

Emphatic Symbolism and Drastic Insinuating Events Employed in ‘Uprooted’ (The English Translation of *Gamperaliya*) by Martin Wickramasinghe

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Abstract. This study sheds light on the symbolism and insinuating events of *Uprooted*, the English translation of *Gamperaliya* by Martin Wickramasinghe. *Gamperaliya*, being a landmark fiction of Sri Lankan literature in Sinhala and the first work of trilogy that includes ‘Yuganthaya’ and ‘Kaliyugaya’ is embedded with powerful symbols and suggestive events that exemplify the socio-political scenario and the cultural sensitivity found in the novel. Thus, the study is aimed at identifying and interpreting these to grasp the true and proper social message generated in them through intense textual analysis. In the novel, Martin Wickramasinghe’s main concern is to depict the ‘fall’ of feudal system and the ‘rise’ of capitalistic social system in the face of global changes that inevitably effect on Sri Lankan society. It is rather evident that Martin Wickramasinghe is more or less influenced by Victorian English literature in which fiction dominated the literary scenario with the new trend, fiction realism. The methodology heavily depends on the profound textual analysis of *Uprooted*, through which, it is attempted to identify symbolism and insinuating events that reinforce the themes and techniques of the novel. Though Martin Wickramasinghe has set the story in a provincial hamlet, Koggala, the social transition highlighted in the novel is common to both national and international contexts. The particular social transition is rather effectively reinforced by emphatic symbolism and insinuating events in the novel by Martin Wickramasinghe.

Key words: *Gamperaliya*, Symbolism, Social Transition, Textual analysis, Fiction realism

Introduction

*Gamperaliya*¹, written in 1944, is considered to be a ground-breaking fiction in Sri Lankan literature mainly due to the fiction realism incorporated in the novel, compared to the popular historical novels established earlier. *Gamperaliya*¹ is the first fiction of the trilogy: the other two being *Yuganthaya* (1949) and *Kaliyugaya* (1957) (Wickramasinghe, 1963), and all three have successfully been produced in film versions by veteran cinematographer, Dr Lester James Pieris. The fiction realism which was popularized by great Victorian writers, to name a few, Bronte sisters through *Wuthering Heights* (1947) and *Jane Eyre* (1947), Charles Dickens through *Great Expectations* (1861), *Tale of Two Cities* (1870) etc, and George Elliot by *Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Silas Marner* (1861) (Gamage, 2020), was with all its essence introduced to Sri Lankan Sinhala literature by Martin Wickramasinghe mainly through *Gamperaliya*¹.

Although the novel was written in 1944, the story initiates in 1904, and it runs for 40 years depicting the socio political and cultural transition took place during the period and beyond. The social transition that took place in Europe with the industrial revolution followed by urbanization appeared quite late in Sri Lanka. London being the first urbanized city in the world and Sri Lanka being a part of the British colony, the Victorian influence in Sri Lankan socio political milieu is quite undeniable. Thus, Martin Wickramasinghe as his title suggests incorporates socio political changes that took place in his village – ‘*Gamperaliya*’. However,

¹ වික්‍රමසිංහ, මා(ර්)ටින්, 1944, 2019, (දෙවන මුද්‍රණය), ගම්පෙරළිය, රාජගිරිය: සරස ජරකාශකයෝ.

although he takes his own village, Koggala situated between Galle and Ahangama in Southern province in Sri Lanka, as the setting, he showcases the socio-political changes in Sri Lankan society in general. The process initiated after industrial revolution was enriched by scientific advancement, technological development and expansion of trade and commerce. This scenario paved the way for capitalism to emerge as a replacement for feudalism which was deeply established creating a vast gap between the rich and the poor. This particular backdrop is reflected in the contemporary literature in global context too, *Great Expectations*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Russian Masterpiece*, *The Cherry Orchard* (1893) by Anton Chekov could be a few prolific examples to cite (Gamage, 2020).

