

# The Revolutionary Vision in Sinhala Poetry

I shall examine in the present paper the work of some of the young Sinhala poets produced during the last decade with a view to assessing their attempts at expressing social consciousness through poetry. The work of poets such as G. B. Senanayaka, Gunadasa Amarasekara, Mahagama Sekara and Wimal Dissanayaka will not be studied at length for the reason that their vision of society does not differ very much from what it was in the pre-1970 period. Although in his later works he has showed a much deeper understanding of our society, Mahagama Sekara was not committed to any particular political ideology. The young poets of the present decade, however, show such commitments and they are not reluctant to express frankly their political beliefs. Poets such as Parakrama Kodituvakku, Buddhadasa Galappatti and Monica Ruvanpatirana who are deeply perturbed by the injustice and corruption in society penetrate its lower levels for their subject-matter. These poets seem to have been influenced by the literary dialogue prevailing in the island during the last few years which emphasized that 'Socialist realism' was the prime objective of the artist.

In the 1950s, and 1960s, modern Sinhala poets were, by and large, concerned with expressing individual spiritual experience through poetry. They were dissatisfied with the achievement of their immediate predecessors, the poets of the 'Colombo School,' and considered it their task to find better forms and styles to express the experience and sensibility of the modern age. Poets such as Siri Gunasinghe, Gunadasa, Amarasekara, Mahagama Sekara and Wimal Dissanayaka deserve mention as the pioneers of the modern movement in Sinhala poetry.<sup>1</sup> These poets have broadened its spectrum of experience and worked towards the development of a suitable style. Further the poetry published after 1970 by some of these poets, in contrast to the poetry of politically motivated young poets, differs only slightly from their work before 1970 with regard to subject-matter. Mahagama Sekara's last volume, wherein we find a vision of life deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophy and some other ancient Asian mystical teachings, is an exception.<sup>2</sup>

1. i. Siri Gunasinghe, *Mas Lī Nāti Āṅga* (Bones with No. Flesh or Blood, 1956, *Ratu Kūhula*, (The Red Bul), 1961, *Abhinkama*, (The Renunciation), 1958.
  - ii. Gunadasa Amarasekara, *Uyaneka Hinda Liyā Kavi*, (Poems Written in a Park, 1957), *Bhāva Gīta*, (Emotive Lyrics), 1955 and *Amal Biso*, 1961.
  - iii. Mahagama Sekara *Vyaṅṅā*, *Heṭa Irak Pāyayi*, (Tomorrow Rises a Sun) (1961), *Sakvālihiṇi*, 1962; *Makṇisāda Yat* (Because of...), 1964.
  - iv. Wimal Dissanayaka, *Akal Vūssa*, (Untimely Rain), n.d. *Kalpa Vinasaya* (End of an Aeon n.d.) *Nara Rakṇā* (The Human Demon), 1969 *Indracāpaya* (The Rainbow), 1972.
  - v. Sarat Anunugama, *Hedaṇḍa Ā ā*, (Desires of a Heart), 1963.
2. See Mahagama Sekara. *Preluddha*, posthumously published in 1977.

*Dāl Kavuluva* (Meshed Window, 1973) and *Viñḍimi* (I Feel, 1975) by G. B. Senanayaka resemble his poems in *Pali Gānīma* (The Revenge) of 1946 which are the earliest examples of Sinhala free verse, not only in style but also in subject matter. He expresses his vision of life and philosophical ideas in these two works quite unhindered by the much publicized literary debates of the time. In *Āvarjana* (Reminiscences, 1975) Amarasekara hardly seems to be influenced even slightly by the current trend. He does not advocate 'revolution' as the solution for social problems. Compositions such as 'Pamadāsa' (p. 11), 'Mehekāriyagē miya giya piyā' (The Servant Woman's Dead Father, p. 14), 'Mehekāra Kella (The Woman Servant, p. 52) and 'Sēnagē Vistaraya' (Sena's Story, p. 86) may be cited as the few instances of the author being influenced by the contemporary literary tendencies. Wimal Dissanayaka's poetical works, *Indracāpaya* (1972) and *Rāvḍipilivā* (1975) may be considered the most representative contemporary Sinhala poetry in contrast with the work of the younger poets with political inclinations. Among the poems in *Rāvḍipilivā* the following may remind one of the work of other young poets as regards subject-matter: 'Ātma Apavādayak' (A Self accusation, p. 7) 'Samvādayak' (A dialogue, p. 12) 'Mata magen Ayadumak' (An Appeal from Myself, p. 18), 'Hingana Daruvā' (The Beggar Boy, p. 22) 'Daruvakuge Biya (A Child's Anxiety, p. 32.) These compositions reflect the influence of 'socialist realism' to a considerable extent. In 'The Beggar Boy' the poet reminds 'respectable society' of its responsibility towards a poor suffering child:

His body in search of two eyes  
 lies by the road under the scorching sun  
 his wailing in search of two ears  
 floats in the cruel air  
 his figure, deformed and discoloured  
 reminds me of a creature from the past.  
 I look away averting my eyes,  
 taking a coin from my pocket  
 I offer it to him,  
 hurriedly, without looking back  
 I walk along the pavement, and  
 feel a fierce and black fear  
 with painted nails following me  
 Am I not responsible?  
 for the dark stream  
 that flows through his sinful life.<sup>3</sup>

