



## **Modern Sinhala Poetry Nourished by Religious Narratives and Religious Concepts: A Study Based on Saumya Sandaruwan Liyanage’s Poetic Work ‘Hatte Watte Magdalena’**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research paper is to examine the use of religious narratives and concepts in the award-winning poetry of Saumya Sandaruwan Liyanage, recipient of the *State Literary Award* in 2014. In particular, the study focuses on how the poetry collection *Hate Vatte Magdalena* successfully draws on religious narratives and concepts to construct its poetic vision. This research is structured in two main parts: first, an exploration of religious narratives and concepts, and second, an analysis of how these religious narratives and concepts are employed within modern poetry. The central research question is: how are religious narratives and concepts reflected in the works of Soumya Sandaruwan Liyanage as a modern Sinhala poet? Liyanage demonstrates a careful and sophisticated use of religious language, incorporating elements of religious narratives into his poetic compositions. Through this approach, he creates innovative poetic imagery while reinterpreting contemporary social realities from a fresh perspective. Issues such as class disparity, poverty, racism, war, and feminism are articulated in ways that allow religious narratives and concepts to acquire new and layered meanings. Accordingly, this study examines how and to what extent the “religious narratives and concepts” contributes to poetic effectiveness in “*Hate Vatte Magdalena*”, highlighting the poet’s ability to merge traditional mythic elements with modern social concerns.

**Keywords** - religious narratives, religious concepts, modern poetry, literary awards, class inequality

## **1. Introduction**

The objective of this research paper is to conduct an analysis of the poetic works of the contemporary Sinhala poet Saumya Sandaruwan Liyanage, whose poetry is based on religious narratives and concepts. The study focuses on his award-winning poetic collection, which received the State Literary Award 2014. The scope of this research is divided into two main areas: an examination of religious narratives and concepts, and their application within the field of modern poetry. The central research question of this study is: How are religious narratives and concepts reflected in the poetic works of the contemporary Sinhala poet Saumya Sandaruwan Liyanage? It has also been taken into consideration here that this poetic work received awards at the State Literary Awards Ceremony, which has continuously conferred awards as the principal literary awards event in Sri Lanka since 1957. Accordingly, this research paper focuses on the poetic work “Hatē Vattē Magdalēnā” by Saumya Sandaruwan Liyanage. This study is a qualitative analysis based entirely on secondary sources. Using a textual analytical approach, it examines the thematic, stylistic, and symbolic elements reflected through religious narratives and concepts in the selected poetic work. Data collection in this study is based on two main methods. Primary sources include the selected poetic work itself, while secondary sources consist of religious narratives and concepts, scholarly articles, critical books, and literary research studies. Although the selected poet employs religious narratives and concepts in his poetry, there appears to have been little analysis, interpretation, or critical attention given to their use and creative contribution. This indicates that studies focusing on religious narratives and concepts reflect the richness of language use in poetry and particularly those examining religious narratives and concepts have largely been overlooked. Accordingly, it becomes evident that the poet Saumya Sandaruwan Liyanage has skillfully and systematically organized his poetic expression by incorporating religious narratives and concepts, or their reinterpreted forms, within his compositions. Furthermore, the poet has created space for a new poetic imagination that enables artistic reinterpretation and offers a fresh perspective on existing social contexts. Issues such as class inequality, poverty, racism, war, and male dominance are recontextualized and given new meanings using religious narratives and concepts in his poetry.

## **2. Discussion**

In studying modern Sinhala poetry, it becomes evident that religious narratives and concepts are used in a highly open and flexible manner, and the poets have succeeded in reinterpreting them from a new and innovative perspective. The autonomy present in these poetic works, along with the excellence of imagination, is critically examined in this research paper.

As highlighted by Töller (2008), religion encompasses not only mythological narratives but also a broader system of beliefs, rituals, moral values, and spiritual experiences that hold significance for a community. In the context of modern Sinhala poetry, this comprehensive nature of religion provides a rich and adaptable foundation for creative expression. Poets draw upon these religious narratives and concepts not as fixed doctrines, but as flexible symbolic frameworks that can be reinterpreted and reshaped. Accordingly, modern Sinhala poets have engaged with religious themes in a highly open and innovative manner, reimagining traditional beliefs to reflect contemporary realities. The independence and imaginative depth evident in these poetic works demonstrate how religious concepts can be transformed into powerful literary tools, a process that is critically examined in this research.

