

**SINHALA LITERATURE AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE RAJARATA CIVILIZATION :  
A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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This paper explores the relationship of one aspect of Sri Lankan culture, namely its literature to the socio-economic system after the fall of the Rajarata kingdoms. It takes as its premise the model of the formation and consolidation of Sri Lankan culture developed by one of the authors (Goonatilake 1976, 1979). The latter model traced the gradual growth of the socio-economic system based on an irrigated agricultural base from about the 5th century B.C. to the end of the Polonnaruwa period. It demonstrated that the maintenance and growth of the socio-economic system was heavily dependent on the particular cultural and ideological system that grew up with the irrigation economy. This culture (its art, literature, etc.) was conservative and innovative only within narrow limits defined by parameters given by the socio-economic system.

The present paper explores the situation after the irrigation based socio-economic system began to decay. Arguing from the above model of Sri Lankan culture drawn for the classical period, one would expect that the weakening of the particular irrigation based socio-economic system would weaken the cultural hegemony and would allow a new burst of cultural innovation. The paper takes this hypothesis and examines its validity taking the example of Sinhala literature from the 12th century to the 16th century, the centuries during which the capital of the Sinhalese kingdom shifted from the dry zone Polonnaruwa to the wet zone Kotte, this shift being also paralleled by a process of transformation of the economy from an irrigation based agricultural economy to one strongly influenced by trade links with the West. Examination of the literature of the period finds that the hypothesis is broadly validated.

**References:**

1. Goonatilake, Susantha 1979—"The formation of Sri Lankan Culture", Reinterpretation of Chronicle and archaeological material.
2. *Ancient Ceylon*, Vol. 4 forthcoming 1979. Dept. of Archaeology, Colombo.