Most other young poets whose work is discussed in this paper, have also focussed attention on the life of beggars, servants and poor farmers as a means of criticizing the present social order. This poem by Wimal

3. W. Dissanayaka, *Rāvḍipilivā*, 1974, p. 22.

Disanayaka can be compared with 'A Question from a Judge' by Buddhadasa Galappatti in 'A Queen Wept!' In the following analysis of the work of young socialist-minded poets it is clear that they, too, concentrate on similar subjects such as beggars, servants, orphans and prostitutes, but they are more militant and less restrained than Amarasekara or Disanayaka. As a result of the politically motivated literary dialogue of this period<sup>4</sup> the pioneers of the Sinhala free-verse tradition were looked down upon as being petit-bourgeois and ignorant of the true problems of the masses. The young poets were, at the same time, hailed as being genuine artists closer to the common man. However, it will be clear from an analysis of their work that they too do not refrain completely from drawing on the themes and subject-matter often used by their predecessors. But some of these young poets do not evince an interest in the aesthetic aspects of poetry. Their main interest lies in exposing the plight of the masses rather than in paying attention to poetic diction or expressing romantic feelings. It is perhaps this social consciousness which appeals to the minds of youthful readers.

A few examples from the work of these young poets would reveal how radical these poets are as regards subject-matter and vision. "We who belong to the era of man's setting foot on the moon, must change our vision accordingly" is what Tilakaratna Silva states in some of the poems in *Deviyō Tātigena Mahapolovata Eti*, (Alarmed, the Gods Descend to Earth) of 1977;

Misery-poverty-malnutrition-crimes  
 unrest of the young-unemployment-question of slums  
 international conflicts-economic depression-immigration  
 these and many other jaws of degeneration are agape  
 To ward off all these disasters  
 bearing in mind determination like an *Indrakhīla*  
 thinking of the era of man's walking on the moon  
 without wasting time on deciphering palm leaf manuscripts  
 discerning clearly the future way through sage's eyes  
 let's march forward united.<sup>5</sup>

The first part of the above quotation, it has to be admitted, reads like prose, but the second part is enriched with poetic expressions and figures of speech. The consciousness and sensibility shown by this poet of the national as well as international situation must be pointed out as a positive development in the modern Sinhala poetry. The poetical works of Kodituwakku, Galappatti and Ruvanpatirana, who have a most prolific output than other contemporary poets, illustrate social reality, criticize the social order and offer political revolution as the panacea for social problems.

4. See, Simon Navagattegama, *Sāhityaya, Samājāyādeya seka Kala Viāaya*, 1973.

5. Tilakaratne Silva, *Deviyō Tātigena Mahapolovata Eti*, 1971, p. 61.

These young poets are admirers of Marxism and they at times sacrifice artistic quality in their attempts to express boldly their wish for social change:

Leaving the lonely desert for good  
my eyes caught sight of –  
a portrait of a young man  
on the wall of a lecture theatre  
surrounded by a dilapidated barbed wire fence  
coming forward  
casting off chains.<sup>6</sup>

Not in a mansion but in a hovel was I born  
Nor am I a princeling and I have never seen a crown  
Yet I yearn to become a king  
Tell me of a child who became king  
yet was no heir to a crown.<sup>7</sup>

People in a certain land, who lived like you  
Shedding tears from their eyes, uttering sorrowful words  
Went forth suddenly and besieged the palace of their King  
I recount you this tale from a book of history  
There's no other remedy I have learnt from books  
O, men, besiege the kings ruling your land.<sup>8</sup>

Come forward  
bearing arms  
Sacrifice now for a better tomorrow  
Let's march to that brave new world.<sup>9</sup>

In the following poem P. Kodituvakku too expressed his belief that one's lost rights could only be regained through a struggle :

Go, seek, seek forthwith  
Go, seek the driplet of milk carried away by the river  
Pursue your search along the river – tarry not  
Son, go, seek your driplet of milk!  
That drop of milk stolen by a myriad foes  
that drop of milk sucked by poisonous snakes  
Son, that drop of milk, collected by your mother  
to feed you, tossing about upon her bosom.  
that drop of milk.....

Pursue, undaunted, along the river, your search  
Pursue your search throughout the sandy desert now smouldering  
Go forward at once, defying the menacing swords  
Bring back the drop of milk borne away by the river on you birthday.

6. B. Galappatti, *Fāra Vasā Āta*, 1974, p. 6.

7. M. Ruvanpatirana, *Angulimālagē Sihina*, 1974, p. 48

8. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

9. Siri Kahavala, *Obē Gīta Mage Ke ʻdulu*, 1973, p. 6



that day you found and sucked  
 the drop of milk your mother brought  
 to feed you, tossing about upon her bosom  
 you would have become  
 immortal.<sup>10</sup>

To convey his message to the reader, Kodituvakku makes use of the idiom of the Sinhala folk poetry. The 'drop of milk' in this poem symbolizes the lost rights of the masses. The poet has also tried to create a pleasant and powerful style through a blend of classical vocabulary with that of modern usage.