Modern poets skillfully adapt religious rituals, texts, and symbols to create layered works that resonate with contemporary readers, blending spiritual depth with aesthetic richness while connecting sacred meanings to everyday human experiences. (Salih, 2025)

William Blake was a deeply devout Christian, and his poetry includes references to various biblical characters, God, and divine power. As Shepherd (2007) notes, “many Western literary works are built upon mythology, especially classical mythology and Judeo-Christian mythology.” Likewise, in examining modern poetry, it can be distinctly observed that contemporary poets employ poetic sensibility in diverse, meaningful, and intricate ways within current literary tendencies. In particular, the critical insight, artistic sensitivity, and linguistic sophistication they exhibit in poetic creations that interpret and critique social realities are regarded as defining characteristics of modern poetic expression.

The experience expressed in poetry can be understood as an aesthetic expression that emerges from the integration of the poet’s personal experiences, sensations, and intellectual reflection. In this sense, whether the experiences are drawn from society, personally lived, or inherited from earlier poets, the act of transforming any form of experience into poetry has commonly become an opportunity to critically examine and interpret society through a strong sense of resistance. (Dhamminnda, 1991)

In the book titled, *Hatē Vattē Magdalēnā* by Saumya Sandaruwan Liyanage, religious narratives and concepts are intricately and artistically restructured through reinterpreted forms. Through this poetic work, the poet conveys religious symbolic meanings in a profound and expressive manner, offering the reader a rich aesthetic experience. In traditional Christian interpretation, Mary Magdalene is often portrayed as a repentant sinner, although this interpretation has been widely debated. In the poem, Magdalene is reimagined as a working-class woman living in “Hatē Watte,” symbolizing poverty and lower social class.

“Mary Magdalene, originally from the city of Magdala near the Sea of Galilee, is depicted in the New Testament with limited biographical details, although interpretations suggest she may have had a troubled past before being healed by Jesus” (Lozano, River, 2017)

කැරෝකේ ක්ලබ් එකේ  
පින්සාර සුන්දරී  
යාන්තං විසිතුනක් වයසැති,  
හැමදාම පාන්දර පමා වී  
වැඩ ඇරී ගේ බලා දුවන්නී  
ඇගේ නාමය මග්දලේනා ය, (ලියනගේ, (2016)

Karaoke klub eke  
pinsāra sundarī  
yānthan visitunak vayasaeti,  
hæmadāma pāndara pamā vī  
væḍa ærī gē balā duwannī  
ægē nāmaya Magdalenā ya

(At the karaoke club, a graceful beauty, barely twenty-three years old, every day she rushes home late at dawn after finishing work; her name is Magdalene.)

කුණු හරුප රස කරන, තලු මරන,  
හැමදාම ඇ යද්දී ඉඟිමරන,  
මනෝ නන්දන උයන,  
ගෙත්සෙමෙහි පිට්ටනිය  
බිම බලාගෙන පහු කරන්නීය. (ලියනගේ, (2016)

Kunu harupa rasa karana, thalu marana,  
hæmadāma æ yaddī iṅgimarana,  
Manō Nandana uyana,  
Gethsemeni piṭṭaniya  
bima balāgena pahu karannīya

(As she passes every day, chewing over crude jokes and vulgar words, and surrounded by leering glances, she walks past the Garden of Delight, the Gethsemane field, keeping her eyes lowered to the ground.)

Through Biblical references such as Gethsemane, Judas Iscariot, Peter, and others, the poet connects biblical narratives with contemporary social realities. For example, Judas is reinterpreted as a symbol of betrayal, representing individuals who sell their integrity for money or power.

