

Portuguese Baila verses and Anti-colonial Subaltern Ideology in Ceylon Coast: A case study on Hugh Nevil Manuscripts

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Abstract : The Portuguese were the first known European Nation to colonize Ceylon during the early 16th century. When the Portuguese set sail in the late 15th century towards the East and West, they first landed in Pondicherry (Pondicherry), an eastern coastal location of early India and established their trade in the Indian Oceanic regions. Sri Lanka (Ceylon until 1972) made its first contact with the Portuguese just a few years after they anchored in India, the Luso-Sri Lankan contact was initiated and became prominent across the time, even during the later colonial rules, i.e., Dutch and British. Such connections created a Luso-Asian hybrid culture in Ceylon that shared both Sri Lankan and European identities. Portuguese Creole communities were prominent among them as an ethnic group with Portuguese descent interwoven with local traditions and customs, yet outcast by the mainstream Portuguese colonials. Hugh Nevil, a British Civil Servant who served Ceylon in the early 1800s, had collected a considerable amount of such Luso-Asian Literature belonging to Sri Lankan Portuguese creole communities, including 180 Portuguese creole verses sung by the creole communities in Eastern Sri Lanka. Though the collection was studied to uncover literature traits, few or no known studies focused on the anti-colonial subaltern discourse appearing in the shades of this work. It is evident that these verses contain local anti-colonial ideologies that create a platform to place them as elements of Luso-Asian subaltern literature. This research explores how the language and content of these verses contradict the mainstream colonial ideologies we intend to position within a regional anti-colonial subaltern context. As this is part of a long-term research project that translates the whole collection into Sinhalese and Tamil, this study will show evidence from early 1800s verses to suggest how Luso-Asian communities create a unique subaltern linguistic and literary discourse.

Keywords : Luso Asian creoles, Luso Asian subalterns, anti-colonial ideologies, Sri Lanka Portuguese creole

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