It is evident from the foregoing excerpts that these young poets are very interested in changing the existing social order. They expect to arouse those who are deprived of their rightful place and share in society. If a more detailed survey of the work of these young poets is done, we will then be able to see how they express their revolutionary attitudes even through subjective experience. Although there are several poets, both male and female, belonging to this category, only a few significant ones, whose poetry is not only full of revolutionary ideas but also rich in literary merit, will be examined in this paper.

Senarat Tennakon is comparatively less well-known as a poet. The freshness of his style and the novelty of form somewhat obscure his message of revolution. In *Layimē Hēḍāva* (The Gloom of the Shacks, 1974) and *Hendirikkā Malak* (A Hendirikka Flower, 1976) Tennekoon draws on the reality of the life of estate labourers, farmers as well as the *chena* cultivators in the Dry Zone. Freshness of style is achieved through selecting words from regional dialects and exploiting the resources of folk-poetry. Those characteristics are evident in the following example:

Bearing up all suffering like a *dunuke* flower  
 sighing like queen *Madri*  
 begetting doubts about me  
 Love, I know well, your mind  
 Your fragrance soothes my fatigued self  
 Dear, are you not aware of it?  
 Although borne amongst clusters of *kinihiri* and *dotahu*  
 The *vātake* flower stands out with its fragrance  
 Through the mound of earth in the grave of memory  
 blue grass of happiness springs up  
 But as the price of sarces keeps on shooting up  
 dear, you recede from me.<sup>11</sup>

10. P. Kodituvakku, *Podi Malliya*, 1972, p. 30.

11. S. Tennakon, *Layimē Hēḍāva*, 1974, p. 19.

Tennakon often depicts vignettes of rural Lanka, and looks at people in remote rural areas with feelings of nostalgia and romance. He differs from the poets of the 'Colombo School' in this respect, namely, that he reveals his impressions of the changing countryside without confining himself to mere descriptions of it. The political ideas found occasionally in Tennakon's poetry have not, however, limited his subject-matter. This poet is equally familiar with the life and social problems of the city as with the mental agony of a labourer:

Although I toil sweating  
 with aching limbs I toil  
 bathed in sweat  
 Yet, I am paid only a pittance  
 But to the local 'Pukka Sahib'  
 working under electric fans  
 Warming luxurious chairs  
 smoking cigarettes and telephoning  
 A few thousands as salary  
 Is it for status and position ?  
 Those devoted to developing the country  
 and protecting the nation  
 are starving, abandoned  
 Bouquets for the brainy  
 mud for labouring hands  
 Damn the wretched life-style  
 that creates suffering for us  
 It is with our help  
 a country will progress  
 we who drink water from a coconut shell  
 and eat stale food off a plantain leaf  
 One day with mind and belly raging  
 we, driven mad  
 will regain our rights stolen from us  
 That day, hoisting victory flags skywards  
 we will fashion a new world.<sup>12</sup>

The direct and sincere tone of Tennakon's poetry is one of the positive qualities which distinguishes it from the common run of politically motivated compositions of the day. The rigid control that the poet exercises does not permit the anger of the writer from developing into hatred.

In his latest work, *Hendrikkā Malak*, Tennakon concentrates more upon the life of the poor farmers in the 'Vanni' or the North Central Province. He seems to be very familiar with both the life and dialect of this area

12. *Ibid.* p. 30

which had never before been depicted so vividly and earnestly in Sinhala poetry. It was, perhaps, only the folk poet who depicted the life in the 'Vanni' through 'pāl kavi' (poems of 'chena' watchmen) with a genuine feeling before this poet. In the course of describing the life and feelings of the villagers and farmers and their perennial problems Tennakon repeatedly projects his revolutionary vision. Poems entitled 'Alut Taruvak' (New Star, p. 16), 'Sinha Pātav Avadi Venavā' (Young Lions Are Waking Up, p. 24) 'Putuni' (My Son, p. 42) may be cited as expressions of socialist and revolutionary ideas:

The whole universe changes  
and faces the new sun  
In Asia, the slumbering lion cubs  
are waking up.  
O toiling friends, there's a journey to make  
a journey to make, if not we'll be stranded in the hills  
Brave we would be, if we go  
If we go, the mountains will be rent asunder  
O toiling friends  
join hands, let's go  
go without any delay.<sup>13</sup>

As is evident from the above excerpt, Tennakon, too, like Siri Kaha-vala and Tilakaratne Silva, shows some awareness of the political situation in other countries. Thus, these young poets have contributed towards the widening of the horizons of Sinhala poetry and have added to its range of subject-matter. Tennakon's poems are not always devoted only to depicting village life and expressing socialist ideas. At times, they include general social observations and personal experience as well:

In the mill of life  
turns the wheel of existence  
Warmed by the fire of lust  
the human iron is fashioned  
On the red hot iron  
falls the hammer of sin  
After a long wait in the mill  
smoothened and perfected  
it comes out  
to the market place of society.<sup>14</sup>

This poem shows how the poet has selected appropriate vocabulary and form to suit his theme. Terms such as 'the wheel of existence' and 'the fire of lust' reminding the reader of Buddhism, form a striking contrast

13. S. Tennekon, *Hendrikkā Malak*, 1976, p. 24.

14. S. Tennekon, *Layimē Hēḍāva*, p. 87.

with a term like 'the market place of society.' It is not only due to the freshness of his style but also due to the complicated nature of his themes that Tennakon deserves a special place among contemporary poets. The field of experience in modern Sinhala poetry is generally restricted to city life and university campuses. But we can find a different type of experience and sensibility in Tennakon's work as well as in that of Monica Ruvanpatirana.