Judas Iscariot (died April 29–33 AD), according to the New Testament, was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. He was entrusted with the responsibility of keeping accounts. He was involved in the act of betraying Jesus. Many Christians (laypeople, clergy, and theologians) still regard Judas as a traitor. The name “Judas” is used in several languages as a synonym for betrayal. (Kent, 1910)

According to Joshua Schachterle, in his article *What Did Judas Do To Jesus? (How Judas Betrayed Jesus)*, Judas betrayed his mentor, Jesus Christ, by cooperating with the authorities who sought to arrest Him. Schachterle explains that the imperial forces believed they could not successfully capture Jesus without the assistance of one of His closest followers. Consequently, they bribed Judas Iscariot with thirty pieces of silver to identify and betray Jesus. Through Judas’s actions, the opposing authorities were able to arrest Jesus, an event that ultimately led to His crucifixion. As a result, Judas is widely regarded as having played a central role in Jesus’s death. Furthermore, within the Catholic tradition, Judas is not viewed as a righteous individual. From that time to the present day, anyone involved in betrayal is referred to as a “Judas.” In the poem, Magdalene’s husband is also called “Judas.” Thus, in society, the name “Judas” has become a common symbol used to represent betrayers, those who turn from friendship to enmity, and those who sell their integrity for money, due to this mythological narrative

කුණුකෙළ පෙරන, දත්මිටි විකන  
“ජුදාස්” හෙවත් “ජුඩා”,  
ඇ විවාපත් ව හුන් පුරුෂ තෙම, (ලියනගේ, 2016)  
Kunu keḷa perana, dathmiṭi vikana  
‘Jūdās’ hevath ‘Jūdā’,  
æ vivāpath va hun puruṣa thema,

(Spitting filth, grinding his teeth, ‘Judas’—also known as ‘Jude’—the man to whom she was married,)

His real name may be ‘Jude’. However, he is referred to as ‘Judas’ because he is a person who can commit any dishonorable act for money. The poet also suggests that he is addicted to drugs.

පැකටි කළ ජීවිතය  
එක රැට අහවර ව  
හැමදාම බලාගෙන හිඳින්නේ  
මත්දලේනා ගෙදර එනකල් ය  
කටු ඔටුනු පලදන්න  
රිදී තිහ උදුරන්න (ලියනගේ, 2016)  
Pækaṭ kaḷa jīvithaya  
eka rēṭa ahavara va

hæmadāma balāgena hiṇḍinnē  
Magdalenā gedara enakal ya  
kaṭu oṭunu paḷandanna  
ridī thihi uduranna

(A packaged life, finished in a single night, every day he waits, watching for Magdalene to return home. To place a crown of thorns, to seize the thirty pieces of silver.)

Similarly, the character Teresa represents financial exploitation, while Peter symbolizes hypocrisy hidden behind religious respectability. These reinterpretations highlight social class inequality and oppression in modern society.

“Basically, the meaning of the cross is death. From the 6th century BCE to the 4th century CE, crucifixion was used as a method of carrying out capital punishment, resulting in extremely brutal and painful deaths. In crucifixion, a person was tied or nailed to a wooden cross and left hanging until death. The process of death was slow and extremely painful. However, Christ also suffered this extremely painful form of crucifixion.” (Shrier, 2002)

The cross was the ‘gallows’ of Jesus Christ as well as of the two individuals crucified alongside Him, Dismas and Gustas. However, people have come to regard the cross as a sacred object because it was the instrument of Jesus’ crucifixion. In this context, what Teresa does is like imposing a death sentence on individuals by charging excessive interest rates. Another notable aspect is that this form of oppression imposed on the lower classes is carried out by people from the same social class. Throughout the poem, Magdalene endures immense suffering from this lower social stratum to survive and support both herself and her husband within a context of class inequality and a struggle for existence.