'Uprooted' (*Gamperaliya*)² rather emphatically depicts the aforesaid social transition with the inevitable deterioration of Mahagedara headed by Kaisaruwathe Muhandiram, and 'the rise' of Piyal, low class person emerging to be the richest in the village within few years. One of the most noteworthy factors of this 'role reversal' (Gamage, 2020) is that Martin Wickramasinghe highlights the importance of education, specially the English education. Piyal is the most educated person in the village, known to be 'Iskole Mahaththaya' (the school teacher) and his knowledge of English paved him the way to succeed in no time. Though the novel sets a legendary move in Sri Lankan fiction writing, and is recognized to be one of the best of all time, the social message inculcated in the work by the writer Wickramasinghe, was not in true sense realized by the authorities concerned. English education did not gain its due recognition after 50s and 60s and subsequently almost two generations suffered (Wijesinha, 1998; Sarathchandra, 1950).

However, *Gamperaliya*¹ undoubtedly is a classic with a predictive validity as it foresees the social transition or one may call it 'role reversal' (Gamage, 2020) that took place after the open economy which was introduced by the then President, JR Jayawardena in late 1970s. With the introduction of open economy what Martin Wickramasinghe predicted in *Gamperaliya* in 1944 became quite obvious – 'Kaisaruwatte Muhandirams' were fast fading away and 'Piyals' were emerging with great guns from all parts of the country. There is no doubt that the open economy had diverse ill effects on the Sri Lankan society, yet, it paves the way for social mobility for the hard-working, talented people of the middle class and lower classes to climb up on the social ladder. Subsequently, the caste system which was deeply rooted in Sri Lanka began to lose its base and the class system is strongly established in Sri Lanka now.

Martin Wickramasinghe, through this masterpiece, brings in a very authentic picture of Sri Lankan culture too. Therefore, the novel should be praised for not only for the social criticism and predictive validity but also for the cultural sensitivity inculcated in the novel. It pictures the New year festival (festive season in April in Sri Lanka) which is celebrated by both the Sinhala and Tamil people. The joyous environment naturally created in the new year time is very vividly portrayed in the novel. People wearing new clothes, relatives visiting, most of the people visit Mahagedara and typical Sri Lankan domestic games like 'Panchi' is also introduced by Martin Wickramasinghe. The novel contains three weddings which are drastically different from each other, Jinadasa-Nanda, Piyal-Nanda and Laisa's.

The humble celebration of Jinadasa-Nanda wedding is far more different from the grand celebration of Piyal-Nanda's. The dresses, jewellery, music, motor car and the guests loudly proclaim Piyal's economic stability and extravagance compared to poor Jinadasa's wedding with Nanda. In addition to these, the funeral of Kaisaruwatte, the 'Thovil' conducted to cure Nanda, the journey to Paragoda temple too mirror Sri Lankan culture in diverse aspects (Wickramasinghe, 1963; Dissanayake, 2009).

² de Silva, L. & Wickramasinghe, R. (2017). *Uprooted* (5th ed.) (The English translation of *Gamperaliya*). Colombo: Sarasa (Pvt) Limited.

Romance is one of the most under estimated themes in *Gamperaliya*¹. Nevertheless, it is very significant as a romantic novel as well; both the major characters in the novel, Piyal and Nanda seem to have similar perceptions in love. Piyal looks to be ‘one woman man’- one who could love only one in his lifetime and Nanda too, though she marries Jinadasa and had been very faithful to him in every sense, it seems that she only loved Piyal. Subsequent to Piyal leaving the village, Nanda became sick, and when Jinadasa was missing without a trace, Piyal proposed to Nanda to come and live in his house. Nanda became sick, obviously feeling that she would lose Piyal again as she vehemently rejected what was suggested by Piyal. These would add enough proof that Nanda too is ‘one-man woman’. Piyal, on the other, hand would have easily married a more beautiful woman with a higher social standing, yet, he patiently waited till the marriage with Nanda got materialized.

Methodology

It is a close textual analysis of ‘Uprooted’² (the English translation of *Gamperaliya*, translated by Lakshmi De Silva and Ranga Wickramasinghe). This prolific novel contains emphatic symbols and insinuating events that need to be comprehended in the proper sense to understand underlined, socio political message inculcated in the novel. Therefore, the research paper mainly sheds light on the analysis of most emphatic symbols and events, and how they enrich the main themes of the novel in relation to the particular time, the novel is set and the time afterwards.

