

The Poetical Works and the Poetic Language during the British Period in Sri Lanka

by

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Printing Technology and the New Literary Movement

In the 19th century during the British colonial rule, the printing industry began in earnest and expanded considerably and as a result many booklets of Sinhalese verse were published. There is a marked difference between the poetry of the Colombo Period, (1930 to 1950s which is also known as the Colombo School of Poetry) and the poetry that originated in the 19th century. Contemporary scholars who review the literature of Sri Lanka opine that the trend in modern literature set in after 1815. The main reason for this was that the division of the Sinhala literary eras was defined according to the capital of the kingdom, 1815 being the date when the capital shifted to Colombo when the British annexed the whole of Sri Lanka.¹ Chandrasiri Palliyaguru's study regarding the emergence of the Colombo Poets' era in his article 'The Sinhalese verses of the 20th century' (*Visivana Siyavasē Sinhala Kāvyaaya*²) is illustrative of this. Accordingly, the conclusion one can draw is that there is a general agreement that the Kandy/Matara eras - that is from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century - are the forerunners of the new poetical era or the Colombo era.³

Though there may be some truth in this, it needs further investigation. It was quite evident that from the middle of the 19th century, signs began to appear of the background necessary for a new poetical era. There was a strong connection between the printing industry that was expanding as a commercial enterprise and the new poetical movement that was emerging. Benedict Anderson (2006) speaking of Europe mentions that at the beginning of the printing technology, printing of books expanded as a major commercial enterprise which brought in much profit.⁴

There was a similar parallel in Sri Lanka between money earning enterprises and the printing of books. Tissa Kariyawasam (1973) says that at the beginning, there were some entrepreneurs who thought the printing industry was a profitable venture. They went in search of poets, got them to compose poetry books which they printed and sold or distributed for money.⁵ This printing for profit was not confined only to books of poems, but it applied to all forms of books. The development of the printing technology in Sri Lanka took place concurrently with the development of the North Indian printing technology in the 19th century. Francesca Orsini's work (2009) titled *Print and Pleasure*, discusses these aspects. As Orsini points out, the development of the printing industry developed on parallel lines with the North Indian printing industry and manifested some common characteristics:

- A. Books published in different language editions (government text books, fiction, story books etc.);
- B. Books written in more than one language;
- C. A few books where the text in the same language was printed in more than one edition; and
- D. The existence of more than one print language in the same market.⁶

This article covers not only some of the poems of then 19th century Ceylon, but a number of books in different languages and subjects. They can be categorized under Sinhala, Tamil and English languages.⁷ Text books on religion, medicine, astrology and poetry come under these categories. After the middle of the 19th century, in North Indian society, books were published as pilgrimage guides, prayer books and other religious publications.⁸ Moreover, there were books published on general subjects which fell under different categories, as follows:

- 01. Oral performance - either listening to performers or a song sung by a singer;

02. Reading aloud – this kind of reading was mostly done at home, among family members and neighbours;

03. An almost silent one in which the reader moved his or her lips, mouthing but not uttering the words – this kind of silent reading was used for religious books and prayers; and

04. Silent reading – when reading fiction such as novels.⁹

These new poetic traditions emerged to cater to the tastes of the new reading public in the then Ceylon society, whose inclination to literature was well-known by that time. The changes in society definitely contributed to the changes in poetical traditions, and it marked the beginning of a major change in Sinhalese literature.¹⁰ In the 19th century, particularly after the 1870s, a new generation of readers for the novel came up.¹¹ With the increase of both poetry and novels, especially the birth of modern verse, the background required for such literature to flourish was provided by the printing technology.

Religious Faith and Beliefs in Deities as Expressed in Poetry

Classical poems like *Kāvyaśekara*, *Guttīla Kāvya* (Kotte Period 1412–1597), begin by invoking the blessings of the Triple Gem (the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha), and also blessings and refuge of the deities were invoked after presenting a list of names of the deities. This was a common pattern followed by almost all the writers of poetry during and after the Kotte era. The poet's objective was to invoke blessings and protection for all human beings and to save them from all evil effects that might fall on them.¹² The Kotte period poem titled *Kav Lakūṇu Miṇimal* was composed adhering to auspicious moments.¹³ In the *Siyabas Mal Dama*, after completing the preliminary requirements, the poet seeks the blessings of the deities.

<i>bamba surapati suraguru</i>	<i>nātha</i>
<i>nabasara sirisara saratara bara</i>	<i>neta</i>
<i>bambakata ada häma suraṅgana kara</i>	<i>meta</i>
<i>suba seta dī raku me häma lova</i>	<i>sata</i>

“Brahma, Jupiter, Pattini Dēvi, May all these deities bless and protect human beings”.

There were instances when the deities were invoked for assistance to avoid faults in the metrical combination of syllables in their compositions.

<i>nitara devindune oba pihītai mema</i>	<i>ṭa</i>
<i>nitara dinen dina set dī rakinu</i>	<i>tuta</i>
<i>nitara memage kividosa duru</i>	<i>karannaṭa</i>
<i>patala karami oba guṇa siyalu</i>	<i>satahaṭa¹⁴</i>

“Deity, give us your continuous assistance. Give us your daily blessings and protect us. Always (help me to) get rid of the faults in my verses. I will continue to spread your virtues among all beings”.

The most popular female deity in the Kandyan era was Pattini.¹⁵ The cult of Goddess Pattini was transmitted from South India, and the literature based on that cult had spread to Sri Lanka.¹⁶ It is to be also noted that the very last rulers of the Kandyan kingdom (1469–1815) were Nayakkar Tamils. At the end of the 19th century, we come across instances when Pattini’s blessings were invoked.

<i>sidda daham pattini sāmi</i>	<i>asanu</i>
<i>sadda gīnāṭum kelipuda obaṭa</i>	<i>ganu</i>
<i>vādda nodī ena uvaduru dura</i>	<i>harinu</i>
<i>sidda salan salamin ā vā</i>	<i>lana¹⁷</i>

“O Pattini, the pure and noble, listen to me, kindly accept this song and dance. Save us from the calamities that befall us”.

<i>sasaga siyal bambalova vasana</i>	<i>deviyani</i>
<i>uraga gurul yak bū nara asurayi</i>	<i>ni</i>
<i>nolaga laga vasana diyagoda</i>	<i>savsatuni</i>
<i>samaga me pin anumodan vanu</i>	<i>sama sitini</i>

This poem invokes the deities who live on land and sea, to allow spirits, demons, creeping and mythical creatures to rejoice in her merit, and transfer the merits to their parents.¹⁸

*dasa masa kusa vädu mavunṭat – rasa äti bojun dun mage piyanṭat
äsadun vilasa sat dun mage gurunṭat – tosakara pin demi nivan
dakinṭat*¹⁹

“Give some of your merit, Oh deity, to my mother who carried me in her womb for ten months, to my father who gave me tasty food, to my teachers who opened my eyes”.

These characteristics can be seen usually in the poetry of the Mahanuwara (Kandy 1469–1815) and Matara periods (1706-1815). It appears that the poets engaged in the composition of verses, bestowed merit on the deities and all beings and wished that they would protect them in return. Thus, it is evident that poetry had a powerful, undertone of the beliefs the people had in divine beings.

From the beginning of Sinhalese metrical literature, one could find that the compositions had a Buddhist flavour. The concept of *peden budu sirita* (expressing the life of the Buddha in poetical works) continued to prevail until the end of the Mahanuwara (Kandy) era. Folk poets thought that preaching *dhamma* in versified form would bestow merit and was a path to heaven. Poets who composed classical verses set their minds on *Jātaka* stories and found ideal plots for their compositions in the genre. The history of Sinhalese verse stories can be traced as far back as the 12th century CE. The *Muvadevdāvata* and the *Sasadāvata* (Polonnaruwa Period 1017-1215 CE) are two classical poems that belong to this tradition.²⁰

The classical writers of prose and verse realized that expressing the virtues of the Buddha was the most difficult task.

*hāgim mā menen guṇahimiyā kiyannaṭa
pohom nel sina unā palandin hot tusara hara*²¹

“To make an effort to extol the virtues of the Buddha was such a difficult task like making a garland of flowers from dew drops and wearing it around one’s neck”.

*munidu guṇa maharu*²²

“The virtues of the Buddha are invaluable”.

maṭa mage nāṇa pamaṇa

“I shall try within the limits of my knowledge”.

kebandu da gatahot munidunge baṇa me
kividu basin kavi karaṇā puda me
bilindu ḷadaruvan keḷinā kala me
*taridu alla māi kala tāt vāni me*²³

“To express the virtues of the Buddha in the language of the poets is as difficult a task as infants trying to touch the moon”.

abaluvakin vivara
nāṇa nimanu bāri samudura
mama mage nāṇa vivara
*kiyami ātimut varada hāradura*²⁴

“It is impossible to measure the water in the ocean with a mustard seed. I am expressing this according to my knowledge. What is wrong with that?”

emahe vānum nāṇa
*abāṭak pamaṇa men*²⁵

“My knowledge of praise is as small as a grain of mustard”.

vijaya bā pirivena
*kiyana baṇa me asan satorina*²⁶

Certain classical poets, who had used Jātaka stories in their poems, sometimes advised the people to listen to *baṇa* that they preached in versified form.

<i>satadat</i>	<i>kivindune</i>
<i>makiyana vadan</i>	<i>valine</i>
<i>varadak koṭa</i>	<i>no gene</i>
<i>asava budu bana savan</i>	<i>demine²⁷</i>

“Poets listen to my words. Without taking offence, listen to the virtues of the Buddha”.

<i>munisanda guṇa</i>	<i>mahata</i>
<i>asan viyatuni yomā</i>	<i>savanata²⁸</i>

“Listen, oh learned men attentively to the great virtues of the Buddha”.

<i>pavuhāra pin karaṇu</i>	<i>lesin</i>
<i>sav sama baṇa saga</i>	<i>tosin²⁹</i>
<i>kiviyara yāda</i>	<i>tosin</i>
<i>teruvana nāmanda</i>	<i>manāsin</i>
<i>musu sinhala</i>	<i>basin</i>
<i>kiyam me baṇa asav</i>	<i>satosin</i>

“While paying homage to the Triple Gem mentally, listen happily to the *baṇa* that is preached in mixed Sinhalese language”.³⁰

With the expansion of the printing industry, poets were able to find new subjects on which to compose poems. However, poets who preferred traditional folk lore, focused on the virtues of the Buddha to express their devotion. Some poets described the virtues of the Buddha in their poetry with the intention of cultivating good qualities in society.

