

A Study of the Form of the Elephant as the Subject of Indigenous Painters and Colonial Artists in Their Paintings in the Sri Lankan Context

P. K. Isuru Suren

Department of Painting, University of the Visual and Performing Arts

isurusurenart@gmail.com

The elephant has been a subject in Sri Lankan visual art in its many forms for a long time, reflected in traditional paintings. Correspondingly, in the Sri Lankan context during the British colonial period, elephants were a main subject of colonial painters, and the peculiarities of their depictions can be identified. One of the objectives of this research is to study the metaphor called the elephant, the form recognised by the painters related to two positions and contexts, as well as its similarities or dissimilarities as well as diversity. This research aims to study how one metaphor is guided by two different parties in the association of visual expression based on socio-political needs. Identifying the ideological orientations of elephants in the paintings of Sri Lankan and Western painters in relation to their representational characteristics is the basic problem of the research. As well as the pictorial elephant associated with Sri Lankan traditional mural paintings of the 18th - 19th centuries, watercolour paintings depicting elephants from the contemporary English period (1796 - 1948) are used as a basis for research. Subject to those research limitations, the research process takes place by selecting only paintings of exceptional importance. By approaching the places with relevant painting sources and based on the information obtained from research books and articles, the qualitative and metaphysical method has been adopted for the research process. Although the native artist had been more intimately acquainted with the elephant since ancient times, it was a new experience and curiosity for the colonial artificer. In accordance with the changes in the Sri Lankan context during the period of British rule, people's lives and traditional agriculture were changing, and development activities and the plantation industry came to the fore. In that association, the coloniser recognised the elephant as an animal with a beautiful and utilitarian value, an animal to be tamed on occasion, and a highly inspired animal for hunting. It is concluded that the elephant has been used to strengthen the religious and socio-political ideology by attributing a cultural value and grandeur to the local artist and that the British colonialist artist has ideologically guided the hand image by exploiting the peculiarities and identities of their colonies to create passions and to get the space needed to carry out their projects smoothly.

Keywords: Sri Lankan Traditional Paintings, Colonial Artists, Colonial Watercolor Paintings, Elephant, Ideological Approaches