The other character in this poem is “Pedro from the grocery shop.” In Christian stories, “Peter was the chief disciple of Jesus Christ and the leader of the early Christian Church. Saint Peter, also known as Simon Peter, was originally a fisherman from Galilee. He was a prominent early Christian leader and, according to the New Testament, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. About thirty years after the death of Christ, several Christian communities known as “churches” existed within the Roman Empire. There was also a church in the city of Rome, and its leader was Saint Peter. (Bruce, 2024)

Thus, Peter, who appears in a saint-like form, seems righteous to the world in this poem; however, he abuses Magdalene in the darkness where nothing is visible. This is a deeply repulsive act for her. What is revealed here is the hidden impurity within the lives of those who appear to be holy. At the same time, the poem also exposes the purity of the woman who is portrayed as impure.

හාල් මිටි ගොඩ ගසන  
මුසල ම ඉස්ටෝරු කාමරේ  
කළුවරේ මුළු ඇගම ඉවෙන් අනපත ගන

හාමිනේ ගැන පවා දොස් කියන

එළිමහන ඇති විටෙක

සිහිනෙහුළු නාඳුනන

සිල්ලර කඩේ පේදුරු

හිතට නිරතුරු

හඳුන ලාදුරු (ලියනගේ, 2016)

Hāl miṭi goḍa gasana

mūsala ma istōru kāmārē

kaḷuvarē muḷu ægama iven athapatha gāna

hāminē gæna pavā dos kiyāna

eḷimahana æthi viṭeka

sihinenudu nāḍunana

sillara kaḍē Pēduru

hitāṭa nirathuru

hadana lāduru

(In the gloomy storeroom where sacks of rice are piled up, in the darkness, groping over her whole body by instinct, even blaming the mistress, when there is an open space, unknown even in dreams—Pedro from the grocery shop, constantly within her heart, creating a lingering sickness.)

Women like Magdalene, who endure all forms of abuse and suffering and are subjected to sexual exploitation at the lowest level of the oppressed class, can be found in large numbers in contemporary society. Yet, no one speaks about their exploitation. Women like Magdalene represent the collective experience of all sex workers in society who are subjected to such exploitation.

Subsequently, he composed a poem centered on Christmas, a universally celebrated festival that transcends cultural and social boundaries across the world, while poignantly portraying the anguish of a mother who lost her son without a trace.

Christmas is a festival celebrated by most Christians around the world to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save humanity from sin. The Bible states that the joyful message for all people is that a Savior was born in the city of David. The name “Jesus” signifies salvation from original sin. Accordingly, many Christian denominations, including Catholics, believe that one must follow Jesus to attain eternal life (Holy Bible, New Testament).

In the poem titled “Mary Amma’s Christmas” from Saumya Sandaruwan Liyanage’s poetry collection “Hatē Wattē Magdalēnā,” the mother figure referred to as “Mary Amma” is paralleled with Mary, the mother of Jesus. This poem is constructed as a reinterpretation of a Christian religious narrative, where the injustice faced by Jesus is reflected in a different form through the suffering of Mary Amma’s son.

Those who speak the truth are represented as Jesus, while those who oppose them are transformed into figures akin to those who crucified Him. Mary Amma stands at the church doorway, waiting in hope for her beaten son to return to her.

ඇගේ ඇකයෙන් රැගෙන ගිය පුතු  
යළි එතැයි මග බලන්නී  
හෝඩුවාවක් නැත ද, පුතු යළි  
එතැ'යි නිතර ම කියන්නී (ලියනගේ, 2016)  
Agē ekayen rægen giya puthu  
yaḷi ethai maga balannī  
hōḍuvāvak næta da, puthu yaḷi  
e'thai nithara ma kiyanni

(With the hope that he will return to her once again. She waits, watching the path for the son who was carried away from her embrace, wondering if there is not even a trace of him, yet always saying that her son will return again)

When her son was tied to a stone pillar and brutally whipped by the Jews, when they placed a crown of thorns upon Jesus' head, struck Him, mocked Him, and humiliated Him, when on the journey to Calvary Jesus fell to the ground three times under the weight of the cross and was beaten with whips by the Jews, when at the top of Mount Calvary Jesus was nailed to the cross, and on Golgotha suffered the agony of death, hanging upon the cross for three hours before dying upon it, and when she held the lifeless body of her son beneath the cross after His death, all these events brought immeasurable suffering to Mary as a mother. (Compiled and Translated Robert , 2022)

Likewise, “Mary Amma” too was a mother who carried all such sorrows within her heart, weeping in pain and bearing grief beyond measure.