Controversies and Avoiding Errors in Poetry

Many poets were aware that there might be some mistakes either at the initial stages or at the final stages of their compositions that

could lead to accusations directed at them by their reading public. Thus, they composed poetry being conscious about this.³¹ The enthusiasm that was aroused by the controversy called *savsat dam vādaya* continued until the second half of the 19th century and it had a considerable repercussion on the poets. It was evident that the *savsat dam vādaya* had a strong influence on the 19th century poets' way of creative thinking. Therefore, *savsat dam vādaya*, and its background needs to be discussed at some length here. A critical knowledge concerning Buddhist subjects and various other causes sparked the controversies precipitated by scholars. Different types of controversies had been rampant among bhikkhus even at the Anuradhapura era (circa 3rd century BCE to 10th century CE).³² Yet, it is not easy to find documentary evidence about such debates that took place in the middle of the 19th century. Nevertheless, considering the large number of controversies which sprang on various subjects,³³ it is not incorrect to name this period as a period of controversies.³⁴ The social, political and the economic changes during this particular period were the main reasons that influenced various types of controversies. These controversies stemmed from manifold causes, led to several serious changes in the society. It brought about a considerable change in the way of thinking of the people. Though controversies that occurred at that time can be categorized into literature, religion, and caste, the majority of them were based on religion.³⁵ As a result of these controversies, a large number of periodicals of various types proliferated.³⁶

Of the religious controversies, special mention should be made of the five great debates with the Christians,³⁷ because it was through these debates that an unprecedented Buddhist revival occurred in the 19th century Sri Lanka. It is a well-known fact that in these religious controversies, doctrinal matters were frequently a subject of insult.³⁸ Nevertheless, the controversies that took place between Christians and Buddhists indirectly resulted in enriching the Sinhalese language and literature.³⁹ Through the translations of some English documents like Olcott's *Catechism*, the Sinhala language was also enriched.⁴⁰ As a result of the religious and educational renaissance brought about by Vālivīṭa Saranaṅkara in the 18th century in reviving the *upasampadā* and

the higher Buddhist learning after the Portuguese destructions of the 16th and 17th centuries, learning and knowledge spread, both in the up country and the low country. Pupils of Venerable Saranañkara played a great role in spreading Sinhalese literature and Buddhism at that time.⁴¹ (However, by the middle half of the 19th century, it had degenerated to a certain extent.) Learning and knowledge that remained dormant was again enlivened as a result of the controversies that arose among the bhikkhus on matters relating to Buddhism. Of the controversies on religion, the two most famous were *Adhimāsa Vādaya* and *Pārupana Vādaya*.⁴² If the *sīmā* or boundaries are confused, it defiles the extreme purity of the *upasampadā* ceremony. As a result of the debates between the bhikkhus residing in the Asgiri temple and the Malvatu temple, two books titled *Sīmā Sañkara Vinodanī* and *Sīmā Sañkara Chedanī* were written. It is shown that these were written not exclusively on the subject relating to controversies, but with the intention of promoting learning and knowledge.⁴³ Some of these books were written in reply to the divisions in *nikāyas* and also different issues concerning them. Among these books were: *Sangabat Beduma (1896) Vivāda Vinodaniya (1899), Namaskāra Vāda Vidāraṇaya (1899), Vādārambhaka Saṅgrahaya (1900), Bhikkhu Sīlaya (1893), Sāmagri Darśaṇaya (1897) Baddha Sīmā Viniścaya (1901)*.⁴⁴ Scholars at that time commented on matters relating to doctrine as found in the *Tripitaka* and *Aṭuvāva* and tried to establish their own views and opinions pertaining to them. The bhikkhus who were quite conversant with the *Tripitaka* had such an extensive knowledge, which was a great advantage for them in their debates with the Christian priests.⁴⁵ Therefore, bhikkhus were inclined to discuss philosophical issues that have not been touched by the Christians.⁴⁶ Also there arose a number of literary debates during that period which made beneficial influence on Sinhala literature at that time. The biggest controversy that arose on a matter of academic interest was the *Gaṅgārohaṇa Varṇanāva (1806)* which resulted in the *savsat dam vādaya*.⁴⁷

Savsat Dam Vādaya Controversy

In the first half of the 19th century, Davith de Saram of Matara, an eminent devotee,⁴⁸ organized a great religious ceremony called

the *gaṅgārohaṇa pinkama* in the Matara Nilvala Ganga. Based on this grand event, a book of poems called *Gaṅgārohaṇa Varṇanāva* was composed. Although the poems in the book are described as *gaṅgaru Vaṇanā*,⁴⁹ the book of poems became famous as the *Gaṅgārohaṇa Varṇanāva*. At the end of the book, the poet identifies himself as Govikule Samarasekera Dissanayake.⁵⁰

The poet presents two reasons for composing the poem. With the use of metres, the poet hopes to generate in the common man an aesthetic delight and appreciation, as well as Buddhist virtues in them. The other reason, according to him, was to glorify and appreciate the noble deeds of Saram Mudali who initiated the religious ceremony that inspired the writing of the book of poems. In the first decade of the 19th century, there had been prolonged discussions on the usage of orthography and alliteration in composing verses. The debates that arose concerning one stanza of the *Gaṅgārohaṇa Varṇanāva* dragged on throughout the whole century and were able to kindle a vibrant literary awakening. Mihiripenne Dharmaratana Thero (1806) pointing out some faults in the arrangement of syllables in the first stanza of the *Gaṅgārohaṇa Varṇanāva*, led to a serious controversy on poetics. Many learned scholars of the 19th century were involved in this controversy which came to be known as *savsat dam vādaya*. When considering the persons who participated in this controversy, it becomes clear that some have joined the debate out of their interest in learning and the arts, while some have joined to exhibit their pedantry and pride.⁵¹ Abeysinghe Mudali challenged Mihiripenna Thero twice to point out the faults in the verses. The faults Mihiripenna Thero pointed out were not related to the sentiments expressed in the poem, which should have been regarded as its essence, but due to some technical defects such as the incorrect arrangement of syllables.⁵² Thus, it was apparent that the motive of those who got involved in this controversy was to exhibit their learning that could enhance their personal image. However, this controversy can be treated as a blessing as it brought to surface many elements related to the composition of poetry such as errors in prosody, and other matters, opinions and different views, weaknesses in grammar, incorrect use of alien

languages, the need to study eastern languages, religious ideas and opinions, etc.⁵³

The *savsat dam vādaya* which began in 1807 had been forgotten for some time, but reappeared for the second time creating a tremendous awakening in Sinhala literature. James de Alwis's *Sidat Saṅgarāva*, written in English and published in 1851, states in its introduction that poet Dissanayake's intention was correct and Mihiripenna Thero's views were wrong and show the incorrect places in the two stanzas.⁵⁴ As James de Alwis' book was written in English, most of the Sinhalese scholars who had very little knowledge of English would have taken some time to grasp comprehensively the reasons given in it. Some people because of the criticism of de Alwis spoke disparagingly of Mihiripenne Dharmaratana Thero and slighted his education and knowledge of poetry.⁵⁵ By the time these views emerged, Mihiripenne Dharmaratana Thero was no longer living, and therefore, his student Koggala Dhammatilake (1851) took up the cause of his preceptor. This bhikkhu disrobed later, but came to be regarded as the leading debater in the *savsat dam vādaya*.⁵⁶ After James de Alwis' criticism began, arguments of both sides in the debate were used in the year 1854, but as there was nobody to pass judgment on the debate, it came to an end inconclusively.⁵⁷

The Influence on Poetical literature

It was quite evident that the *savsat dam vādaya* exerted a strong influence on the poetical literature of the 19th century. Partly due to this reason, Sinhala poetry became interesting to the reader. After the 1850s, the printing industry made major strides and its contribution to these debates was immeasurable. It should be specially mentioned that from the beginning, newspapers and magazines gave prominence to these debates. It was due to these debates that the magazines like *Yatalaba* (1854) and *Sāstrālaṅkāraya* (1853) were published. Koggala Dhammatilake Thero and Sitinamaluve Dharmarama Thero wrote many articles to the *Sāstrālaṅkāra* magazine.⁵⁸ It was a scholar named D. K.P. Ubayasekera, who at the beginning, wrote a number of articles

in the *Sāstrālan̄kāraya* challenging the views of Dharmaratana Thero. From April 1854, similar articles continued to appear in the *Yatalaba* magazine edited by Pandit Batuwantudawe. Many people who took part in the debate wrote under pseudonyms. There is no doubt that many learned scholars of that time were involved in these debates. The *Yatalaba* magazine was started mainly for the purpose of continuing this debate, and articles of Batuwantudawe as well as James de Alwis on the debate may have appeared under pseudonyms.⁵⁹ A verse published in *Sāstrālan̄kāra* reveals that Ubayasekera was the pseudonym of Hikkaduwe Sumangala Thero. “The verses published under the name of Ubayasekera were no doubt composed by Hikkaduwe Sumangala Thero”.⁶⁰

It is quite interesting to find that Hikkaduwe Sumangala Thero had joined the debate. From his childhood, he had displayed a penchant for various subjects relating to language and education. With the beginning of the middle half of the 19th century, many people who were erudite in languages showed a great interest in Sinhalese poetry.⁶¹ Hikkaduwe Sumangala Thero was an opponent of the Saram camp (party) and did not hesitate to show how incorrect their views and opinions were.⁶² It is especially important to note that when learned bhikkhus in the calibre of Koggala Dhammatilake and Hikkaduwe Sumangala got involved in this debate, many lay people too were dragged into it. Through this debate, a powerful challenge was aimed at the status of bhikkhus for being involved in literary activities. A handwritten note by the Christian James de Alwis who was actively involved in this debate was found (the handwritten commission) on 01.12.1853, which reads:

<i>dam rada sasunamralasa sadev yasas</i>	<i>mutu</i>
<i>dam soṇda lesa digambu nurata lakala</i>	<i>dimutu</i>
<i>dam pada hasala novitara satahu</i>	<i>mitu</i>
<i>dam nada yati nadana dāka me pata diya</i>	<i>yutu</i>

“The Dhammananda doctrine which nobody has learnt, shines in many forms in the *sāsana* which is as boundless as the sky. Give this note to Dhammananda Thero when you meet him”.

“... In view of the blessings that are sent ... you have not written about any of the reasons mentioned in my letter to you. You are very immature. But if I debate with you ... this time the merit will go to Batuwantudawe guru’s pupil James de Alwis”.⁶³

In the course of this controversy, James de Alwis has subjected Dhammananda Thero to a cynical treatment using *Dam Nada*, the pseudonym of the latter.

Most people believe that modern Sinhala literary criticism begins with the *savsat dam vādaya*.⁶⁴ Yet, from the middle of the 19th century, many features of the Western literature can be found in our literature. Criticism of poetry was one of these. In the Preface to the English translation of the *Sidat Saṅgarāva*, James de Alwis (1823-1878) claims that it was the first book written on the subject of criticism of poetry. In his literary criticisms, he had adopted theories of criticism of poetry as well as other supporting theories of literary criticism prevalent in some Western countries.⁶⁵ Thus, a bilingual scholar like James de Alwis’ criticism of *savsat dam vādaya* was influenced by theories of Western literary criticism.⁶⁶ In the first decades of the 20th century, inspired by Alwis, there were several writers who took to literary criticism and editing classical works. Among them were W.S. Gunawardena, Mendis Gunasekera, Martin Wickremasinghe and Kumaratunga Munidasa. Following in the footsteps of Wasala Mudali Gunawardena who showed an interest in literature, subsequent scholars like Kumaratunga drew inspiration from these debates to criticize classical literature.⁶⁷ The participants in this debate without using the mixed language found in classical literature, used the language that was in common parlance, and it was the first time that such language was used for literary purposes.⁶⁸ Another notable feature was that the 20th century poets used a very appropriate, simple language in their writings and the Sinhala language was moulded as a result of this debate.⁶⁹

<i>kaḍiyan tuḍuvan tuḍa vasa piri</i>	<i>se</i>
<i>eḍiyen dāyen doḍavana vila</i>	<i>se</i>
<i>vāḍiyen maḍa pān bī vel pede</i>	<i>se</i>
<i>māḍiyan baka bakaye haṅḍa dena</i>	<i>se</i>

*päduru kapana mīyan hā samānan ...*⁷⁰

“These persons talk with great courage. The more they talk and make noises, the more they resemble the frogs that live in the paddy fields drinking mud and water, and the rats that gnaw on the mats”.