Ruvanpatirana, who enjoys a great popularity, is the only contemporary female poet worthy of discussion in a serious study of new Sinhala poetry. Her poems reveal the feelings and problems of an educated young woman of our time—thus adding a touch of femininity to modern Sinhala poetry which had hitherto been male-dominated. Monica Ruvanpatirana has published four collections of poems so far, viz; *Api Denna Saha Tavat Kipa Denek'* (Two of us and a Few Others, 1971), *Tahanam Desayakin* (From a Prohibited Land, 1912), *Angulimālagē Sihina'* (Dreams of Angulimāla) and *Obe Yeheliya Āya Gāhāniya'* (Your Consort, the Woman, 1975).

All these works have enjoyed considerable popularity and recognition. In her first collection of poems Ruvanpatirana deals mostly with youthful romantic feelings, while a few compositions are devoted to stating her experience gained as a government employee.

It is possible that her poems would have a fresh appeal to the Sinhala reader who had for a long time been accustomed to the romantic feelings and intellectual problems of male poets. Simplicity of expression and sincerity must have been the other major factors in her immediate success. Most of the poems in *Tahanam Dēsayakin* have to do as much with personal experience as with the plight of the poor. It is in this volume that Ruvanpatirana emerges as a poet with a deep concern for the plight of the poor and the underprivileged. This social concern and sensibility is a dominant feature in her later work too. The reason for the sufferings of the masses according to her, is the injustice inherent in the present social system. Thus Ruvanpatirana writes about the life of labourers, beggars and prostitutes in the city and farmers in the village in order to expose it:

Your father, imprisoned in the dingy foundry  
beats iron with a hammer, perspiration pouring from body, like lava  
Through the innumerable sparks rising from the iron as he hammers  
Son, the way to your future lies.<sup>15</sup>

To make you happy by putting out the fire in your belly  
Having trudged long through towns and villages  
Daughter I took you to the capital city  
And there, I left you in a big mansion

15. Ruvanpatirana, *Tahanam Dēsayakin*, p. 28.

You, bidding me farewell I beheld  
 Like a flower laden with dew  
 You came back, bringing wealth a plenty  
 Daughter, where is your smile I valued so much?  
 Such comforts I never sought  
 Put out the fire in my heart, not that in the belly.<sup>16</sup>

In the first of these excerpts we see a toiling blacksmith working in his gloomy workshop to earn a living for himself and his son. As the fourth line makes clear the aim of the poet is not mere description but the pointing out to the younger generation a way of liberation through struggle. In the second poem quoted above we are acquainted with the feelings of a poor father on seeing his daughter returning home laden with money, but at the expense of having been sexually exploited. This poem reveals the plight of thousands of poor girls taken to the city as housemaids. Thus, Monica Ruvanpatirana, like many other contemporary young poets, tries to analyse various social ills and vices and to expose them.

Monica Ruvanpatirana's third volume, *Angulimālagē Sihina* (The Dreams of Angulimāla) typifies most of her work, and hence it would be instructive to examine its content to show how the author's mind is steeped in current ideas of socialist realism, and also her attempt at widening the field of experience. The poems in this work can be classified as follows, according to content and theme:

- i. Poems of self-expression,
- ii. Vignettes of office life,
- iii. Descriptions of and reflections on social order.

Out of the three categories it is the poems belonging to categories 2 and 3, that embody a revolutionary vision. 'In the Course of an Interview,' which is the first poem in *Angulimālagē Sihina*, the poet laughs at the routine questions asked at interviews and is amazed that the interviewers do not delve into details of the candidate's personal life. 'God Sakra' is a prayer to Sakra, the king of the heavens in Buddhist literature, drawing his attention to the case of a poor mother toiling the whole day to support her children. 'A Poem Written on 1st of May' shows the poet's feelings of happiness and enthusiasm on witnessing a May Day rally. 'From a Street Walker' is about the thoughts of a street walker who counters the common charge that she kindles the fire of lust in peoples' minds by complaining that she herself is consumed by the fire of anxiety, but that there is no one to put it out. In 'From an Accused,' a poor clerk who is under a cloud complains that though laws prescribe punishment for offences

6. Ibid. p. 29.

they do not consider the circumstances that lead people commit such offences. 'A Poem from a Farmer' reveals conditions in the Dry Zone. The farmer sweats in his field, undergoing all sorts of hardship, but at harvest time, a rich merchant who had not shed a single drop of sweat, comes to the field, and exploits the farmer by paying a low price for his harvest. These themes exemplify how deeply the poet's mind is fixed in reality. She is often moved by the suffering and pain of the downtrodden. Further, we find in her poetry the expression, by a sensitive young female clerk, of the feelings and emotions which are in turn, the products of her innermost being. In the 'Office Song' this is how the poet beseeches the sun:

While you set in the west beholding me pen in hand  
my life dries up like ink drops  
smothered by files I am at the point of death  
Please sun, don't rise tomorrow over my office block.<sup>17</sup>

In poems like this Ruvanpatirana expresses the agony of thousands of her colleagues.