The poet draws a powerful parallel between the suffering of Jesus and the fate of the young men who disappeared during the political violence in Sri Lanka in 1988–1989. By comparing the abducted child of Mother Mary to these disappeared youths, the poem transforms the traditional religious image into a political symbol of grief and injustice. Just as Jesus was tortured and crucified, these young men too were subjected to torture and brutal killings during the political conflict. Through this comparison, the poet highlights the immense pain of the mothers who lost their children and condemns the cruelty and violence of the political system.

කටු ඔටුනු ලා, දේ අත් සිර කළ  
පුවේ පුතු ගැන අහන්නී (ලියනගේ, 2016)

Kaṭu oṭunu lā, dē ath sirakaḷa  
puñchi puthu gæna ahannī

(About the little son, whose hands were bound, and crowned with thorns, she asks.)

She is startled even by the sound of firecrackers, because of the painful experiences she endured from hearing countless gunshots during that period.

රතිඤ්ඤා හඬ ඇසී ඉඳහිට  
නැගී වටපිට බලන්නී  
තිගැස්සී ගිය හැදින් නැවතත්  
තනි ව දෙවියන් යදින්නී (ලියනගේ, 2016)

Rathiññā haṇḍa asī indahiṭa  
nægī vaṭapiṭa balannī  
thigæssī giya hædin nēvathath  
thani va deviyan yadinni

(At times, hearing firecrackers, she rises and looks around in alarm. With a heart shaken by fear once more, she prays alone to God)

Here, the poem conveys that Mother Mary’s son has been abducted through the line: “the son who was taken away from her embrace. “ඇගේ ඇකයෙන් රැගෙන ගිය පුතු - Agē ekayen rægen giya puthu (ලියනගේ, 2016) Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mother Mary too gently caresses the bruised places on her son’s tender body.

තැළුණු සියුමැලි සිරුර පිරිමැද  
හීනෙනුත් ඇ හඬන්නී (ලියනගේ, 2016)  
Thaḷuṇu siyumæli sirura pirimada  
hīnenuth æ haḍannī

(Caressing the bruised and delicate body, she weeps even in her dreams.)

In the poem “කිරි වෙහෙර අසල මල් විකිණූ අම්මාගේ සිතිවිල්ල”, “The Thoughts of the Flower-Selling Mother near Kirivehera,” although she engaged in selling flowers for Buddhist offerings, subtly conveys through sophisticated poetic techniques that the realization of Nirvana remains unattainable for her at present. The poem further reflects the idea that even the spiritual pursuit of liberation becomes difficult within the harsh realities of oppressed social existence.

Nirvana (Nirvāṇa) is the highest spiritual state sought by Buddhists. It is attained when a person eradicates desire, hatred, and ignorance. According to Buddhism, Nirvana is regarded as the supreme goal that Buddhists aspire to achieve through following the teachings of the Buddha.

“That Nirvana is not a dwelling place for beings such as those in the divine realms or the human world, nor is it an object with color or form; rather, it is a certain state of bliss. The pleasures found in the human world and even in heavenly realms are such that, once obtained, they disappear in an instant. Therefore, one must repeatedly strive and struggle to obtain them again. Even if such pleasures were to last for some time without fading, they would eventually become tiresome to beings and thus turn into suffering itself. The bliss of Nirvana, however, is such that once attained it is never lost again. Therefore, one does not need to repeatedly seek it or strive for it. It is a joy that never becomes boring, no matter how long it lasts, and its value is beyond measure”. (Chandavimala, 1974)

In Buddhism, Nirvana can be realized even while one is still living. However, in the poem “The Thoughts of the Flower-Selling Mother near Kirivehera,” it is said that the woman who sells flowers cannot attain Nirvana at this very moment because her small flower-selling business is what supports her entire household and provides for all its expenses. This verse, which is considered part of religious mythic literature, is constructed around the single word “Nirvana.” Here, the poet presents one by one the reasons why this woman, despite her suffering, is unable to free herself from sorrow and realize the supreme state