<i>piṭa paṭa gasamin audin surāpāna</i>	<i>sālā</i>
<i>kaṭa mäta gonnak rā bomin matava</i>	<i>ulā</i>
<i>kaṭa keḷa räule hosse konen väk</i>	<i>kerilā</i>
<i>koṭa koṭa ävidin gen geṭat kolā</i>	<i>halā</i> ⁷¹

“Drinking toddy and getting intoxicated with spit dripping down the beard and face, go from house to house and make a commotion”.

On account of the fact that the debaters used a large number of words unfamiliar to the Sinhala language, they were subjected to very strong criticism by some learned scholars. Their opinion was that when composing verses, poets should draw inspiration from the language found in classical literature.⁷² Thus, the use of simple spoken language in writings could be found in many books of verses. As one would see, the *savsat dam vādaya* had exerted a strong influence to build up to this situation. To establish their own views and opinions, the debaters had quoted frequently from classical literature, both prose and verse. This aroused a keen interest among the people to read the classical literature, which was already available in print.⁷³ This debate paved the way for the appearance of a number of books written on controversies. It was due to these books that the readers' curiosity was greatly aroused about reading and writing.⁷⁴ In the books on debates coming under our review, there are instances of personal attacks trying to discredit each other. Another notable feature is that the *savsat dam vādaya* contributed indirectly to revive subjects like prosody and ornateness in poetry.⁷⁵ There was no continuous tradition of ornate poetry despite the proliferation of the printing industry. Especially in the Mahanuvara and Matara periods, metre in stanzas was a popular feature. In the *savsat dam vādaya*, it was seen that the debaters made use of both prose and verse and there

were occasions when they mixed metre in stanzas. On some occasions, it was obvious that they paid no attention to metre. The fact that they paid no attention to metre had influenced other contemporary poets too. Particularly in the 20th century to express new experiences, there arose a need to seek new metres and sometimes to disregard metres altogether.⁷⁶ Some people opine that it is a misnomer to state that the controversy over the *savsat dam vādaya* led the way to literary criticism. Nevertheless, it is evident that the beginning of modern literary criticism emerged with this controversy.⁷⁷ It was due to this debate, that people became aware of the existence of certain criteria to be applied in literary criticism.⁷⁸ During this period, poets used various devices to avoid their poetry being criticized by others.⁷⁹ The *savsat dam vādaya* seems to have a direct influence on the poets of that period. In the 19th century, writers who composed verses were largely influenced by the *Gaṅgārohaṇa Varṇanāva*. Between the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, there sprang a large number of poems describing the various meritorious acts performed during that period, and those poems reflected a direct influence of the *Gaṅgārohaṇa Varṇanāva*.⁸⁰

In the past, kings contributed generously to promote the development of classical Sinhala literature. Some literary works were written at the request of those kings. However, after 1505 CE, foreign invasions disrupted the whole social system and as a result, the kings as well as their officials had no time to take an interest in the sphere of literature. But, later this situation changed. At the beginning of the 19th century, the literary awakening in the south was spurred on by the students of Vālivīṭa Saṅgharāja Thero who had reintroduced Buddhist higher learning. The resident bhikkhus of the pirivenas and the leading Sinhala Buddhists such as Mudliyors and Muhandiramms, who served under the British government at that time, were the leading figures of this movement.⁸¹ Nevertheless during the Mahanuwara and Matara periods, high ranking personnel, in order to project their image in society, extended patronage to various social events. Thus, certain people who had gained prominence in the 19th century sometimes did not hesitate to extend their patronage to religious and social

activities. Several notable families who hailed from the south, extended their unstinted patronage to bring about a revival in the spheres of literary, religious and social activities. Outstanding among them were the lineages of Vidagama, Samarakoon, Don Lawrence Navaratne, Illangakoon, Saram Mudali, Don Simon Dissanayake, Wijesinghe and Gajanayake. It is clear that some of those leading personages extended their patronage voluntarily to many of the poetical works that come under our scrutiny. The fact that the *Gaṅgārohaṇa Varṇanāva* had received the special patronage of Saram Mudali, may have prompted others “To separate flaws from poetry and take only what is correct is like giving a swan milk and water and expecting it to separate the milk from the water and drink it”.

*yut at misak dosātak mehi noma rāgena
met sit bejetvā kav rasaya viṇḍi mina*⁸⁶

“Take what is proper or just, reject what is improper or unjust, and enjoy these verses with a compassionate mind”.)

*me dān kiyana kavi duṭu varadakine
metin kam vaḍā muniguna bāvine*⁸⁷

“If there are any flaws in this poetry, bear up those with a compassionate mind”.

*jalayen kiri venkara bona hasa raja vilasin nuvanina
saruvan rut ganimin dos duralavā yuhu sulu novaṭina*⁸⁸

“In the manner of a swan separating milk from water, discard the errors and take only the precious meaning”.

One comes across certain classical poets of previous centuries who occasionally appealed to the readers to appreciate any merit they found in their poems.

*itidu hota kiyam guṇalobini lohimiya
menehi varada nobajav guṇekāt nam mehi bajav*

“I praise the Buddha’s merits and speak highly about his virtues. If there are any errors in these verses, do not worry about those. Take only the virtue in those, if there is any”.

Some poets made an effort to write poetry using similes and discarding the flaws.

<i>kiyan neda yavahan ära</i>	<i>ivatata</i>
<i>miyen mekavipada matupat</i>	<i>dahasata</i> ⁸⁹

“Read these verses after discarding what is unnecessary so that in the future, thousands can enjoy them”.

The poet of Bentara Lakara’s wish was that his poems should reach only the good and desirable people and not the undesirable people. During that period, it was sometimes apparent that criticism was not tolerated.

<i>ese heyin me māge</i>	<i>gārahīmen</i>
<i>dos vikramhi sitān</i>	<i>u</i>
<i>pudana satasatan vilhi nogos met guṇen</i>	<i>yut</i>
<i>sudana sudana saṅda räshi gos keḷitvā</i>	<i>satosnen</i> ⁹⁰

“Therefore, my poetry should not go into the hands of undesirable people, but only to those who are virtuous and compassionate”.

It is clear that from some of their statements, these writers had an understanding not only of creative verses, but also about rhyme, prosody, rhetoric etc.

“Many important people condemn my poetry. According to *gaṇayo* (an insulting term used for bhikkhus coming from the period after the Portuguese destruction when there were not fully ordained bhikkhus), this verse of four lines has not followed the rules of prosody”.⁹¹ It was apparent that critics did not have much room for criticism like this when poetry was getting rooted in the society as a popular form of literature. By the end of the 19th century, one

could see that poetry had earned itself a position in the society as a medium of communication.

Usage of Language, Traditions and the Emergence of New Trends

When studying the poetical works of the 19th century, it is very important to pay attention to the use of language. The *Siyabaslakara* (9th century CE) shows the manner in which poetic words should be arranged through poetic license. The dictum *rasavat sañdahā savan piya bas*⁹² shows how words should be used in poetry. Even when poetic literature was first initiated, poets were very concerned about the level of erudition and errors occurring in poetic language. The admonition in the *Siyabaslakara* was that composing poetry should be done by using the Siyabasa (vernacular) only.⁹³ However, one can find a mixture of languages in the compositions of later poets.⁹⁴ Books such as *Hansa Sandēsaya* reveal that in the Kotte era, poets used pure Sinhalese as well as a hybrid language mixed with Sanskrit in their compositions. In the history of the evolution of the present-day Sinhala language, the impact of other languages such as Pali, Sanskrit, Tamil, Portuguese, Dutch, and English can be seen easily. It is clear that these languages, one by one, did not contribute much to the evolution of the Sinhala language, and the extent of the influence of such languages was limited.⁹⁵ From the first half of the 16th century for about one and a half centuries, the coastal areas of Sri Lanka were governed by the Portuguese who spread Catholic beliefs by force under the direct instructions from the Pope in the form of Papal Bulls; after them, the Protestant Dutch governed the same areas; finally for about another one and a half centuries, the whole country was governed by the English who exerted a fairly strong influence on the language and the culture of the country.⁹⁶

It is a well-known fact that the knowledge of languages declined during the Kandyan period which was geographically hemmed in by European colonisers. The greatness of Venerable Saranañkara Sangharāja Thero, who ushered in a cultural revival to bring back what was lost due to European barbarities, brought

some hope. Ruled by three foreign nations, the language and literature of the country at that time became greatly influenced by their language and literature. Numerous Portuguese, Dutch and English words entered the common man's vocabulary. Certain contemporary scholars who did research on alien influences in the Sinhala language have written several articles on this subject. The *Orientalist* (Vol. I, 223 & Vol. II, 155), which carried an article titled 'Influence of the Portuguese and Dutch Languages on the Sinhalese and Tamils' by Mudhouse, was one such article. However, some Portuguese, Dutch and English words that had entered the common man's phraseology could be seen in most of the poems composed during that period (19th century). Because of the influence of the lineage of South Indian Nayakkār kings on the Kandyan kingdom, many Tamil words crept into the colloquial as well as written Sinhala. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that Tamil words had infiltrated the Sinhala language from the Dambadeni period onwards. Accordingly, we should recognize that South Asian classical languages like Pali and Sanskrit, and Western languages like Portuguese, Dutch and English, and in addition the Tamil language, had to a certain extent, influenced the poetry of the 19th century. The triad named *Piyummālā*, *Nam Ruvan Mālā*, *Nāmāvaliya* (Kotte Period) contained the names of the books that were helpful for poets to improve their poetry as well as their education. Since the appearance of *Kavu Lakunu Minimal* in the 15th century up to the first half of the 19th century, not a single book on poetics appeared which could be explained by the destruction of the culture due to colonial oppression.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, to compose verses, poets used a mixture of pure Sinhala words and words borrowed from foreign languages. This mixture of Sinhala and non-Sinhala words was used purely with the intention of making the language simple for the common man to easily understand. Poets of that period generally used the classical language to compose their verses. Controversies on religion and language that took place during this period paved the way to form an idiomatic language that influenced other literary creations as well. However, this idiomatic language changed to simple Sinhala according to the prevailing times as depicted in Hikkaduwe Thero's letters and articles relating to his debates.⁹⁸

Since some Sinhala writers had received an English education, a few English words were inadvertently borrowed.⁹⁹ To illustrate this, it is necessary to cite examples from poetry books written during that period. It is not possible to show how English poetry exerted a direct influence on the poetry of Sinhala writers of the 19th century. Nevertheless, it is evident that there had been diverse influences for the spread of the English medium education in Sri Lankan society. During the British rule, it was but natural to have knowledge of English. It helped English speaking people to assert a higher position in the colonial society. An admixture of English words also helped Sinhala writers to master alliteration in poetry.

bristol räsivoränti namäti hotel eke
'master' kage 'post' eke siñi Jacob nam ü
'mist' saha G.T. Wijesekara mäti tos ü
'luster' lesa 'open' kañä vesesin 'very good'
'bristol räsivoränti nam hotel ekak disu'
aviyañä mätrā madi unāñä kañäñä mihiri rasa kohinda¹⁰⁰
istäil lesañä meun karatta piñä nägilā¹⁰¹

<i>räkam nova virāñita mā siri</i>	<i>vatuti</i>
<i>äsme atañä bamavā puñgilo</i>	<i>balati</i>
<i>biskat källak suratin rägenä</i>	<i>kati</i>
<i>isket vi nam häragena yam se</i>	<i>yuvati¹⁰²</i>

On some occasions, it is seen that English words were used to give alliteration to the verses:

<i>rahas pahas doñamin piyama</i>	<i>sinā - sudu</i>
<i>digäs netät mahatun sakala</i>	<i>sinā-</i>
<i>"that is nice" kiyamin risi lesa</i>	<i>sinā - äsū</i>
<i>"what is price" kiyamin melaga</i>	<i>sinā¹⁰³</i>

<i>"rascal" kiyā sarosin bani</i>	<i>nne</i>
<i>sāstara räsin dāñiya</i>	<i>helanne</i>
<i>"yes very fine" aise</i>	<i>kiyanne</i>
<i>"who's that" kiyā danayen</i>	<i>asanne¹⁰⁴</i>

“Scolding angrily and saying “rascal”, casting curses and swearings, saying “yes, very fine, I say”. Asking “whose is that?” from the people”.