In another short poem, 'Death on the Pavement' attention is focussed on a dead beggar:

In the morning when all the world is awake  
Today, I miss your familiar voice  
in a sun-scorched alley  
why do you sleep still?  
Those who never heeded your cry in the past  
have flocked round you in their thousands  
beholding you huddled in silence,  
Please beggar man, arise from your sleep.<sup>18</sup>

Ruvanpatirana succeeds in this poem in communicating her displeasure at the lack of compassion in people, without sacrificing the poetic quality of her composition. Thus she saves herself from falling into the category of poets whose main concern is the propagation of certain political ideas. 'The Welcome Dance' may be cited as another good example of this positive characteristic.

Having obtained peoples' sanction  
He lifts his head; bows his head  
Now shifting the eyes, now the body, to and fro  
to the accompaniment of the beating drums  
for the sake of someone  
going in procession in a vehicle

17. Ruvanpatirana, *Angulimālagē Sihina*, p. 41

18. *Ibid.* p. 37.

from your barefeet  
 rises up the sound of anklets  
 Down the ages, all alone. sorrowfully  
 You performed your dances  
 and that heritage  
 makes your feet still tread the ground  
 But for you, no semblance of procession  
 Only the molten tears  
 From the heart of a sympathetic earth.<sup>19</sup>

The poet creates a powerful image here, likening the melting tar to the tears of mother earth weeping over the plight of the dancer. It is this type of imagery and a style rich with emotion and humour, that have established Ruvanpatirana as a promising young poet.

We do not intend discussing Monica Ruvanpatirana's latest work *Obē Yeheliya Āya Gāhāniya* (Your Consort the Woman, 1976) as it is devoted to praising the greatness of woman, incidentally showing the author's growing interest in the women's liberation movement.

It would be useful to discuss the work of Buddhadasa Galappatti at this point in our survey since he, too, deals with the same type of subject-matter as Ruvanpatirana and draws his inspiration from similar social situations. Both these poets are equally concerned with the burning problems of our society. Galappatti has four collections of poetry to his credit, viz, *Dolosmahe Pahana* (The Eternal Lamp) which he published in collaboration with Sunil Ariyaratne and Jayalath Manoratne in 1971, *Kāṭapat Pavura* (The Mirror Wall, 1972), *Pāra Vasā Āta* (The Road is Closed, 1974) and *Rājinak Hāṇḍuvāya* (A Queen Wept, 1976). Like Monica Ruvanpatirana, Galappatti too, presents a variety of themes. He employs an emotional style and often writes of love. This is reminiscent of the poetry of Gunadasa Amarasekara. Our discussion of Galappatti's work will be mainly based on *Pāra Vasā Āta* and his latest work *Rājinak Hāṇḍuvāya* as these two volumes consist of poems which are more relevant to our study than his early works.

His poems deal with the reinterpretations of stories and characters selected from classical Sinhala and Buddhist literature, feelings associated with love and romance, the plight of his countrymen and incidents rooted in everyday social life. Poems such as 'My Love' and 'Forgive Me My Son' in '*Pāra Vasā Āta*' resemble the poetry of Monica Ruvanpatirana as regards subject-matter as well as style. Consider the following poems:

Stranded and helpless, I cannot  
 exist, in the desert of life  
 I cannot endure the starving childrens' cry  
 Hence, my love, I fear to love you

19. *Ibid.* p. 35.

The few gold pieces you earn, thirty days being over  
 how will they suffice to support us after marriage  
 for our childrens' schooling and for buying rations  
 what a lot of gold pieces are needed.....  
 To you possessing gold - I pledge,  
 to live my life with you.....<sup>20</sup>

Here instead of presenting a girl who is prepared to sacrifice everything for love, the poet ironically commends the practical nature of the girl who rejects her lover, and thus rebukes society for setting such great store by money.

'The Night I Listened to Ravi Shankar' and 'At Ratnapura Town Hall' in *Pāra Vasā Āta* and 'Your Smell,' 'Vacancies For Jobs' and 'The 1st Day of May' in *Rājīnak Hyṅduwāya* are some of the poems where Galappatti interprets personal experience from a socialist perspective. 'At Ratnapura Town Hall' is a poem about the inhuman treatment of a servant girl by her masters:

Maid Premavati's face is clouded with disappointment  
 Out of the theatre, carrying the baby she goes  
 not fortunate enough to witness  
 the happenings on the stage.  
 Premavati, don't weep,  
 We won't have to cry eternally  
 We will smile one day  
 Hurling away the baby  
 We will smile one day.<sup>21</sup>

Premavati, the maid servant, must have been, probably for the first time in her life, watching a play, 'with open-mouth' as the poet says, but quite unfortunately for her the baby she was holding begins to cry.