සංවරව කියාගමි සිත, කය ද වචනය ද  
 එහෙත් හිමියනි දැන් ම නොහැක නිවනට යන්න  
 ජීවිතේ විය ගසින් තව නොහැක ගැලවෙන්න  
 මහන්සිය නැති වෙන්න බණ ටිකක් පවසන්න (ලියනගේ, 2016)  
 Saṃvarava thiyāgami sitha, kaya da vachana da  
 ehēth himiyani dan ma nēhaka niwaṇaṭa yanna  
 jīvitē viya gasin thava nohaka gālewenna  
 mahansiya nēthi wenna baṇa tikak pavasanna

(I keep my mind, body, and speech restrained, yet, my lord, I cannot now go to Nirvana. I still cannot be freed from life, please recite a little sermon to relieve my fatigue.)

He views the woman’s life struggle through a metaphorical expression as “the tree of life.” Here, he also uses the term “yoke (viyagasa),” which is taken from agricultural practice. In ploughing, two oxen are used, and they are joined together by a yoke. This yoke is placed across the necks of the oxen and is attached to a cart, plough, or other implement, making movement possible and efficient. The yoke symbolizes unity, cooperation, and a shared effort toward achieving a common goal. In the same way that the oxen cannot escape the yoke, the flower-selling woman too cannot free herself from the burden of life.

The poet, speaking from the perspective of the flower-selling mother, expresses all the suffering experienced by ordinary lower-middle-class people, showing that the oppressed class is unable to bring an end to the struggles of life.

ලොකු පුතා හමුදාවේ අටයි අවුරුදු පිරුණේ  
 මිනිය ආ පෙට්ටියක් සිල් කරලයි තිබුණේ  
 ලේලි ඇවිදින් ගෙදර මුණුබුරක් දෙක වසරේ  
 මගේ රස්සාවෙනුයි උනුත් ජීවත් වෙන්නේ (ලියනගේ, 2016)

Loku puthā hamudāvē aṭai avurudu piruṇe  
 miniya ā peṭṭiyat sīl karalai thibuṇe  
 lēli avidin gedara muṇuburath deka vasare  
 mage rassāvenuī unuth jīvath vennenē

(My elder son completed eight years in the army; even the coffin in which his body arrived was sealed. My daughter-in-law came home with a two-year-old grandson; they too survive on the income from my work.) She is the one who sustains the life of this family. From the very small income she earns, she supports not only herself but another family as well. Here, the poet also subtly reveals another pressing social issue: “unemployed graduates,” exposing it through the poem in a nuanced and indirect manner.

පොඩි පුතා උපාධිය ගන්න තව මාසයයි  
 එක් රස්සා නැතිව ඉන්න වේ දැයි සැකයි  
 මහපොලත් මදි කියා නිතර නහයෙන් අඩයි  
 දුක් විඳින පොඩි එකා ගැන මගේ හිත බයයි. (ලියනගේ, 2016)

Poḍi puthā upādhiya ganna thava māsayai  
 ēth rassā nathiwa inna vē dai saṭai  
 Mahapolath madi kiyā nithara nahayen aḍai  
 duk viḍina poḍi ekā gæna mage hitha bayai

(My younger son has only one more month until he graduates, but I fear he may end up without a job. He often cries, saying even the Mahapola scholarship is not enough, and my heart is worried for that child who is suffering.)

The Mahapola scholarship, which is referred to as “Mahapola allowance,” is a form of financial assistance given to university students in Sri Lanka to help them cover the costs of their education. It is provided without distinction between rich and poor in society. Whether a student comes from a low-income family or a high-income family, the scholarship is awarded based on merit to any eligible student. However, its true value is most deeply felt by children from low-income families such as the “flower-selling mother near Kirivehera.” Ultimately, the poet suggests that, in the face of all these social

and economic struggles, she is unable to realize Nirvana. It also implies that one cannot attain liberation and escape from the suffering of “samsara” all alone.