As *Gamperaliya*¹ is well known for fiction realism which was quite unknown to Sri Lankan literature at the time, it also brings in symbols and suggestive events that are extremely true-to-the nature or, in other words, may come across or happen timeless and placeless in Sri Lanka.

Discussion and Analysis

The death of Nanda Jinadasa’s infant is one of the most felt happenings in the novel, which generates a very deep social message. What Martin Wickramasinghe, in fact, reveals here is that the end of feudalistic society; feudal system is incapable of progressing anymore – it should come to an end. This deteriorating class has no future whatsoever and the two people, Jinadasa and Nanda, two from feudalistic society are incapable of joining forces and producing anything new. Wickramasinghe (also hints that feudalism plus capitalism may produce a new generation, however the present generation of feudal class has no future generation, and it is the end of it.

“Nanda gave birth to a boy... the baby looked ill... an hour after the infant had died” (p. 107)².

‘Mahagedara’, the ancestral house, is an extended symbol in the novel. It is a large house, “the walls of this house are too feet thick, and the heavy jack wood frames and windows, darkened by the age to a mellow brown, match the massive walls (p. 3)².

It doubtlessly, represents the system and ‘two feet thickness of walls’ suggests that it was built to survive forever. Yet, everything changes; one system should give way for another. By the time the novel commences, the deterioration of Mahagedara has already begun.

“This house would decline to an irreparable state to decay in a few decades.” (p. 5)².

The fact is further reinforced by the unstoppable leakages that occur simultaneously. “drops of water splash on to the floor in a corner of the hall. Matarahamine looked up at the roof and saw the water dropping through the cracked tile” (p. 59)².

“It was not only in the hall that that water dripped onto the floor through the broken tiles.” “the leaks in the roof had contributed to the hastening of the inevitable decay of the Mahagedara” (p. 60)².

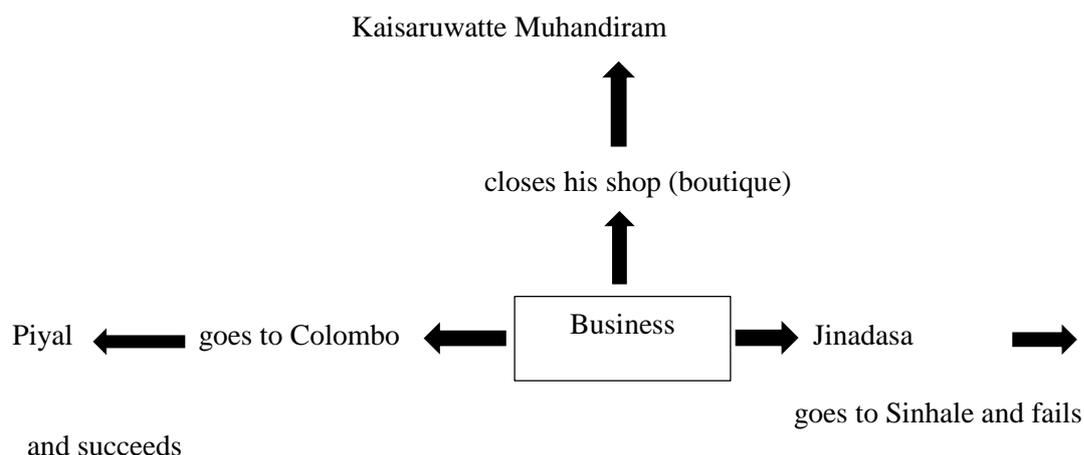
Martine Wickramasinghe here implies that it is not the house, Mahagedara, that leaks, it is the system that has reached to its end leaks and it is not just the house which is in an irreparable state but the system that undergoes the inevitable decay.