'A Question For a Comrade' a poem taken from the same collection is typical of the Sinhala poetry of the present decade:

The green rice sways in the breeze  
 Pearls of perspiration glisten on the body  
 Your body feels no tiredness  
 Your dauntless mind brings you victory  
 But comrade, have you really gained victory?  
 Your toil nourished one who never sweated  
 Someone who never sweated, who  
 used your toil to gain the lead  
 and drank the cup of victory.<sup>22</sup>

20. Galappatti, B. *Pāra Vasā Āta*, 1974, p. 3.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

22. *Ibid.*



Poems such as these which lack novelty of experience and other poetic qualities such as richness in imagery or subtlety of suggestion may not appeal to the serious reader of poetry. But they were promptly accepted by the youthful readers and politically-biased critics as the product of a new generation of poets catering to the needs of our contemporary society. Most of the young poets of this decade appear not to be concerned about originality and pay very little attention to technique.

Ruvanpatirana's poem, 'A Poem From a Farmer' found in *Angulimālagē Sihina* is yet another example in respect of the ideas expressed. All these poets express their sympathy for the poor farmers who work hard to cultivate their fields, and their hatred for the owners of the fields or merchants who reap the crop and give only a trifle to the farmer. The idea underlying the repetition of these facts may be the desire for a complete change in the existing social system, as Siri Kahavala says in the following poem:

We have nothing, but  
 they, possess all the best things  
 in the world  
 There's no place to bury our corpses  
 they possess the best land  
 We live and sleep on the road  
 as they own all houses and mansions  
 Our feet bleed from trudging the roads  
 They own the best cars  
 Love cannot be had without money  
 They take the best women  
 The basis of the division  
 of wealth is wrong  
 Thus, in every competition  
 they can beat us  
 So, let us get together and share out  
 everything in the world again.<sup>24</sup>

Another characteristic of the work of these young poets is the re-interpretation of religious and romantic stories. For instance the following are some of the poems of this category belonging to Galappatti's work: 'Maname Seen in a Dream,' 'Prince Vijaya and Sita,' 'Pabavati is a Fool' in *Dolosmahe Pahana*, 'To Prince Sinhabahu,' 'A Letter From Asokamālā,' and 'True Love was with Ummādacitrā' in *Pāra Vasā Āta*, and 'Yasodarā's Complaint' and 'The Twentieth Century Patācārā' in *Rājīnak Hāndūwaya*. In 'Pabhāvati is a Fool,' Galappatti portrays a girl from contemporary society who falls for a man's physical and superficial qualities and later regrets her mistake. She recalls the story of Princess Pabhāvati in *Kusa Jātaka* and

23. Siri Kahavala, *Obē Gīta Magē Kaṇḍuḷv*, 1973

24. *Ibid*, p. 16

considers her a fool for not appreciating king Kusa's love, disregarding his physical defects. This is how this girl's feelings are presented in plain language:

Had I got married  
to the ugliest man in the world  
I would have been happy  
to the end of my days  
Then that man would have loved me  
With all his being  
Pabhāvati seems to me a fool  
because, she didn't love her husband Kusa,  
A fount of love.<sup>25</sup>

In this simple poem, we are told, how an innocent girl was enticed by a rich, handsome man and later condemned by him to a life of suffering. Princess Pabhāvati rejected Kusa's love because of his ugliness, while this girl accepted an attractive person who does not reciprocate her love.

Thus, we can assume that this poet laughs at the undue importance placed on money and physical beauty in our society, disregarding human feelings and emotions.

At the same time, the poet tries to reveal some facets in the life of the upper-middle class. As an example of the compositions of this category we can also consider 'To Prince Sinhabāhu' which is an appeal to the prince who is the protagonist in the well-known Sinhala play 'Sinhabahu' of Ediriweera Sarachandra. Here the poet recollects how prince Sinhabāhu forced open the stone door of the cave, where he was kept by his father, a lion according to the legend, and gained freedom for his mother, sister and himself. The poet thinks that it was for the whole Sinhala people that Sinhabāhu gained freedom that day. But, that freedom no longer exists. The nation is again imprisoned in a cave. To save the nation, the poet appeals to Sinhabāhu:

Prince Sinhabāhu, come back to us, I pray thee  
Show us again the strength of your mighty hands  
Break down this cave and dispelling our dark thoughts  
Take us to a new world  
glowing with the golden light of liberty.<sup>26</sup>

Through Prince Sinhabāhu's character, the mythical ancestor of the Sinhala, the poet invokes feelings of freedom. According to him, it was Sinhabāhu who gave the Sinhala people their first lesson in fighting for freedom. Thus in almost all his compositions we find feelings of dissatisfaction with the present social order, sympathy for the suffering masses, along

25. B. Galappatti, S. Ariyaratne and J. Manoratne, *Dolosmahe Pahana*, 1971.

26. Galappatti, *Pāva Vasū Āta*, 1974, p. 2

with a wish for a complete change in our political and social systems. Galappatti's strength as a poet lies in his ability to maintain a balance between his political ideas and his emotional, personal experience.