ඒ නිසා හිමියනේ නිවන මට නම් දුරයි  
තනිව නිවනට ගොසින් සැතපෙන්න අකමැතියි  
සංසාරේ ඇවිදලා පිපාසයි, විඩාවයි  
නිවන නැතිවත් අනේ බණට මං මනාපයි (ලියනගේ, 2016)  
Ē nisā himiyanē niwana mata nam durai  
thaniwa niwanaṭa gosin sēnasenna akamæthiyai  
saṁsāre ævidālā pipāsai, viḍāvai  
niwana nathivath anē baṇaṭa maṁ manāpai

(Therefore, my lord, Nirvana feels distant from me. I do not wish to go alone and find peace in Nirvana. Wandering through samsara, I am thirsty and weary. Even without Nirvana, I still prefer the teachings of the Dhamma.)

She is unable to attain Nirvana alone because she is burdened with many responsibilities: she supports several families through her earnings, works to prevent her only shelter from being lost to foreclosure, and provides financial assistance to a child pursuing university education, among other obligations. In this context, a question arises for the reader: in a society divided by class differences, while Nirvana remains very distant for the oppressed lower classes who suffer under the weight of survival, is it equally distant for those in the upper classes?

“Bhairava is the gatekeeper of Lord Shiva in Hinduism. He is described as a protector of the wealth of others. Discussions about them are mostly associated with hidden treasures. This group of beings known as Bhairavas is said to have very short bodies and limbs resembling those of dwarfish humans, and they are often described as similar in appearance to short-statured people.” (Williams, 2008)

The poem “Bhairavayo,” which is based on this mythological reference to the term Bhairava, is a re-creation that reimagines Bhairavas as guardians who protect grand mansions.

උසැති මහ මන්දිර  
වලාකුළු ප්‍රාකාර පාදමේ  
අතීතය උරුම කළ පටු අඳුරු හුදෙකලා තීරුවේ  
සංසාර බර හිසින්  
දරාගෙන හෙමි හෙමින් ඇවිද යක්... (ලියනගේ, 2016)  
Usæthi maha mandira

valākuḷu prākāra pādamē  
 atīthaya urumakaḷa paṭu aṇḍuru hudekalā thīruvē  
 saṁsāra bara hisin  
 darāgena hemi hemin avidayath...

(Tall, grand mansions, with cloud-like ramparts at their foundations, in the narrow, dark, solitary strip that carries the legacy of the past, bearing the weight of samsara upon their heads, they slowly walk on...)

Here, the poet describes the working-class servants who are never allowed to stand in the front of grand mansions. They are assigned only physically exhausting duties such as guarding the mansion and performing menial labour—what is referred to as “bala-mehewara” (servile work). They receive no recognition or praise, yet they continue to endure both joy and sorrow equally. Using the term “Bhairava,” the poet symbolizes these overlooked workers who silently protect and sustain the wealth and comfort of others.

සතුටට ද, කඳුළට ද  
 එක ලෙසින් උරුම ලද  
 කටුක මන්දස්මිත්ය  
 වෙස් මුහුණ සේ පැලඳ  
 පරමල් ම නිතර ඉවසා හිඳිත් (ලියනගේ, 2016)

Sathutaṭa da, kaṇḍuḷaṭa da  
 eka lesin uruma lada  
 kaṭuka mandasmīthya  
 ves muhuna sē pælaṇḍa  
 paramal ma nithara ivasā hiṇḍith

(To both joy and sorrow, they are equally bound, wearing a bitter, faint smile, like a mask upon the face, they patiently endure only what has withered and fallen.)

“Bitter faint smile” ( Katuka mandasmithaya) refers to the smile that appears on his face while suppressing the hardships and suffering he endures. Those dwarf-like figures at the base of the mansion, who are never noticed or questioned by anyone and who never receive the recognition given to elements such as the moonstone, guard stone, or stair-rail stones (Korawakgala), are presented by the poet as wage laborers who raise their voices for their rights.