Martin Wickramasinghe rather effectively coins the “leak” with the character of Tissa, the youngest, the only son of Mahagedara and, above all, the heir of Mahagedara. The general family expectation is that when father is gone, the son would rise to the occasion as the responsibility of maintaining social status is often thrust upon the heir, the youngest son of the house. However in this case, it is not to be; “the dull tuk tuk sound came from the raindrops striking the mat spread on tissa’s bed. The sound of deep inhaling and explanation of breath indicated to Nanda that he was sleeping soundly” (p. 115)².

This suggests that Tissa is not at any means capable of performing what is demanded in the situation, and Nanda says when inquired by Jinadasa, “yes Tissa was fast asleep” (p. 115)².

The huge mango tree in the compound of Mahagedara too depicts the inevitable process of deterioration, Mahagedara undergoes in the particular transitional period... “in the past this seems to have more fruit than leaves. That is no longer bore fruit, was a portent of the declining fortunes of the Mahagedara” (p. 66)².

It was the time of the expansion of trade and commerce all over the world. As capitalism was emerging, business plays a crucial role in the novel. At the outset of the novel, Kaisaruwatte Muhandiram closes his shop (boutique) putting the blame on Carolis, which suggests the bankruptcy of Mahagedara, denying the only steady income they received at the time. With the painful rejection from Mahagedara, Piyal’s intention was also to be an entrepreneur, though he started his career as a clerk. With his education, especially with the English education, he had not only the courage but also provisions to go to Colombo, and subsequently, succeeds in no time. On contrary to that, Jinadasa mortgaging his last remaining property goes to sinhale, a remote area in upcountry, and fails miserably as he lacks educational background and kind of personality, Piyal possesses. The profound deficiency of this aristocracy was they never knew how to make money but only to spend the money.



At the proposal brought by Piyal to Mahagedara to marry Nanda, the Kaisaruwatte’s spontaneous reaction was “how dare these fellows seek marriage ties with our family” (p. 52)². Nanda and Piyal belong to the same caste but the fact was ‘lowly social status’ Piyal had as people of the village still could remember “Piyal’s grandfather carry a pingo on his shoulders hawking vegetables in the village (p. 75) ². In this case, Piyal’s grandfather is a vegetable supplier and his grandson who begins his career as a clerk later becomes “a well established supplier of provisions” (p. 73) ². Both the grandfather and grandson look to earn

their living in the same way. However, Piyal was well received even by Mahagedara people later. When Piyal began to visit Mahagedara as a well established businessman, he was warmly welcome. The initial spontaneous responses at the proposal brought forward by Kathirina – “who will give anyone in marriage to the likes of such fellows” (p. 30)² and “how dare these fellows seek marriage ties with our family” (p. 52)² were no longer valid, in the face of economic stability or “new money”.

At the outset of the novel, Nanda ends up in the losing side in the ‘Panchi’ game and Piyal offers- “Nanda here is the money you lost”

“I don’t want it” Nanda slapped the palm with the coin (p. 9)² and Piyal further inquires

“Why don’t you accept a new year gift from me?”

“Why should I accept a gift from you?” “Nanda’s voice conveyed disdain of a lady of high birth for a presumptuous stranger” (p. 12).

However, after the social shift, Mahagedara could no longer maintain its social status and Piyal emerges as a very promising entrepreneur, not only at the village level but at the national level. In the occasion, where the second marriage of Nanda takes place, there was no objection whatsoever.

“Piyal not only provided Nanda’s clothes and accessories but Anula’s as well” (p. 185)². When “a huge breadfruit tree uprooted by a gale that with the rains fell on Mahagedara bringing down the wall and roof the left wing of the house” (p. 202)². It was Piyal who provides money at the request of Nanda, “Piyal sent Nanda five hundred rupees” (p. 203)², although both are well aware that “these practical steps did not hold the gradual deterioration of the house” (p. 203)².

The capital, money, plays a key role in the last part of the novel. Though “Nanda slaps” the palm with a coin of Piyal, she was made to spend Piyal’s money to do the last activities of Jinadasa. In the face of Piyal’s remark “so it was my money that you used to get down the Bhikkus and perform the last rites to bury Jinadasa, in fulfillment of your obligations to him” (p. 219)². Nanda is utterly helpless even though “the searing sarcasm of Piyal’s cruel words, made Nanda recoil, as if she had been whipped” (p. 219)².