Among contemporary Sinhala poets, Kodituvakku is perhaps the most ardent propagator of revolutionary ideas. He seems to be more politically active than any other young Sinhala poet. This may be one of the reasons for his remarkable enthusiasm for expressing socialist ideas through the medium of poetry. He has published three collections of poetry so far, viz; *Podi Malliye* (To My Younger Brother, 1972), *Akikaru Putraykugē Lōkaya* (The World of a Disobedient Son, 1974) and *Alut Minhek Ävit* (A New Man has Arrived, 1975). These volumes consist of poems containing the feelings of a young revolutionary who is dissatisfied with every aspect of the present social order. 'Judgement of a Revolutionary,' the first poem in *Akikaru Putraykugē Lōkaya*, may be taken as a striking and effective expression of the ideas and hopes of the younger generation. This poem presents a few reports issued by some social institutions on the behaviour of a young revolutionary and, finally, the statement by the accused. His disbelief in traditional social institutions as well as the power of his expectations are implicit in this forceful appeal. The following is a translation of the last section of this poem:

Dont confine me within a shell like a snail  
cutting off the cells  
Don't turn me into a coward  
by preaching morality to me  
Don't convert me into a brute  
by heaping falsehoods on me  
Don't turn me into a pliant disciple  
to whom freedom has been denied  
Permit me to raise questions like Socrates  
Permit me to doubt like Descartes  
Permit me to push on like a river  
Permit me to cut through like a dagger  
Permit me to rise up LIKE A MALE ORGAN.<sup>27</sup>

The rhythm as well as the rhyming of this poem, together with the repeated use of words such as *Nokarav* and *Ida Diyō* add to the power of expression. The belligerence of a rebel is reflected in the vigour, and the forcefulness of the poem. In 'One of Us,' a poem in *Podi Malliye*, Kodituvakku denounces communal and racist ideologies:

Sarasvatī-Nityakalā  
We bathed at the same spot in the river Menik

27. Parakrama Kodituvakku, *Akikaru Putraykugē Lōkaya*, pp 6-7  
The last three words are given in larger type in the original poem.

We worshipped as a common group at 'Sri Pāda'  
 We were inseparable at school too,  
 It was the same at the 'tōse kadē'  
     (where we had *vad-* together)  
 To Somādevī, our office colleague  
 at Kataragama  
 Sivalingam  
 had given his address.....  
 The Elāra Dutugāmunu duel  
 Victory to Dutugāmunu  
 Elāra's body on his elephant !!!  
 Cease your applause  
 Cease your applause  
 Cease your applause  
 Who do you applaud ?  
 Who has got  
 a.....tear.....drop  
 to bestow in his name ?  
 One of our own  
 died in that war  
 a member of our household  
     a blood relation<sup>28</sup>

Here the poet tells the Sinhalese not to rejoice over Dutugamunu's victory, telling them that Elāra was not an enemy but a relation. To substantiate his view, the poet reminds us of common instances from contemporary life when Tamil and Sinhala people participate in common activities, and disregard ethnic differences. While trying to change his attitude towards history, Kodituvakku further attempts to look at traditional methods of learning from a perspective which is centred upon pragmatism:

I beg you to give me a hearing  
 the learning you imparted to me  
 is worthless now  
 For centuries  
 from pathway to pathway  
 along highways and byways  
 through different cities in different lands  
 I wondered but in vain  
 Your learning has not helped me  
 to gain a livelihood.<sup>29</sup>

The above verse is taken from "A Suit against Disāpānok" in *The*

28. Kodituvakku, *Podi Malliye*, pp. 12-13

29. *Ibid*, pp. 17-18.

*World of a Disobedient Son.* The sceptical view of traditional learning as depicted here, may be taken as being typical of the view of today's younger generation, who no longer care for an educational system which does not help them to get immediate employment. Galappatti, too, holds a similar attitude, as is evident from the following example:

But my heart quivers:  
 Will my knowledge be sufficient  
 to overcome obstacles  
 Teachers, who educated me  
 Parents, who brought me up  
 tell me, I beseech you, what else should I learn,  
 to snatch the laurels.<sup>30</sup>

The above quotation from "A Poem without a Title" resembles Kodituvakku's poem "A Suit against Disāpāmok" with regard to the theme in that both the poets doubt the relevance and validity of their education in the context of modern society. While giving an account of the highlights of his career as a promising student in the first part of his poem, Galappatti states his fear about the future especially with regard to employment. Thus he exposes the frustration of educated youth.

These young poets always attempt to inject ideas of social protest even into historical or religious episodes. This is quite clearly seen in such poems as "To the Fortunate Man" and "I am Not Patācārā" in *To My Little Brother* and "A Message from Patācārā," "Lord, Please Come Hither" and "Kisā's Sons" in *The World of a Disobedient Son*. "A Message from Patācārā" is an example of the re-interpretation of a religious story:

A woman who suffered  
 more than anyone in the world  
 crossed the river Aciravatī  
 .....but my Lord,  
 She comes back today  
 without seeing you anywhere  
 with fire of sorrow not extinguished  
 Even by the river Acirvatī.  
 Two children following her  
 stumbling and falling  
 pale with anaemia.  
 Even the river  
 didn't take those children,  
 The hawks in the sky  
 rejected them too  
 .....under the clock tower

30. Galappatti, *Pāra Vasū Āta*, p. 29.

In a drain by the bus stand  
 shaking empty cans  
 spending the night  
 in the police cell  
 and the morning at  
 the V. D. clinic.  
 The gate is closed  
 at Jetavana Vihāra  
 The Lord IN/OUT  
 .....mushrooms blossom  
 eloped for love  
 with a wood chopper  
 leaving behind wealth worth millions  
 and the life on the seventh floor  
 cruel and shallow;  
 like an anthill full of snakes,  
 But the cobra  
 leaving the anthill followed behind,  
 After being bitten,  
 left, alone in the storm  
 — friends,  
 KILL THE COBRA.