By these images, the poet was especially successful in drawing a picture of the then contemporary society. The verses titled *The Colombo Horse Race*¹⁰⁵ can be taken as a good example for this. Here, the writer tries to express the kind of language used by various nationalities that flocked to watch horse racing in Colombo. Here, the writer has been able to communicate to the reader something about the infiltration of Western culture and attitudes to Ceylonese society. Though the writer has tried to show the widespread use of alcohol and the various inroads against the traditional culture, he never attempted to criticize these.

*“see that joki very clever” kiyamin duvanno
bīmatkamin vāni vāni pasekin siṭinno
“vā vā dore” kiya kiyā veḷañdan karanne
meles balā iñda yalit satuṭin piṇanno*

*“try this girl very fine aise” kiyanno
ukgas doḍam tāmbili ā mila dī rāganno
sarvat bibī sumituran samagin saranno
“sīni mari” kiya kiyā pasekin balanno¹⁰⁶*

These verses did not convey a precise meaning. However, borrowing words from the English language, even Malay words as “*sīni mari*” (Come here) and mixing them with the Sinhala was a feature of the literary style in the colonial context, and it led to a cultural mishmash.

To present his ideas, the poet sometimes tried to go beyond the folk traditions by also introducing some ornate descriptions. Poets, who had been influenced by the classical verse traditions, began to show their creative talents in this manner.

<i>ran pä hasev piyayuran kusuman paṭin</i>	<i>dul</i>
<i>pun rū sirin helaṅganan samagin youn</i>	<i>pat</i>
<i>bimhi pasan bäsa riyn ävidin</i>	<i>nolas vi</i>
<i>lansi tosin doḍa doḍā sittiyo</i>	<i>pasekhi</i>

“Beautiful young women with figures and breasts resembling golden swans wearing shining bands of glittering flowers, get down from cars and stand aside talking in the Burgher language”.

<i>siri dāru katek audin särasī</i>	<i>yehena</i>
<i>sitauru balanakala neka turaṅgun</i>	<i>duvana</i>
<i>piyauru väsuma ivataṭa u bava</i>	<i>nodāna</i>
<i>vilibiru nätiva siṭiyai senmäda</i>	<i>pāmina¹⁰⁷</i>

“While a lovely woman with adornments had been watching the horses running, her breasts got exposed. Unaware of it, she stood among the crowd quite shamelessly”.

This shows that the poet had the freedom to choose the language he liked when composing verses. It is evident from some verses that the poets were influenced by both the folk tradition as well as the classical tradition. The poetry of that period (19th century) reveals that people in that society were very conscious about superstitions such as the cawing of crows and the crying of geckos.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, there were occasions when Tamil words like *sokari* were used in folk tales.¹⁰⁹ Here is an example of Tamil words used in some verses as in the case of the folk play *Sokari*.

<i>kannaḍi kaudiya kāpiri de</i>	<i>se</i>
<i>ponnaḍi polauru doluvara</i>	<i>dese</i>
<i>sannasi urumusi kosala</i>	<i>dese</i>
<i>nanuru solī raṭa dāka ehi</i>	<i>melese.¹¹⁰</i>

Poets were inclined to use Tamil words to show the disposition of Muslim and Tamil people and their social background.

tambināne marikkāre hajji lebbe *ennakāriya*
sinna tambi dore nāne enna seyyo *pogavāriya*
menna melesa kiyā yon kāla ekatu vī karaganda *dahiriya*
*yanda giyā sāmakiyā pasudina balava liya gena karan kāriya*¹¹¹

From verses of this type, it is clear that the poet did not want to be creative, but just to report the incident in versified form. These poets had no clear idea about how to use the language appropriately, as is seen here. Nevertheless, they were quite concerned about the alliteration in their verses. The rhythm was there, but no originality that could be appreciated. Sanskrit words were used freely on several occasions.

uvana puṇḍarīka sanda *upasobita*
nayana nīlotpala varṇa *supuṣpita*¹¹²

There were occasions when instead of using the dental ‘s’, the palatal ‘ś’ has been used in the compositions.

*aśav śāmadena nagā deśavana*¹¹³
*śātinan*¹¹⁴
*dikurupaiyat*¹¹⁵

It shows that the poet has used the idiom of the ordinary man. He has given priority to ornateness, and not to poetic quality in language. In composing verses, the poet should select words that fit into the theme.¹¹⁶ Just because a poet uses spoken language, he would not be able to create a poetic language. A poet should be able to use the appropriate language in his compositions.¹¹⁷ In poetic language, morphology and rhetorics take the first place. Morphology in poetic language exists when the poet uses appropriate words.¹¹⁸ The author of the *Siyabaslakara* mentions that the words a poet applies have a devine power - *dev bas*,¹¹⁹ *siyal vadanun*,¹²⁰ *saṇḍa vātup ras*, *bas kātatelehi*,¹²¹ are obvious examples that are appropriate here. Yet, in that period (19th century), there were many instances to show that poets applied language without any appropriateness.¹²²

<i>ate kabara äti lombudāyakayā samagin</i>	<i>pirisak</i>
<i>hite tibunu garumanbiñdi</i>	<i>katikāvak</i>
<i>käte nisā kiyā gānuma bāruva mita karana</i>	<i>deyak</i>
<i>site auru hāṅgunā lesa giye ya lombugen</i>	<i>paḍaya</i>

<i>paḍe dugaṅda nisā seben ivat kaleya</i>	<i>lombā</i>
<i>hādeta jūjakayāvat ratunet</i>	<i>palabimbā</i>
<i>vade nitara pukakasamin giye uvana</i>	<i>pumbā</i>
<i>aḍe ivata yava kiyamin nerapi eyin</i>	<i>lombā</i> ¹²³

“A crowd gathers around a toothless contributor with spotted hands. They have a conversation with him. They pretend he is not ugly and listen to him and then he farts. Because of the smelly fart, they remove the toothless man from the assembly. As he is always scratching his back, they say “Get away from here”, and chase him away”.

The expressions used in these verses were crude and “indecent”, the type that was not found in earlier poetry. The words such as *paḍe*, *pukakasamin*, *aḍe*, *lombā* are used by the people of the lowest ranks in society and not in polite society and hitherto literary circles. This poetic tradition would have been popular among some strata of the common man because of the usage of such vulgar words. The words *usabayā*, *taṭamalā* are used in the verses given below seem to have been acceptable to the common man during that time.

<i>ekalā ‘usabayā’ vāḍa maha saṅga</i>	<i>sabaṭa</i>
<i>nimalā suragurev damdesanā</i>	<i>soṅḍaṭa</i>
<i>patalā ‘nāṅatilak’ yatinduge uvana</i>	<i>tuṭa</i>
<i>dākalā biyavelā seda ‘divi tama</i>	<i>gābaṭa</i> ¹²⁴

(“At that time, the *usabayā* came to the Mahā Sangha and seeing the face of Gnanatilake Thero, who was as wise as Jupiter, became frightened and went immediately to his room“.)

āve huṅgak taṭamalā guru hā tamange
*vāden jayak lābagenā uḍavan paninṭai*¹²⁵

“He came here after many attempts to debate with his guru (teacher). He thought he could win and jumped joyfully”.

During this period, the *Kusa Jātaka* was written in verse form, but before that, a number of classical works had already been written on the same *Jātaka* during the Anuradhapura and Dambadeniya periods. Despite the existence of these classics, this is how the *Kusa Jātaka* story had been presented in verse form.

<i>inṭa bāriya pabāvatiṭi dakinnaṭa</i>	<i>onā ya</i>
<i>yaṅṭa kivya ātpattiya hāṭiyaṭa</i>	<i>hiṭapiya</i>
<i>inṭa putunu āṭgovvek se to</i>	<i>hiṭapiya</i>
<i>yaṅṭa yamuya ātun balannaṭa mage</i>	<i>yeheliya</i> ¹²⁶

“I can't wait without seeing Pabāvati, Then my son, go and wait in the elephant kraal like a mahout. Let us go and see the elephants, my cousin”.

These verses are not composed properly, and they are written in the folk dialect. Poetical works such as the *Kavsilumiṇa* and *Kusa Jātaka Kāvya* which were written in the Dambadeniya and Sitavaka periods, but the *Kusa Jātaka* story (Sitavaka period) was obviously composed with the intention of narrating the story for the benefit of the ordinary reader. It is clear that by using unrefined, vulgar language, the high quality of the verses is lost and there is no literary value in such verses.¹²⁷ The following verses illustrate the low level, to which the language degraded in that period.

<i>āti namut varada tamusege mā</i>	<i>namaṭa</i>
<i>giya namut pihiṭavemi puluvan</i>	<i>durata</i>
<i>gala numut pälei maṭa van so</i>	<i>dukaṭa</i>
<i>vikunatot ganimi tana deka</i>	<i>rupiyalaṭa</i> ¹²⁸

“Even if you have done any wrong, I will help you as far as I can. My sorrow is so great that it can even split a rock. If you are selling your breasts, I will buy both for a rupee”.

sinā sisī mage ratran kelle ¹²⁹

“Keep smiling my golden one”.

pemā mahimi rusiren rankurullā
sāma dinamā pinavami inda turullā ¹³⁰

uccitaṃ paccitaṃ kī basa situ pātu de novedo
evigasīn ohu situpātu deya divās nāti aya kese danīdo
topa visin situdeya lābēvā piru saṅdamen kīven do
nuvaṅāsīn salakā bālu kala kisit vāḍa nāti bas novedo ¹³¹

“The *Dussīlavata* says that the Pali words *uccitaṃ paccitaṃ* have no meaning. “Aren't the words *uccitaṃ paccitaṃ* helping you to get things you wish for? How do people who do not have the divine eye know what is wished for? May you get what you wish for is like wishing for the full moon”.