However, the novel ends in romance, Piyal as an educated gentleman apologizes hinting that it is not the money but Nanda’s concern over Jinadasa that made him angry, which could be easily proven true in general human nature.

“Forgive me Nanda..” I did not mean what I said. It was an angry outburst” (p. 221)² and Piyal further adds “Yes Nanda I got angry because I love you so much” (p. 222)².

Subsequent to the death of Kaisaruwatte Muhandiram, Matara Hamine decides to sell the writing table of her husband due to the financial difficulties nodding their way. Selling their property and pawning their jewelry became part of the living in the process of downfall of this feudal class. However, while dusting and wiping, Matara Hamine comes across some letters “that appeared to be written in a feminine hand” (p. 98)², then found to be written by Kathirina ; “one of the letters ended with words “Punchi Appu has gone to Devundara ; he returns the day after”(p. 98)². Mathara Hamine, however was not so disturbed, for, “all three letters had been written seven or eight months before the marriage” (p. 99)².

Yet, “when she recalled Kathirina’s daughter Laisa, her anger increased. Like the Muhanduram’s Laisa’s smile brought a dimple to the point of her chin. Her lips were more like Muhandiram’s not Kathirina’s or Punchi appu’s made her so disturbed and got “feeling of anger and sorrow” (p. 99)².

Whether Kaisaruwatte Muhandiram continues his affair with Kathirina after his marriage to Matara hamine is an important question to pose. By the time the novel, ‘*Gamperaliya*’¹ begins, Anula has lost her hopes to marry, and she is considered to be overaged for marriage and in that case, Laisa who gets married even after Nanda (first

marriage) should obviously be younger than Anula. This proves the fact that Kaisaruwatte Muhandiram continues his affair with Kathirina after the marriage and Karolis visiting Kathirina's place to meet Laisa would have been a threat to him, therefore, Karolis was sent to 'Sinhale'.

In mid 20th century, urbanization broke loose in Sri Lanka too. People started to settle in Colombo mainly for employment and with the 'Colombo-offers-you-everything' concept. As Piyal remarks "it is easy for anyone to be happy in Colombo, and after few days even forget the village" (p. 125)². Due to the facilities like pipe-borne water, electricity, easy transport and opportunities for employment and education, what Piyal emphasizes had been a social reality, and thousands of people chose Colombo as their permanent residence.

It is Piyal who brings a motor car to the village, Koggala for the first time. The car, not only exemplifies the wealth of Piyal but could also be considered a symbol of industrialization that expands to every nook and corner both in the global context and Sri Lankan context.

Babunhamy, Piyal's mother is very supportive to Piyal for all his endeavors, and she not only saves money but makes money through various odd ways. With the high social status and prestige Piyal receives his mother, Babunhamy too becomes 'Waligama Hamine' towards the end of the story. There is only solitary Hamine, Matara Hamine in the village at the outset of the novel but in the end, 'two Hamines' and they also become close relatives, which is also an example for the inevitable role reversal that took place over the years at the village level as well as at the national level.

Conclusion

Gamperaliya, through which fiction realism was introduced to Sri Lankan Sinhala literature in its true sense is significantly consisted of emphatic symbols and insinuating events that reinforce socio political message, Martin Wickramasinghe intends to convey. In literature, what is most important is not what is said but what is not said (Gamage, 2020). Therefore, the proper understanding of the symbols and insinuations is rather crucial in appreciation of a literary piece, whatever it could be. Thus, this research paper aimed at identifying the aforesaid, and elucidating them in a subjective perspective to develop profound meanings of them, and serious social message that are incorporated into them. Inadequacy may lie in not being able to cover all the symbols and insinuations of such a prolific work like *Gamperaliya*¹, which could also be identified as a limitation of the research. However, that paves the provisions for further research on the same research area. Nevertheless, in *Gamperaliya*, Martin Wickramasinghe has employed very emphatic symbols and powerful insinuations to reinforce socio political scenario he mainly showcases in the novel; the deterioration of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism.

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