I am your ever loving,  
 Paṭācārā."<sup>31</sup>

Here the most important image is that of the 'cobra' which becomes a symbol of the wealthy class to which Paṭācārā's parents belonged. They would never have approved her living with a labourer. Thus the killing of the cobra may be symbolic of the overthrow of the power of the wealthy classes. In this poem, while making use of the main incidents in the story of Paṭācārā, the poet draws attention to the life of a poor prostitute. As we have already noted, this type of re-interpretation of stories taken from classical Sinhala and Buddhist literature is a favourite practice of contemporary poets.

Another significant feature in Kodituvakku's poetry is the manner of depicting of modern society. In his poems of social criticism he becomes aggressive, straightforward and precise. Let us consider the following poems:

Beware of dogs'  
 the sign is no more, father  
 I replaced it with  
 'Come, see the flowers'

31. Kodituvakku, *Akikaru Putrayakugē Lōkaya*, p. 8

I've sent downstream  
 my paper boats  
 along with your myriad gods  
 and other beliefs.  
 You taught me those days  
 'flowers fade'  
 still next morning  
 all flowers will bloom  
 brightly and refreshingly  
 It has not dawned yet  
 still the flowers  
 which are to bloom tomorrow  
 are waiting expectantly  
 the morning to come  
 I see as an urn,  
 and the bright sun  
 as the flowers,  
 the new Taprobane  
 of our life.<sup>32</sup>

In this poem the poet conveys in symbolic form the anticipated victory of the revolution. The unhappy past is like the night while the morning, or the future, is like the bright sun. The disobedient son in this poem makes a confession to his father, revealing how he discarded everything appreciated by his father and accepted everything rejected by him. The poet does not like to live in the past, surrounded by myths and traditions, but tries to break all ties with it. He sets out in search of reality and freedom like Prince Vijaya of the myths who went in search of Tambapanni after being expelled by his father for having been disobedient. Kodituvakku's latest collection, however, includes a few compositions devoid of any aesthetic quality as the poet has deliberately permitted himself to indulge in a bit of propaganda. *Älut Minihek Avit* (New Man Has Arrived) shows lack of originality with regard to themes and careless application of form and technique. Some of the poems in this work, e. g. 'A Long Journey,' "Life is a Kiss, When I am with you," "The Story of the Five Princes" and "The Revolution in the Farm" are essentially propagandist in nature and serve to bolster political views. Consider the following excerpt from 'Life is a Kiss, when I am with you':

At night, lying between wife and son,  
 I see with closing eyes — my comrades  
 gathering round my bed  
 Never will I be alone when amongst you  
 Life is a kiss, when I am with you<sup>33</sup>

32. *Ib d.*, pp, 17-8.

33. P. Kodituvakku, *Älut Minihek Avit*, p. 33.

These are the thoughts of a young social worker. He feels lonely for a moment at home after a hard day's work. As his wife and son are sound asleep, to overcome his feeling of loneliness he ponders over the things said and done during the day. Even as he remembers the enthusiasm shown by some members of the village development society, he is overwhelmed by joy and excitement, as depicted in the last section of the poem quoted above.

Similar ideas are expressed in some other poems in this collection, for instance in "The Revolution in the Farm." In this poems, a picture of a collective farm is painted, the like of which does not exist in our country. The workers, farmers and their leaders are shown to be victorious in the end, like the heroes and heroines of romantic fiction. Though Kodituvakku's later poems, marked by bold presentation of political views, lack poetic quality, his earlier work, which is rich in original imagery, fresh thought and characterised by sensitive and forceful language, will be appreciated by readers.

Some of the major Sinhala poets before 1970 were experimenting with form and language. But their efforts were not well received by the readers and the only poet who continued with his experiments and gained wide popularity was Mahagama Sekara. Unlike Siri Gunasinghe, Gunadasa Amarasekara and Wimal Disanayaka, the post-1970 young poets were basically not concerned about form and the other technical aspects of poetry. These later poets made use of the forms and vocabulary developed by the earlier poets. They explored new aspects of society in their work. Thus, as we have already discussed, instead of the problems of the middle classes and descriptions of nature, a whole new range of subject matter and a new vision of life began to appear in Sinhala poetry after 1970. These young poets had witnessed the plight of the educated youth of the post-1970 period. Several of the young poets of the present decade were involved in or affected by the insurrection of 1971. It will be easier for us to understand these young poets if we place them against this social, economic and political background. The cultural and literary controversy of the early 1970s regarding 'socialist realism' also appear to have influenced these young poets to some extent.

The young poets of the period under review have been greatly successful in popularizing Sinhala poetry among the younger generation and in convincing them of the potential of the free verse form as being the most effective medium of expression. Though some of the work we have examined above is naive and even crude, poets like Ruvanpatirana, Galappatti and Kodituvakku have the talent necessary to produce creative works of enduring value, if only they would pay greater attention to the techniques and craft of poetry.