As literature reflects the quality of a language, a writer should have a good command of his language. He should be able to manipulate language according to his discretion. A writer's cleverness or expertise becomes manifested by the manner in which he manipulates language to get the optimum effect he intended. To create a meaningful impression on the reader, writers used various styles of language, depending on the themes they had chosen. Some exhibited their creativity by using ancient literary language; others by using folk language; and still others by using the diction of urban culture.¹³² During that period, poets made use of both, the language of scholars as well as the idiomatic folk dialect and accent while some others used a mixture of both types in their compositions.

kamala uvana muhulasa ganaba tanahasa
nimala kanaka vālitālayaka katiya pasa
komala hasin bāma san karana padesa
demaḷa katek vī nam viṅḍinemi pahasa ¹³³

“Your face is like a lotus and hair like a black cloud. Hips are like golden sandy plains. If it were a Tamil woman, I would enjoy her caresses”.

*ranā kusa nil upul pipisara pabala turu mihilol kāti
ganā susinindu sevala ranasak sapiri atapalu malpeti
manā lela dena vimala maldam kumudu rāndi niti ekasati
kaṇā liya neta nuduṭu nata haṭa mepura liyabalanāṭa āti* ¹³⁴

Sometimes, words like *mihilol*, *atapalu mal* were used as similes. “Blue lilies blossom, clusters of bees in trees. Very smooth forest moss is complete with a belt of *atapalu* flowers. Nice glittering pure bouquets of white water lilies which a woman has never set eyes on without longing”.

There were occasions when the language of folk poetry was used due to the influence of classical language.

*tikiri nagā sāmāṭa ma vāḍiyen tilakā
idiri vāḍena piyayuru deka ran tilakā
sapiri baṇḍaṭa peti gomara yasa ruvakā
apiri novan numba adahana ran māṇikā* ¹³⁵

“My younger sister Tikiri is prettier than anyone else. Her young breasts jut out like two golden dots. The spots around her hips are so attractive. Do not develop a disgust towards your own Ranmenika”.

Here, simple folk poetic diction has been used. These verses exemplify that there was no definite or accepted language followed by the poets during that period. They used language according to their wishes and abilities. During the Matara period, although the poets exhibited their learning by using language with profound hidden meanings, by the end of the 19th century that situation seemed to have been relaxed in many ways with very little attention being paid to such “poetical” language. Poets expressed their inner feelings in simple language. Some poets did

not pay any attention to the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the poetic usages they adopted.

<i>raṭa hāra dura gaman yannaṭa</i>	<i>situvādo</i>
<i>maṭa kara nigā mada yudayen pali</i>	<i>de do</i>
<i>piṭaraṭa yaṅṭa mandak paya deka nora</i>	<i>rādo</i>
<i>aṭapirikara dī umba maṭa lābu</i>	<i>vādo</i> ¹³⁶

“Did you think of leaving the country and taking a long journey? Why have you insulted me? Will your two feet allow you to go from here? Did I give *aṭapirikara* in a previous birth to get you?”

As one can see, the implied meaning of the phrase *aṭapirikara dī umba maṭa lābunādo* is contradictory to the Buddhist doctrine. In the classics of poetical literature, various similes and metaphors were used to praise or describe a woman’s physical features. It was common in classical verse and prose for writers to praise a woman’s physique using various similes such as the sea, flowers, lotus, stems of lotus, swanlike breasts, and describe physical features in women like eyebrows, eyes, lips, cheeks, tresses of blue hair, waists as that could be spanned by one’s hands etc. From ancient times to the beginning of the modern period, it was seen that poets used various similes to praise the beauty of women. In classical literature, vivid similes were used to describe and praise women’s beauty.

<i>sādi soṅḍa lakala sikipil kalabev</i>	<i>sunilā</i>
<i>mananada karana yut susiniṅḍu digu</i>	<i>varalā</i>
<i>sakavan suvaṭa geleyut sumaṭa</i>	<i>pāhāsara</i>
<i>ranada mābaraṇa sādi yuvalakini</i>	<i>manahara</i>
<i>ratāṅgili soṅḍuru dala pela lakala</i>	<i>hāmaviṭa</i>
<i>ratasara saraṇin susādi mana</i>	<i>tuṭa</i> ¹³⁷

“Hair as beautiful as the blue peacock’s tail. Neck shaped like a conch shell. Fingers like tender leaves. Feet and hands so tender”.

lelei etunu ingan dunu kākula se
bāndu varala siki nindumal kara se
*pandu dekaki piyayuru ran tāṭi se*¹³⁸

“Waist like a bow and breasts like balls in golden discs”.

ugulaki numbe detana nam salelu *bañdinaṭa*
vālañdā simbimin depiyayuru bañda sipakara *turulu*
kavadā simbindo numbe piyayuru *kākulu*¹³⁹

“That can trap young men to embrace and kiss them. When can I kiss your tender young breasts?”

sirigat elañdage bāmayuga *etinā*
pāhāpat ran ramba pālayaki *gahanā*
pemā vaḍana elañdage tana *lapiru*
namā tibū ran tāṭimena *sapiru*¹⁴⁰

“Beautiful eyebrows, thighs like golden plantain stems. Full breasts like overturned golden saucers”.

Although some poets made an effort to use similes like *etunu iṅga dunu kākula se*, *ugulaki detana*, breasts like two balls, poetically they were unable to express proper sentiments expected of such similes, hence their attempts became unsuccessful. When studying the history of poetical literature, a salient feature was the adherence to rules of poetics. The use of metre was one of the main characteristics in poetics. During the era of Sinhala poetical literature, scholars classified Sinhala poetry into three periods, namely *gī* (literally “songs”), verses of four lines (*sivupada*), and stanzas (*silo*). Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Dambadeniya and Kurunegala were considered as eras of songs (*gī*), Gampola, Kotte and Sitavaka as eras of four line verses (*sivupada*), Mahanuwara and Matara period as the era of stanzas (*silo*).¹⁴¹ This classification is made taking into consideration the predominant characteristics of that period. An important book giving descriptions of Sinhala “songs” and metres is the *Elusañdās lakuna* (Dambadeniya Period) which distinguishes differences between songs, verses

of four lines, long stories, parables, and metres. This method of prosody had been influenced by classical prosody.¹⁴² Even before the *Siyabaslakara* and the *Elusañdās Lakūṇa*, our poets were conversant with the usage of embellishments and metres. Classical prosody was based mainly on styles and colours. In Sinhala, prosody styles were more important. While “songs” and four line verses gave prominence to style, unlike rhymes and pauses in poetry, four line verses had characteristics different from songs. Poets of the *Muvadevudāvata*, *Sasadāvata* and *Kavusilumiṇa*, drew inspiration from the Sigiri graffiti, and their poetry had the ability to express deep feelings in a simple and precise manner. Books on poetics such as *Siyabaslakara*, *Sidat Saṅgarāva* and *Elusañdās Lakūṇa* were held in high esteem as they helped the poets to express their feelings in the manner they wished. Nevertheless, since the Sinhala poets’ preference for alliteration at the cost of meaning, led to the degeneration of verse. To express ideas easily, simple four line verses having characteristics such as alliteration and rhyme started to appear for the first time. Verses of four lines were considered as the most popular form in the Kotte era and in the genre of “message-poems” (*sandēśa kāvya*), four line verse metres were often used. However, of the poems written in the Kotte period, *Pārakumbā Sirita* and *Eḷu Silo Śatakaya* deviated from the other poems of that period in respect of theme and style. Although the *Pārakumbā Sirita* was metrically composed with verse of four lines, some of the verses showed the influence of Tamil rhythm (*vannam*). One can trace the influence of colourful metres in Sinhala poetry written during that century.¹⁴³ After the Kotte era, it can be seen that metres were subjected to various types of experiments. Sometimes, there were occasions when traditional metres were used erroneously while some learned poets had used the same metres correctly. Some poets paid attention to the effect of syllables. Poets had earlier paid special attention to the composition of verses and the establishment of props. Books like *Sidat Saṅgarāva* clearly show that poets paid attention to a mixture of auspicious and inauspicious syllables in their compositions. In the Mahanuwara and Matara periods, some poets tried to exhibit their learning by experimenting on various poetic techniques while paying no attention to traditional metres in composing their

poems. In the poetry that came under our review, it was seen that poets on some occasions have used both short and long metres. Nevertheless in the case of most verses, it was difficult to identify a definite metre, but it could be conjectured that those have some semblance of a traditionally accepted metre. No definite rhythm can be found in the following verse written on the slaughtering of cows.

*dura pänna, pera menna, bärída ne - mehē
karadenna, bärivenna, yana täne - äge
kiribonna, tel kanná, näti ne - pasu
mara minna, mas kanná, deti ne*¹⁴⁴

It was written with five letter words intermittent with short vowels. The metres used in this verse appear somewhat similar to *gaja* prosody. In *gaja* prosody, there are 15 modes (*mātras* – 5 letter words) or 12 modes.¹⁴⁵ Here, there is a pause in every five to five modes, while using words like *mehe*, *äge* for emphasis. This tendency was a characteristic that comes from the Mahanuwara era. For the sake of prosody, there were occasions that poets were inclined to lengthen verses unnecessarily, therefore it was not possible to consider them as verses of high quality. The following verse has no meaning, but only a tune. For the sake of alliteration, some letters were added unnecessarily.

*bōvena kumarūṭa mē mē mē mē kī gāna basa raja me
ē gāna vairaya mē mē mē mē pāna tāna kīve
premayen api sāma mē mē mē mē yāmena
bōdana ekatuva mē mē mē mē lāmena sārasili me*¹⁴⁶

“The king said some words to the growing prince, for which he developed a hatred. With love, all of us got together and decorated this...”

Sometimes, poets disregarded metre and paid attention only to the vowels that came up in the verses as it is shown here. A salient feature seen in this period was that more attention was paid

to long metres than to four line verse metres. According to the *Eḷu Saṅdās Lakūṇa*, there were about twenty eight metres.

*kauru enatek jayagatidäi kiya kiyā nāki mahallo
nāmburu vī vāni vāni ävidin paseka un tosinkuhullo
soṅduru pāṭāti saron kailoli soma da ända taruṇakollo
ituru pättaka gosin indagati vāda daknā lesinvipullo* ¹⁴⁷

“Old men saying, “Who has won so far?” came bending and waving, and waited inquisitively. Young men came wearing beautifully coloured sarongs, and important people sat there watching the debate.”

In this verse, there are about twenty five to twenty six modes (five letter words), and according to the rules of prosody, they are classified as *mī* prosody.¹⁴⁸ In the verse given below, which is classified as *tenet* prosody, the poet has made use of the colloquial language instead of poetic language.

*juvan mage duva bāndalā unnā eka pav lē
naming napuru kittā pämiṇa kaḷa apaṭa aulē
eyin tamai mē anatura sidda une me kālē
daran inne kelesada mama mē kāraṇa mekālē* ¹⁴⁹

“Juvan married my daughter, and we lived as one family until the wicked Kitta came and caused confusion. That is how this misfortune happened. This situation is too unbearable for me”.

Verses that belonged to the *tenet* prosody have at least twenty one or twenty two short syllables in each line. Many verses written during this period had more than twenty syllables in each line which should be specially mentioned here. On some occasions, the usage of a classical language was an effort made to be compatible with the traditional metre.

siya pata uvana nilupul yuganaya na
muḍu itā sevela varalasa koṇḍa dasa na
eka yutā tisara piyayuru mana nan na
gaṅga veta giyemi varaṅgana siri dara na ¹⁵⁰

“Face like a lotus flower, eyes like blue lotuses, soft plaited hair fallen up to the hips. Teeth like kumudu flowers. Breasts like swans. I went towards the lake to see these noble ladies.”