ප්‍රභූ පා පහසින් ම  
 නිරන්තර ඔප වැටුණු  
 සොල්දාදු මුරගලිනි  
 දැඩිව රැකවල් බැඳුණු  
 නයනාහිරමණිය

මහරු සඳකඩපහන මායිමේ  
හැමදාම හුරුපුරුදු  
හුදෙකලා කළුවරේ නතර වෙත් (ලියනගේ, 2016)

Prabhū pā pahasin ma  
niranthara opa vætunu  
soldādu muragalini  
dæḍiva rækaval bæḍunu  
nayanābhira-manīya  
maharu saṇḍaka pahaṇa māyimē  
hæmadāma huru purudu  
hudekalā kaḷuvarē nathara veth

(Polished constantly by the footsteps of the elite, they are like soldier-like guard stones, firmly bound in protection, and like the aesthetically beautiful moonstones at the threshold of grand mansions, they always remain stationed in familiar solitude and darkness.)

In the current society, where class divisions remain severe, the lower classes who raise their voices for their rights are effectively made voiceless. When they do speak out, they are often subjected to oppression by political authority, the police, or security forces. As a result, they remain silent and endure everything, because preserving their own lives becomes more important than resistance.

බැටන් පොලු අනුහසින්  
වීස කඳුළු දුම් බෙලෙන්  
නිරතුරුව දුරක එළවන ලදීන්  
අතීතය උරුම කළ  
පටු අඳුරු මාවතට යළි හැරෙත්  
දරා ඉවසා හිඳිත් (ලියනගේ, 2016)

Bætān polu anuhasin  
visa kaṇḍuḷu dum belen  
niranthuruva duraka eḷavanaladin  
atīthaya urumakaḷa  
paṭu aṇḍuru māvathāṭa yaḷi hæreth  
darā ivasā hiṇḍith

(By the force of batons, and the power of tear gas smoke, constantly driven far away.

They return once more to the narrow dark path, inherited from the past, and remain there enduring in silence.)

### 3. Review

This paper examined how Saumya Sandaruwan Liyanage uses religious narratives and religious concepts, while also analyzing their distinctive features and literary contributions to reinterpret the contentious to reinterpret the contentious issues in society. Hence his poetry creates a remarkable mark in modern Sinhala poetry using religious narratives and concepts in his poetic works.

Saumya Sandaruwan Liyanage has achieved success by employing religious narratives and concepts in a way that imparts timeless meaning and suggestive depth to his poetic creations. In doing so, he engages readers at both intellectual and emotional levels, exploring universal themes such as culture, attitudes, thought, and identity through familiar symbols and narratives. Religious narratives and concepts have enabled his poetry to interpret complex ideas while enhancing poetic depth and expanding poetic exploration within a modern spectrum. Through this process, he has been able to draw upon religious, cultural, and humanistic symbols, which in turn facilitate new interpretations by connecting them with contemporary ideas, issues, and contexts. As a result, readers experience the symbolic meanings of poetry as an experience constructed in relation to modern society through religious narratives and concepts.

The symbols, imagery, language, and narrative backgrounds derived from religious stories and concepts have enabled Liyanage to develop a new poetic imagination, offering artistic interpretation and a fresh perspective for understanding the contemporary social context. It is evident that religious narratives have provided him with the linguistic capacity to artistically project modern society, reflected through issues such as class inequality, poverty, racism, war, male dominance, and religious dominance, without resorting to a purely documentary style. Furthermore, his work demonstrates not only the imitation of religious narratives and concepts but also their reinterpretation and re-creation within new meanings and contexts. The appropriate and precise artistic use of religious vocabulary has contributed to his poetic success, and it is also evident that without an understanding of the meanings of these terms, poetry would not achieve its intended effect.

Accordingly, the analysis shows that it was possible to identify religious narratives and concepts and determine their literary value, in Saumya Sandaruwan Liyanage's poetry. It can thus be confirmed that the poet has produced a distinguished body of work through the creative use of religious narratives and related vocabulary, which has become a foundational mechanism for the emergence of a new poetic

generation. This represents a turning point in the modern poetic movement, one that transcends the traditional conventions of poetry that previously relied on religious narratives and concepts.

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