



EDITORIAL

After a hiatus of over three years, we are glad to publish the first issue of the 43rd volume of the *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* (SLJH).

The 42nd volume was published in 2018. That was perhaps in a different world. Much has happened since then. A global pandemic and an unprecedented economic and political crisis have hit Sri Lanka in quick succession. We will be able to explore this crisis in greater detail in the future issues of the SLJH. However, the present issue as well as the next in this volume will focus on certain topics and themes which have been of enduring concern.

We begin this volume with an article co-authored by Shamara Wettimuny and Gehan Gunatilleke, who examine the plight of the Ahmadis during the late colonial period in Sri Lanka (then ‘Ceylon’). Considered to be an unorthodox group within the Muslim population, the authors show how the colonial state imposed unjust restrictions, in the name of ‘public order’, on the religious liberty of a smaller group of people considered to be marginal and unorthodox by a dominant religious group (the Muslims). The authors point to how conceptions of orthodoxy affect religious liberty, while contributing to the delegitimization of smaller groups of people. This underlying message is a chilling reminder of the potential power a dominant religious group would have over an ‘unorthodox’ group within it; and how the dominant group’s approach, in turn, can affect the state’s attitude towards smaller groups, especially when the state is preoccupied with issues of public order.

In the second article, Liyanage Amarakeerthi re-evaluates the Sinhala literary culture during a defining period in post-colonial Sri Lankan history. Its focus is the ‘cultural revolution’ which is associated with the year 1956. Even though ‘1956’ is often portrayed as the triumphant and revivalist moment of Sinhala linguistic and cultural nationalism, Amarakeerthi shows that underneath these rhetorical claims there was a richly cosmopolitan intellectual milieu that contributed to the literary revolution of 1956. He does so by examining two particular aspects of the revivalist movement, namely: literary criticism and

literary studies. Focusing especially on the works of Ediriweera Sarachchandra, Amarakeerthi argues that certain literary intellectuals, who were at the center of the Sinhalese literary and cultural achievements in the 1950s, have been more cosmopolitan than one would have imagined. Therefore, the revival witnessed in 1956 was hardly a product of a cultural nationalist trend.

Priyantha Fonseka, in the third article of this issue, examines the phenomenon of silence in the Sri Lankan art cinema in the post-1990 era. He explores how silence can be seen in the background spaces of a number of critically acclaimed films by Asoka Handagama (*This is My Moon*), Prasanna Vithanage (*Death on a Full Moon Day* and *August Sun*), Vimukthi Jayasundara (*Forsaken Land*) and Sanjeeva Pushpakumara (*Flying Fish*). In observing silence in relation to Sri Lanka's socio-political and cultural history, Fonseka discusses how these respective film-backgrounds echo the forces of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that prompt the civil war, youth uprisings, and the systemic inequities prevalent in the socio-political landscape of Sri Lanka.

The fourth article is by Sameera Tilakawardana, who visits the anti-Muslim violence unleashed especially in the Kandy district in early 2018. Adopting the theories of representation and encoding (of Stuart Hall) as well as of imagined communities (popularized by Benedict Anderson), Tilakawardana examines the YouTube videos uploaded in early 2018 and the numerous encoding strategies, forms of identity, and nationalism the content of these videos signified. Arguing that YouTube exhibits a democratizing and hegemonic duality, the author suggests that the challenge therefore is to exploit the duality in developing pedagogical activism and strategies of democratization and socio-political awareness. The article reminds us about the critical and contradictory role social media plays in these troubled times, when it becomes a ready platform for provocative content, thereby contributing to the tensions between majority and minority groups in the country.

Alex McKinley's review-article concludes the first issue of this volume. It examines the recent work of Ronit Ricci titled *Banishment and Belonging: Exile and Diaspora in Sarandib, Lanka, and Ceylon*. Published by Cambridge University Press in 2019, the book explores, with reference to a vast array of historical sources, the different narratives on displacement, banishment and exile developed by Sri Lankan Malays, bringing the history of Malays back into Sri Lankan history. An important historical work belonging to the 'Indian Ocean Studies' and one which has been already reviewed by leading scholars, McKinley's review supplements Ricci's book with supporting Sinhala and Tamil sources, given the latter's inability to access local Lankan texts to support her arguments. McKinley also notes that Ricci's work raises intriguing questions for future researchers and scholars, as

well as the need for greater alliances and co-authorship in publications in the humanities disciplines.

As the co-editors of the SLJH, we wish to stress that the views expressed in these articles are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the co-editors or the SLJH Editorial Committee.

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