This verse belongs to the *gaja* prosody and according to the *Kavumiṇi Kaḷamba*, we can see that it resembles more to the *Sakvā virita* (metre). In Sinhala verse literature, the *Samudra ghōṣa virita* was very popular at that time with its ten or eight modes and pauses composed with eighteen modes. Some of the verses of that period too were written in *Samudra ghōṣa virita* or with another metre closer to that.

kadisarayā uva hapilā gira vara na
tama vatayā biṅdagana vāni leutura na
sāṅda velayā nāgipasū taru eli kara na
visirigiyā vānimaya ohuge kira na ¹⁵¹

“Even though smart, he was struck by an elephant. When the moon rises and stars brighten the sky and scatter rays of light ...”

One can sometimes note that songs were written using metres, and in these songs, metres and pattern were lengthened.

bat pisa nokana sē
tora novamin daniva sē
tama himi santo sē
kāv lan bat māṇiyan sē ¹⁵²

“Cooking rice and without eating it, she stands near her husband to make him happy and mixes rice for him like a mother”.

In these verses, each line has 9, 11, 9, 14 patterns. The unequal lines (metre) in the *gī virita* have nine modes and eleven

pauses, while the preceding verses have twenty modes and the subsequent ones, twenty two modes.¹⁵³ The obvious reason is that poets of that period had not taken any special interest in metre. They wanted to express their ideas unfettered through poetry. In the structure of Sinhala verse and in its process of development, the verse occupied only a secondary place. The Sinhala verse that originated with song eventually became extremely popular due to the verse of four lines (*sivupada*). The *gī* or *silo* which came into existence as a result of the coordination of song and verse can be shown as a traditional form of verse. While prosody contributed to the development of verse, the stanza can be termed as a recent development. It is obvious that the Mahanuwara and Matara poets had shown a great liking for this type of literature.¹⁵⁴ Of these works, the 20th century poem *Gaṅgārohaṇa Varṇanāva* and Mihiripenne's (1806) verses were reckoned as high. Although Venerable Mihiripenne composed short poems containing several stanzas, from time to time, he had not written an *aśṭaka* or any other notable book of poems. Nevertheless, Venerable Dharmaratana can be considered as an outstanding figure in composing poetical stanzas. Among the verses that came under our review, we could find verses in the stanza metre composed by him. Sometimes, the stanza metre as well as the four line metre were used frequently.

<i>pānev melak māduru des tama rās durin</i>	<i>lu</i>
<i>G.H. Perera abidam mātindā samat</i>	<i>u</i>
<i>minidam ruvan dā miṇi lō sudanan noyek</i>	<i>desa</i>
<i>bandā nitin guṇarāsin pinavā ves</i>	<i>dān</i> ¹⁵⁵

“The poet G.H. Perera uses his poetic talents to brighten poetry and change it. He composed poetry binding it always in a tasteful manner to win readers' appreciation”.

While the stanza mentioned above can be classified as belonging to the *Mālini virita*, at that time many stanzas were written following ancient verse traditions. In expressing or even describing an incident that occurred at that time in stanzas, the use of new similes was noticeable. Although the following stanza

can be considered to have been composed according to the *Bujaṅgaprayāta virita*, it has not conveyed any new ideas.

<i>ahas kus gamangat noyek bū suran</i>	<i>kāl</i>
<i>edan sal balālā sudam sal</i>	<i>igillī</i>
<i>ävit bim telehi diledo kuhul</i>	<i>net</i>
<i>sāpat vī haḷo dev nives e kuhul</i>	<i>sit</i> ¹⁵⁶

“Deities travelling in the air look at the *dāna sālāvas* with inquisitive eyes. They fly from Sudarma and abandon their heavenly abodes.”

It is clearly seen that these poets were not successful in presenting “tasteful” poetical imagery. Yet, we can see that through the use of the ordinary man’s dialect, they made an effort to express their ideas freely. As is evident from examples of this period, classical poetry was continuing to degenerate. Although many poets were enthusiastic about writing poetry, their poems were not of a high standard, similar to the Sigiri graffiti poems written by ordinary visitors. These poets were comparatively less talented, and hence their creations were inferior in quality. Although the poets of that era (19th century) were somewhat conversant with texts like the *Siyabaslakara*, they felt that they were not bound to faithfully follow the instructions given there. The poets who used the words given in the *Siyabaslakara* did not show that they could grasp the special two-fold meaning suggested in those.

penet at belen ena arutudu sadatu dekab
*yam sanda savanatehi hota - hägnenu penetata nam ve*¹⁵⁷

These words in the *Siyabaslakara* express the overt meaning as well as the covert meaning. It appears that the poets at that time have paid more attention to the external appearance or the form of a verse rather than its content. Around 1838, poetry which was composed such as *Heladiv Abhidhānavata*, the attention of poets was directed to the eight *gaṇas*, as well as to the harmful results arising from poetical faults. Under the eight *gaṇas*, the poets’ attention has been directed to the differences between long and short vowels, appropriate and inappropriate *gaṇas*, auspicious and

inauspicious results arising from use of inappropriate syllables, prosody, grammar, agreeable and disagreeable sources etc. Also attention was drawn to poetic faults, good and bad *gaṇas*, errors in prosody, appropriate similes, gender, faults, repetition etc. Books like the *Heladiv Abhidhānavata* reveal that those books were written after researching into ancient texts in order to create a new tradition in the art of writing verses. To support this fact, a verse from *Heladiv Abhidhānavata* is quoted below.

*kīvot melesa katunāhaṭa dos nopamā
ātāi poraṇa kavi me sidat saṅgarāda mā* ¹⁵⁸

“If it is told in this way, the author would be blamed. If there are ancient verses, they are those cited from the *Sidat Saṅgarāva*”.

Until the critics expressed new ideas, poets who held deep-rooted, established ideas did not abandon their traditional ways, and followed the usual path of imitation. This was one reason why the poets at that time did not reach “maturity”. However, some poets admitted the shortcomings in their verses, and begged pardon from readers. Nevertheless, due to a trivial matter relating to prosody in the poem *Gaṅgārohaṇa Varṇanāva*, the *savsat dam vādaya* was precipitated, and it became a source for a series of controversies on prosody. However, no other book that appeared during that period could generate such vibrant criticism. Nevertheless, learned scholars at that time had some awareness about literary criticism. During that time, critics of poetry were concerned only with the form of the verse. It was very rarely, a critic paid much attention to the poetic value of a poem. As a result of literary criticisms that arose centering on the *savsat dam vādaya*, a series of new views were expressed as shown in the reviews that appeared in 1889 on books titled *Muva Kavudu Sival Katāva* and *Gaja Sival Katāva*. *Muva Kavudu Sival Katāva* was written by M. Francis Mary Soyza and the *Gaja Sival Katāva* by J.M.C. de Soyza. These two books were written on the invitation of Gurunnanse Thambi Appu, and they were sent to scholars for review. A large number of commentators pointed out the good and bad aspects of the books. Meanwhile, Engeltina Kumari wrote a book named *Kāvya Vajrāyudhaya*, showing the incorrect instances

in the poetical criticisms of the above two books and mentioning some valuable views shown by critics. Some criticisms were not rational and were not unbiased evaluations. They were sometimes utter nonsense or clichés of indecent words. A critic who got involved in the controversy under the pseudonym of *ām a:* discloses this appropriately.

<i>vādayaka pāminu</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>jaya gāna parusa</i>	<i>vadanina</i>
<i>eyin sihi</i>	<i>nuvaṇina</i>
<i>yodā piḷituru kivot</i>	<i>anagaṇa</i>

<i>guttīla maha</i>	<i>osuda</i>
<i>mē neka paṇḍivaru</i>	<i>soṇḍa</i>
<i>kaḷa siyaluma</i>	<i>vāda</i>
<i>parusa binumen</i>	<i>nokaruveda</i>

“They come to a debate and use harsh words. You should reply with discreetness and care. Guttīla Paṇḍit never used harsh words in his debates”.

Nevertheless, at the end of the 19th century, this situation underwent a change. The use of harsh words in criticism completely disappeared. Likewise, there was a tendency to treat literary works on merit. During this period, criticism on poetry received encouragement from newspapers. While poets sent their books to editors of newspapers and magazines for review, the critics who reviewed pointed out virtues as well as defects in these books. On the whole, such criticisms paid no attention to the rules of poetics in the *Siyabaslakara* or *Kāvyaḍarśaya*, but they only commented on the general nature of the poems and the benefits one could derive from them. The two examples given below would elucidate this point further. A newspaper named *Satya Samuccaya* criticized the *Siyabas Mal Dama* that appeared at that time, as follows:

“Yet those who learn Sinhalese, the great King Vijaya of the Sinhala Island, to those who like to know news of him and his love affairs.”¹⁵⁹

At that time, the common man began to show some interest in poetry as evinced from some criticisms that appeared in the newspapers. The poems of Sigiri graffiti were written by ordinary persons. And Robert Knox in the 18th century mentioned that all the people of Sri Lanka are poets and that some criticism on poetry confirms that fact. Regarding the folk poems of the 19th century, a newspaper editor expressed a similar idea:

“Books that are not ‘*pala batu*’ verses, and a lot of *sivupada* exist in the oral tradition of Sinhala people. As one can see, some use ornate methods, endowed with grammatical tricks which have been introduced by learned people. Some natural, intuitive persons compose poems which are full of satire that spread no sooner one heard them.”¹⁶⁰

In composing poetry, the common people at that time used Sinhala language in an unrestrained and free manner. During the Peradeniya era of the 1960s, there was a literary debate which according to some critics, was only a sequel to the debate that began at the end of the 19th century. The *Lak Rivi Kirana* commented in 1896:

The poetry in our country from ancient times praised our women with various glorifying terms. Because of this, young men became inflamed with lust and their minds became corrupted, so nothing conducive to their progress happened. Therefore, poets made up their minds to abandon this custom, and when praising women, gave good admonitions for their progress in this world.¹⁶¹

By this type of criticism, it is evident that literature, especially poetry was influenced by religious and other ethics related concepts. It was seen that even critics prompted poets to present erotic concepts in their poetry in a refined manner. The *Lak Rivi Kirana* again commented: “It would be best if poetry that tends to increase carnal desires is not included in these books and given publicity.”¹⁶²

Sometimes, these poems gained popularity in the society, particularly in the south of Sri Lanka and these criticisms can

be considered as an indirect accusation against many poets who composed such erotic poems.

yauvana madayaṭa pamaṇak obi nā
kav pada bāṇḍumak karatei me vinā

“Suitable only for young people’s passion. These verses are composed for them”.

Sometimes, there would have been a growing resentment among common people for books of poems dealing with erotic themes. It may be mentioned that the influence of criticism on Sinhala poetry during this period was negligible. It is a well-known fact that James de Alwis in his book *A Survey of Sinhala Literature* (being an introduction to a translation of the *Sidat Saṅgarāva*) displays the vast knowledge he had on both the literature of Sinhala language and the English language. In a society where such well read scholars lived, it was natural for the common man to imbibe even a very little of that knowledge. James de Alwis in the beginning of his book remarks thus: “Led by curiosity, or invited by the allurements of Science, Europeans have, during the past half-century, devoted not a little of their time to the task of unlocking the rich stores of Oriental Literature.”¹⁶³

It was seen that prominent Sinhala scholars who were well-educated in English and Sinhala, evaluated Sinhala books following the methods adopted in English criticism. When all these facts are considered, it can be said that although there was an inclination to draw inspiration from verse traditions in the past, the foundation for the present-day poetic traditions has been actually laid by the end of the 19th century.

