ORIENTALISM IN PRACTICE: STEREOTYPICAL IMAGES IN SOME SELECTED COLONIAL WRITINGS ON SRI LANKA

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Cultural differences are created and maintained through stereotypical images about various groups of people. Colonialism can be identified as one of the key processes through which such stereotypical images have been produced and propagated. Thus, the production of stereotypes can be considered as integral to the way in which the western culture has spoken of other cultures for generations. Once produced, such stereotypes are being constantly used to elaborate the cultural differences between eastern and western societies even leading towards prejudicial imaginations. Orientalism which can be defined as a systematic structure produced to view the non-western cultures, as Edward Said has argued, has, in fact, enabled the production of stereotypes of the Asian cultures.

Within this broad context, the objective of this research was to identify the stereotypical images present in some selected colonial writings on Sri Lanka. Some selected colonial writings are reviewed to identify the stereotypical descriptions and statements related to Sri Lanka. This study identifies similarities in the basis on which these stereotypical descriptions are made and notices that these stereotypical descriptions form a standard pattern- that of the 'oriental'. The study also pays attention to the distinctions made among various ethnic groups such as Sinhalese, Tamils and Malabars etc. in the process of creating these stereotypical images.

The significance of the study lies in two particular areas. First, this is an area that is not adequately studied. Second, although the relations between West and South Asia grows in pursuit of a greater economic and political cooperation, stereotypical images still form the basis of cultural understanding continuing with the colonial legacy. This study points out that it is essential to explore and argue out the stereotypical images and cultural differences created through them to understand ourselves within the postcolonial context and also to create a better understanding and awareness between western and South Asian societies.