes the “mode of discourse in which the persona [narrator] is imagined to be engaged” (Semino 1999: 39): the reader of the poem “Sankalpanaya” imagines that the first-person narrator is a solitary narrator located in an unspecified context of utterance, speaking to only the feminine

[^88]: The Sinhalese double headed drum.
personification of creativity. In the song, Amaradeva’s inclusion of a woman’s voice forces a reinterpretation. Perhaps she represents the personified experience of creativity, or maybe just someone else paying homage to the creativity within herself.

Chandrarahna Manawasinghe, Madawale Ratnayake, W.D. Amaradeva, and Mahagama Sekera enhanced the post-1956 cultural revolution because they circulated aesthetic representations that were sanctioned by the state’s most powerful electronic medium of communication at the time, the radio. Sekera’s songs based on Sinhalese folk poems and legends, fulfilled the rural intelligentsia’s need for a song that could celebrate their new majority power. Meanwhile, his songs “Gī Potai, Mī Vitai,” inspired by his own translation of Victorian English poetry, and the song “Galā Ennē Kalpanāwen,” certainly called for a more liberal understanding of Sinhalese tradition: songs like “Gī Potai, Mī Vitai” and “Galā Ennē Kalpanāwen” challenged (from within) the more nativist forms of Sinhalese cultural nationalism prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s.
Conclusion: Sinhala Song of Colonial/Postcolonial Sri Lanka

In this dissertation, I have endeavored to disclose several fundamental features of sarala gi, fundamental features that characterize this song form from its colonial-era ancestors in projects of national liberation to its post-colonial descendants aired for the Sinhalese masses in broadcasts of radio station musical programs. Its mode of existence was local yet its conditions of possibility were of cosmopolitan proportion: the spread of Parsi Theater, the power of radio technology, the force of anti-colonial nationalism, the search for post-colonial national identity, and the rhetoric of democracy and majority politics.

John De Silva and Munidasa Cumaratunga composed song and wrote music historical interventions to cure various colonial-era illnesses that they believed to be afflicting their downtrodden people. De Silva celebrated Sinhalese Buddhist heritage to counter Westernization and Christian missionary projects. Cumaratunga reinterpreted Sinhalese music history to free the Sinhalese from the “corrupting” influence of North India. The very linguistic register he used in his writing carried out his mission in its lack of Sanskrit influence.

Cumaratunga’s power struggle in particular nuances how ethnomusicologists tend to understand South Asian colonial-era musical nationalism, projects of musical reform they usually explain within a colonizer-colonized framework. Little acknowledged inter-South Asian (Sri Lankan-Indian) tensions animated Cumaratunga’s project. If such was the case in Sri Lanka, other composers and lyricists at the margins of South Asia in the colonial
period likely strove to create autonomous realms of culture distinct not only from the “West” but from power centers within South Asia. The wonderful incongruities in the musical style of Cumaratunga’s devotee Suni Santha are illuminating examples of this because he resisted North India with Western instruments and melodies, as well as linguistic purism in song lyrics.

The lyricists and composers who rose to prominence after independence fashioned song for a country with a radically new complexion: sovereign, and ruled by Sinhalese Buddhists. When Sinhalese politicians came to power claiming to represent the Sinhalese Buddhist rural masses, and switched the official language to Sinhala, the government-controlled radio station circulated song to complement and accommodate the vision of this new regime. The Ceylon general election of 1956 and the subsequent Sinhala Only Act were linchpins for Sinhalese Buddhist poets like Mahagama Sekera, Madawale Ratnayake, and Chandrarathna Manwasinghe, as well as the composer-vocalist W.D. Amaradeva to find employment at Radio Ceylon to popularize a hitherto unarticulated musical ethos for the Sinhalese masses.

Manawasinghe penned the first Sinhala radio opera “Manōhari” to combat imitation of Hindi and Tamil film music. Ratnayake and Amaradeva’s “Ran Wan Karal Salē” circulated the popular Sinhalese nationalist cultural metonyms of vāva, dāgaba, and yāya (tank, temple, and paddy field) that became indispensable to twentieth century nationalist rhetoric as the true marks of Sinhalese culture. Sekera composed songs like “Anna Balan Sanda” to recreate pre-colonial Sinhalese Buddhist literary worlds. They created divergent forms of “exclusively Sinhalese”: Manawasinghe espoused Sanskrit-heavy lyrics and a North Indian cultural imagination, Ratnayake and Amaradeva advocated a
return to Sinhalese folk music and poetry, and Sekera used Victorian English literature and his own poems as resources for *sarala gī*.

**Looking Ahead**

In the following decade, a new constellation of Sinhalese lyricists, vocalists, and composers would musically and topically expand *sarala gī*. The radio station and television circulated Sinhala songs and performances during a more violent period that ushered in more virulent forms of ethno-nationalism. Many unanswered questions remain as to how this new conglomerations of artists responded to the 1971 JVP youth insurrection, the spread of television, the creation of an autochthonous constitution in 1972 that accorded Buddhism a primary place among Sri Lankan religions, the first Tamil nationalist demand for a separate state in 1976, and the shift in 1977 when Sri Lanka became first South Asian country to liberalize its economy. The way these artists built upon the *sarala gī* fashioned in connection to the postcolonial “cultural revolution” by Sunil Santha, Chandrarathna Manawasinghe, W.D. Amaradeva, Madawale Ratnayake, and Mahagama Sekera, deserves a comprehensive study.

These lyricists, composers, and vocalists still hold importance in post-war Sri Lanka, especially to the Sinhalese rural intelligentsia, who attribute a “classic” status to their works. The Sinhalese revere W.D. Amaradeva today as the torchbearer of serious Sinhalese music, and the Sinhala language & literature textbooks printed by the Department of Education contain chapters devoted to songs of Sunil Santha and

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89 Important lyricists include Ajantha Ranasinghe, Ran Banda Seneviratne, Sunil Ariyaratne, Premakeerthi de Alwis, and later, Ratna Shri Wijesinghe. Vocalists Nanda Malini, Gunadasa Kapuge, and Victor Ratnayake became household names in the 1970s and 1980s. Visionary composer Premasiri Khemadasa created choral and symphonic works in these decades.
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LANGUAGES

Sinhala – speak, write, and read
Tamil – speak, write, and read
Telugu – read
Hebrew – speak, write, and read