‘Gentlemen Poetry’ in the Colonial Context

‘Gentlemen poetry’ is a word that sounds strange today. Nevertheless, from the research done on Bengal society, the enthusiasm and attitudes shown by males towards poetry is easy to recognize. Rosinka Chaudhuri’s book *Gentlemen Poets in*

Colonial Bengal (2002), describes Indian poets as English poetry influenced their poetry in the 19th century. It details how poetic creations of male poets were influenced by English verse.¹⁶⁴ With the expansion of the printing industry (in then Ceylon during the colonial era), efforts to express in verse gathered momentum among men. One reason for this was that the population had become more literate. Educated in government Sinhala medium schools and in the *privenas*, this group did not have much knowledge of English language and literature. The style of language they used in their poetic compositions was closer to the Sinhala folk idiom. They were not recognized writers and the themes of their creations were not about those who were subjugated to colonialism, and their books were confined to illustrate facets of folk traditions of the local population. Apart from those poetical compositions, the poetical creations of those who received a bilingual education can also be observed. An outstanding characteristic in the creativity of these poets is the use of the classical diction, which was close to tradition. In colonial literature, male writers outnumbered female ones. Under this condition, a set of new readers emerged. The contributions of *bhikkhus* in the sphere of literature gradually declined, and it paved the way for laymen to express ideas on topics that were considered as improper for women to discuss. Because of this, these verses found wide distribution among readers. Among the subjects of this genre, many were on sentimental or emotional love. Another topic that drew the attention of poets was social events and praise of religious festivals. After the well-known poetess Gajaman Nona (1746- 1815), Dona Selestina (1897) can be indentified as a poetess who had some knowledge in formal poetics. Books like *Kara Palal Hätte*, *Alimāle Ādara Ratnaya*, *Kaḷu Siniñdu Katāva* and *Kāvya Vajrāyudhaya* helped display her talents and made her become well-known. *Añganagunadapana*¹⁶⁵ of N. Catherine Silva was a book that was widely spoken of in the colonial context and can be treated as influenced by colonialism. Her poem shows that she was fearless in expressing her ideas. As Arjuna Parakrama states, ... it was in many ways, a self-consciously 'feminist' text. It explicitly rejected dominant notions of female sexuality, and lays bare male hypocrisy, criticizing the privileged male hypocrisy ...¹⁶⁶ These poetesses were unique because they possessed a fairly good

knowledge and a grasp in prosody. While most male composers of poetry had no knowledge of prosody, the advantage they had was the liberty to express their ideas freely. These writers who had not come under the sway of colonialism, were seen as a group and they represented Ceylonese folk traditions. Among these were: Appuhamy Ernest Jayasuriya (1896), Appuhamy Carolis (1895), Appuhamy Manthes (1896), Jamis Appuhamy, Edirisinghe (1896), Gandara Don Andiris Coranelis Senanayake, Mathale Nakaththa (1894), Pabilis Don Felix Apa Appuham, Nandana Kavishekara (1895), Wijeweera (1899) etc. It should be noted that although European, especially Portuguese, derived names abound above, it should not be assumed that these persons were pro-colonial because during colonial times, European names were forced on locals. It was only such writers as above who were able to express something tasteful in their poetry. Many people who read this poetry enjoyed it and it is a well-known fact that these writers were instrumental in creating a new reading public. As their creations were so simple, it was not possible to categorize them under folk verse. The reason for this is that though they expressed ideas in a fearless manner, the creative aspect was lacking in them. This applies equally to folk songs too. Nevertheless, under the "modern" social order, these poets used a wealth of material taken from rural as well as urban society. Since the language they used was closer to the folk language, it appeared as if they were following the literary traditions of the past. One can trace in it the roots of the poetry of modern time. The writers who were bilingual, made significant contributions in this period. Among them were Albert de Silva (1890) (*Kavumini Kalamba, Pandu Keliya, Himatirtalankaraya, Vesak Kavu Mal Dama, Volunteer Kandavura, Sukara Jataka Kavya*), T. Bastian de Silva (*Avurudu* (1891) *Malaya, Go Ghatanaya*) and James de Alwis (*Matarata Gamanak*).¹⁶⁷ The poetry of these writers was quite different from that of the poets mentioned earlier, in respect to the usage of rules and the language of traditional verse. Their attitude towards society as depicted in their poems was different. Thus, on the whole, one can distinguish several factors that were special to these poets. The booklets of verses that were published after 1850 contained verses that resembled the characteristics of verses of the Matara period.

The changes that had taken place throughout the island in the 19th century in the spheres of economic, social, cultural and political were reflected in this poetry. On the whole, one can find in these poems, a medley of characteristics found in the traditional poems and folk poetry.

It was the new reading public, who emerged with the expansion of printing that showed a penchant for these verses. When one examines the history of the poetic tradition from its inception, one would be able to discern that a vast change had taken place in respect of theme, objective etc. On some occasions, an effort was made to revive the ancient traditions. Language, production of books, composing of poetry, rules and regulations followed by ancient scholars, changed from time to time paving the way for new ones. The wide distribution of knowledge, orthography and the abundance of books, are some reasons that can be attributed to these changes.¹⁶⁸ In their poetry, writers added personal experiences and liked to use well-known sayings and similes and the common parlance of the times.¹⁶⁹ Consequently, modern literature became closer to the people and more realistic, thus reflecting the complexities of contemporary life than the literature of the remote past.

During the middle of the 19th century Sinhala literature followed a completely new direction.¹⁷⁰ So far, the only influences were from traditional Sinhala and Tamil literature, but with influences coming from Western literature, the door was open to new ways of thinking.¹⁷¹ With the expansion of English education, some poets sought new ways to present their compositions. With this background, some poets did not show any liking to traditional verse, which had come down the ages. The influence of English poetry on Sinhala poetry was evident among those who were not separated from traditional indigenous culture and closer to the borders of urban culture. The English schools that were established by the Buddhist associations resulted in the proliferation of English educated young men who learnt English literature as a subject in school. Having drawn inspiration from English literature, they started composing Sinhala verses imitating the English verses

they had learned. Nevertheless, the traditional scholars who had received an oriental education did not show any appreciation for the new poetical trends of these young men. This was the background of the conflict that cropped up between English poetry and Sinhala poetry.¹⁷² The traditional verse and their meanings, the ancient Jātaka stories with the settings of Dambadiva (India) depicted in those, and admonitions given in those Jātaka stories were a far cry from the English poetry that these English educated young men knew. These young English educated men chose for their poetry day to day experiences, which they gathered from their own environment.¹⁷³ Before the introduction of the English poetic traditions, it was the poetic traditions of the Mahanuwara and Matara period that had held sway. The British Colonial rulers whose objective was to train locals to fill the administrative posts, paid more attention to English education and thus Sinhala literature became neglected.¹⁷⁴ The two most outstanding poets of the Romantic Age in English literature were P.B. Shelley (1792-1822) and John Keats (1795-1821) both dying young, Nevertheless, they influenced English literature of the period immensely, and had also a considerable impact on the Sinhala poetical literature.¹⁷⁵ Yet, the extent of influence of English poetry on Sinhala poetical literature in the 19th century was not well-known. Thus, although there was a wide expansion of English education towards the end of the 19th century, it was the Indian poetical concepts that predominantly exerted some influence on Sinhala verse traditions.¹⁷⁶ The *Siyabaslakara*, a treatise on metrics informed Sinhala poets about the science of poetry. The virtues of a poem, characteristics of great poems, meaningful embellishments, alliteration and poetical errors identified by name had not been sufficient for poetics and poetical criticism. To fill this gap, examples were provided in the *Siyabaslakara*. Some poetical concepts in the *Siyabaslakara* have been in use for a long time by Sinhala poets.¹⁷⁷ For those poets who had a great desire to use alliteration in the 13th century, the *Elu Sañdās Lakuna*, a treatise on prosody by a monk called Badra, became very useful. Local poets were concerned about poems that brought both beneficial and harmful results. At present, there are books that deal with beneficial and harmful results in poetical compositions. There are the *Sidat Sañgarāva (Iṭu Niṭu Adiyara)*

Lakunusara and *Kavulakunu Minimal*. In this way, the necessary instructions are given on how to compose a poem without blemishes. From *Savusat Dam Vādaya* as well as *Muvakavuḍu Sival Katāva* and *Gaja Sival Katāva*, one can see how the local poetic criticism influenced those works. Despite tradition, change takes place in modern society; so does the people's taste

Narrative Poetry, *Kavi Kola* and Popular Literature

According to Ediriweera Sarachchandra, the foundation of the modern Sinhala language was built on debates, leaflets, periodicals etc. which contributed to enriching it. Similarly, the reader's knack for reading was enhanced by translations, tales in versified form, plays etc. Sarachchandra's views on poetry of the 19th century are worth enquiring into. With the wide expansion of printing technology, the quantity of written material that appeared in verse form was large. Sometimes books of verses came out in print in considerable numbers because newspapers had created a growing demand for such books among the general public. Most of these stories revolved round incidents based on the lives of lay households.¹⁷⁸ There were many reasons for the popularity of verse among the people. Narrative poetry tells a story.¹⁷⁹ For versified tales, certain incidents, characters and contemporary social events provide a wealth of interesting themes. These versified narratives are built on a cleverly constructed plot. Contemporary experiences in the background also add colour to it. Sometimes, poets' personal experiences are incorporated in the plot to make it more interesting for the reader. Such incidents are organized in a deft manner to create a deep impression in the reader. The characters in the verses too change from time to time.¹⁸⁰ The tales in these narrative poems can be treated as fanciful fiction. These human experiences presented in a mixture of spoken and written language and in versified form are meant for the gratification of the reader. On the whole, in the traditional fiction, narratives can be found in folktales, fairy tales, parables, fables, moral tales, myths, legends, and also in modern fiction which include both fantastic and realistic fiction. There are at least four stages in narratives, namely orientation, complication, series of events, resolutions,

and reorientation. To introduce special characters, adjectives are used. Reasons such as where, how and why are explained, and the story is presented in such a manner that a vivid picture is formed in the reader's mind through the language.¹⁸¹ While these beautiful verses did not receive the patronage of important and powerful people as in the past, the readers' interest to read *Jātaka* and other stories increased. This situation paved the way for the birth of versified narratives in Sinhalese. A large number of *Jātaka* stories were versified while every other verse narrative contained some sort of story as its nucleus. *Nimi Jātaka Kāvya*,¹⁸² *Temiya Jātakaye Viridu Pota*,¹⁸³ *Ummagga Jātaka Kāvya*¹⁸⁴, *Velaṅda Rāja Maṅgalyaya*,¹⁸⁵ *Kummāsa Piṇḍa Jātaka Kāvya*,¹⁸⁶ *Tun Yahalu Puvata*,¹⁸⁷ *Kusa Rāja Maṅgalyaya*,¹⁸⁸ *Deva Dharma Jātakaya*,¹⁸⁹ *Kāpiri Kumārayage Katāva*, *Tarka Jātaka Kāvya*, *Sūkara Jātaka Kāvya* etc, can be cited as examples. However, poems written on certain incidents and special events that took place at that time were more readily accepted by the readers than those based on *Jātaka* stories. *Alut Kaḍe Usāviya Langadi Sidu Vuna Maraṇayak hevat Juliyānu Katāva Nohot Avavāda Maldama*.¹⁹⁰ ("A murder that took place near Hultsdorf Courts or Juliyanu Story alias Avavāda Maldama") is one such example. This incident was presented in verse form as a story about a murder that took place near the Hultsdorf Courts. This poem based on a real incident, offers the reader something for his gratification. The story is about a young woman from a remote village who had come to work as a house-maid in Colombo who had later given birth to a daughter. She was named Juliyanu and was given in marriage to one Juvan Perera. When Juliyanu had flirted with another man, Perera had filed a case against her. But being overwhelmed by severe pain of mind, he had later stabbed and killed Juliyanu. How Juliyanu's mother lamented over her daughter's death is depicted in verse.

