

**‘LANSITUDE’ AND BEYOND: AN INTERTEXTUAL STUDY OF THE  
EMERGENCE OF THE BURGHER FIGURE IN SRI LANKAN  
LITERARY TEXTS**

**Crystal Baines**

*Department of English, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka  
crystalbaines1@gmail.com*

Analyzing the corpus of contemporary Sinhala and English literature produced by Sri Lankan writers, it is interesting to note that the representation of ethnic identities in their works is predominantly influenced by and dependent upon the ethnic iconographies defined at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of the nationalist agenda. This research is an attempt to review the treatment of one such ethnic identity, the Burgher figure, by Sri Lankan writers within an intertextual literary paradigm. For the pioneer writers of the Sinhala novel, the Burgher figure, among other ethno-cultural identities, was extremely instrumental in the articulation of the dominant Sinhala Buddhist nationalist agenda espoused by the likes of Anagarika Dharmapala. It is perhaps no exaggeration to suggest that this image of the Burgher as foil to the early dominant Sinhala nationalist identity, has wittingly or unwittingly taken root in the successive Sinhala literary discourses.

Based on the cultural and ideological positioning of the Burgher figure, predominantly in Sinhala fiction, this paper examines not only the role of the Burgher figure in the ‘creation’ and ‘manifestation’ of the Sinhala Buddhist identity, but also considers the strategies by which the post-independence Burgher writers deal with and respond to the disparaging, often one-sided characterizations and stereotyping of the Burgher in the dominant Sinhala Buddhist discourse.

This study delineates the representation of the Burgher figure in the Sinhala literary discourse for the purpose of conceptualizing a new theoretical view-point, which would facilitate a reevaluation of the Burgher identity in works by the post-independence Burgher writers as a rejoinder to the dominant Sinhala Buddhist discourse. “Lansitude” (derived from ‘Negritude’) is a term coined in order to introduce the said theoretical concept which the Burgher writers, consciously or unconsciously, employ as a strategy to manipulate the discourse of power for the purposes of resisting derogation and engendering group identification through this same discourse. In this sense, this study reconsiders the identity and cultural formation found in works such as *The Jam Fruit Tree* and *Running in the Family*, as possibly a proud appropriation and thereby a reversal of the derogatory epithets leveled against the Burgher by the dominant Sinhala Buddhist discourse. However, this paper is also wary of the said resistant Burgher discourse or “reverse” discourse, for in spite of its subversive potential to challenge the oppressive ideology, it also engenders a ‘reverse-discriminatory’ discourse against the dominant and other ethnic identities.