<i>juvan mage duva bāṅdalā unnā eka</i>	<i>paulē</i>
<i>naming napuru kittā pāmīna kalā pata</i>	<i>aulē</i>
<i>eyein tamai me anatura sidda une me</i>	<i>kalē</i>
<i>daran inne kelesada mama me kāraṇā me</i>	<i>kālē</i> ¹⁹¹

“Juvan married my daughter and lived as a family. A wicked man named Kitta came and caused this problem. That is why this happened. How can I bear this up?”

While the pseudonym ‘Kitta’ is used to introduce the main character of this story, the poet has been successful in creating a visual picture of him in the reader’s mind. By expressing certain ideas in the story, the poet is able to arouse an emotional feeling of grief in the reader and this is a special feature of the poem. *Sipiri Mālaya* or ‘The Prisoner’s Lamentation’ is presented in verse form to portray a prisoner’s suffering.

<i>hapalā kannāṭa bāri battika gal</i>	<i>ekka</i>
<i>uyalā labuhodda diya kaḷa kaha</i>	<i>ekka</i>
<i>analā gammiris luṇu kuḍukara</i>	<i>ekka</i>
<i>kālā inṭa bāri danavā mage</i>	<i>bokka</i> 192

“When I eat rice I chew stones too. The gravy has only saffron and salt. After mixing and eating pepper and salt, my stomach burns up”.

Language used in these verses is not creative, but what attracts the reader is the story. These verses have been created with the intention of gratifying the reader’s desire for reading. *Kaṭugampola Haṭana* describes in verse the dreadful riot that had taken place in the Katugampola Pallegama village.¹⁹³ Pallegama Banda and Gunaratna both had a dispute over some land, and both parties clashed with weapons such as clubs, pistols, dynamite etc. The first stanza begins with a description of the ghastly scene which strikes the reader’s mind with horror.¹⁹⁴

<i>rakusan lesin mun sāma tul velā</i>	<i>sita</i>
<i>kaḍamin pol kurumbā gas pālu</i>	<i>koṭa</i>
<i>kukulan sāvoma allā sivalun</i>	<i>lesaṭa</i>
<i>keruven noyek kōlāhala biyakaru</i>	<i>lesaṭa</i> 195

“Like devils, they plucked the coconuts and young coconuts, and laid bare the coconut trees. They destroyed the chickens and many other animals and created a big riot”.

villager had visited him taking a pingo load of goods. The whole story is presented in verse in the form of a dialogue. The lawyer had quickly uttered these words:

<i>perakadōru duṭu</i>	<i>ekalē</i>
<i>hanika melesa kiyai</i>	<i>lolē</i>
<i>gamaṭa gosin numba</i>	<i>rālē</i>
<i>gena eva makiyana</i>	<i>siyalē</i>
<i>desit doḍan jamanāran</i>	<i>raseyā</i>
<i>vālat samaga varakā gena</i>	<i>tosēyā</i>
<i>alut vāli hakuru mul bāṇḍa</i>	<i>mesēyā</i>
<i>genāt deva kaṇḍa nōnaṭa</i>	<i>sēyā</i> ¹⁹⁹

“Go to the village and bring oranges, mandarins, ripe jak, and a bundle of jaggery and give those to my lady”.

For three years, the case had dragged on and in the end, the villager was sentenced to prison. His suffering in the prison is expressed here in a very sensitive manner.

siragei ohu inna kalāṭa
māsa tunak yana ataraṭa
atīsāra leḍak oḥuṭa
*velā māruṇi asaddaya ṭa*²⁰⁰

“He was in jail for three months and while he was there he had contacted diarrhoea and died”.

The uniqueness of these tales was that the writer’s sole intention was to narrate a story, paying no heed to the creative style he used. The various embellishments seen in traditional verse are not found in these versified stories. The Sinhalese classical poets used a wide range of subjects, like *Jātaka stories*, and

followed the rules of prosody using similes and anecdotes with the object of creating an accomplished piece of poetry. The best example that could be cited is *Kavsilumiṇa*. Yet, the 19th century verse writers did not find it necessary to use appropriate language to accomplish their work. Their objective was to present a story in a free style. It was not a problem for them whether there were characters or not. *Colomba Nagaraya Tuḷa Diḷindange Vilāpaya*²⁰¹ (The Lamentations of the Poor in Colombo City) is a poem that describes the travails of the poor in Colombo city who had been evicted from their houses by the police.

*yama paluvo lesin innā 'police' kārayō vit
dāḍi vadanā kiyā sithi madakvat novī duk
'kaḍa kaḍava tope pālpate geval dāna' kiyālā
sunu visunu karat duppat ape pāl mekalhī*

“Like devils from hell, the police came and destroyed our houses saying: we are going to pull down your slums”.

Another interesting feature of this period is the presentation of old folk tales in a novel form. A king in the olden days was suffering from some ailment and a dhoby came forward to cure him. This story is told as an incident that happened in the present.²⁰² In most of these versified tales, some plot is used to arouse the curiosity of the reader. In the 19th century, printing technology expanded in Indian society and versified tales were growing in popularity among the urban population there too. Even a well-known folk tale, presented in a novel form would become popular.²⁰³ In the context of the closely-knit Sri Lankan society, well-known versified tales gained popularity among the urban as well as the village population. Those writers without proper education or literary taste, tried to show these tales as chap-books.²⁰⁴ These types of versified tales were printed and sold at public places in the form of *Kavi Kola* (sheets of verses). Both Gananath Obeysekera and Neera Wickremasinghe showed that this type of verse could be rated as *Kavi Kola* literature printed in the 19th century. This may be called an oral literary culture consisting of the popular ballads based on *Jātaka Tales*. They came to be printed in cheap leaflets

called *Kavi Kola* that were sold at market places and pilgrimage centres. Those sheets of verses became popular among these classes that had acquired literacy in the state school system.²⁰⁵ It is quite reasonable that this type of verse-sheets be classified under *Kavi Kola* literature as suggested by several researchers. With the spread of printing technology in the 19th century, most forms of poetry became popular among the people. Verse became a popular form of literature among the masses. Popular literature was not a new form in Sri Lanka. In Indian society of the 19th century folk tales, plays, and new stories are regarded as popular literature.²⁰⁶ C.E. Godakumbura made an effort to depict the poetry of the Mahanuwara period and the 19th century as popular literature. There is evidence to show that popular stories were presented in versified form and distributed among the people, even as far back as the 17th century.²⁰⁷ The article published in the late 19th century titled '*The Popular Poetry of the Sinhalese*'²⁰⁸ bears testimony to this fact. In popular poetry, one can find the lives and views of the Sinhalese expressed in simple literary language. These books may be categorized into contemporaneous or posthumous publications.

The popular poetry of the Sinhalese can be classified into the following categories:

1. Poems written on religious themes;
2. Poems based on Jātaka tales;
3. Poems based on folk tales;
4. Poems based on historical events or incidents;
5. Poems on arts and crafts; and
6. Poems on games and pastimes.²⁰⁹

Although poems in this classification can be identified, all of them could not be subjected to review, as it is too vast in number.²¹⁰ With the expansion all over the world of printing technology and printing culture, people's levels of education were also enhanced gradually concurrent with the exchange of knowledge and information. With the expansion of literacy, 'cheap' literature

too became widespread. This type of literature was most popular with the lower strata of society.²¹¹ The notable feature that one could find was that the 19th century writers' aim to present popular and interesting stories which were composed according to "proper methods". Some of these stories transcended the level of traditional folklore and verses and took the form of creative and investigative poetry. Likewise, the merits and demerits of a poem were subjected to scrutiny and made public. In this, all popular verses were branded as traditional *Kavi Kola* poetry in the 19th century. However, to reach such a general conclusion was not reasonable, as all traditional poetry had not been subjected to proper investigation. Modern traditional poetry appears to be more popular. Ariya Rajakaruna mentions that with the expansion of printing technology in the end of the 19th century, it paved the way for a new traditional poetry which became very popular.²¹² To classify this poetry in its entirety is, somewhat difficult as the literature is very vast. On the whole, the aims of the poet were apparently to compose verse slightly deviating from the hitherto traditions of poetry, but adhering to its basics. These characteristics that were already evident in the Mahanuwara and Matara literary periods began to gradually slacken. It is not possible to show the poetry of the post-Mahanuwara era in a meaningful way, and the Colombo literary era came into the scene amidst this situation. With the expansion of the printing industry during the colonial era, the literary style hitherto prevalent in society, and the way of thinking underwent certain changes, the effects of which were felt on the traditional verse as well.

This being the case, it completely accedes to Sarachchandra's view that these poetical traditions do not occupy a definite place in the history of Sinhala literature. Sarachchandra mentions that from the middle half of the 19th century, Western literature held sway over the middle class in Sri Lanka.²¹³ Although the people of the middle class knew about English poetry, there was no strong influence of it on Sinhalese traditional poetry. Thus, it proves that many critics had arrived at this conclusion without providing convincing reasons. These verse traditions were founded on the literary style current in colonial times. With the

invasion of politics into the colonial society, the socio-cultural life and the people's way of thinking gradually changed, and they began to think in new ways. Traditions were challenged. The improvements in technology, new ways of communication and road systems - all those factors contributed to change the ideals of the people.²¹⁴ With the expansion in printing technology and communication, articles, verses, and novels were published awakening the feelings of national dignity all over the world. This was the opinion of Sharkey J. Heather. Although a wide expansion of printing technology could be seen in the Sri Lankan society, there was no poetry to kindle nationalism. The way people used printing techniques for the purpose of awakening patriotic feeling is shown in these poems. Although this idea was not clearly seen in the Buddhist revival movement in the 19th century, which revolved around the temperance movement, poetry helped to build the necessary background for the rise of nationalism. Likewise, the necessary background was prepared for the independence movement which gathered momentum at a later stage.²¹⁵

Conclusion

The common characteristic that could be seen in this period under discussion was that scholarly and folk traditions were both represented in the new poetical traditions. Poetry was the common medium of communication in society, and it was certainly a characteristic of the traditional verse that emerged parallel with the printing industry. When society changed, poetry also changed with it. It is reasonable to treat this period as a period of transition in the history of poetical literary traditions.

Endnotes

1. Sannasgala, Punchibandara, *Sinhala sāhitiya vansaya* (The History of Sinhalese Literature) Colombo: Lake House Printers, 1961: p. 508. Since the beginning of the Anuradhapura era, naming the division of eras in the history of Sinhala literature was done based on the kingdom, such as Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Dambadeniya, Kurunegala, Gampola, Kotte, Sithawaka, Mahanuwara and Colombo.