

**A critical study on the women in Sri Lanka as depicted in
Henry Parker's Village Folk Tales of Ceylon**

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On being appointed by the Secretary of State for Colonies as an irrigation officer, Henry Parker arrived in Ceylon in July 1873. First posted to the North Central Province, he was then transferred to the North Western and the Southern Provinces respectively. Thus, he was able to become acquainted with a cross-section of the inhabitants and to get an insight into their different life styles, customs, beliefs, manners and so on. Being a very humane and unassuming character, Parker was able to associate with the local population closely and with ease. He became fascinated by their vast treasures of folk tales, which prompted him to collect them and commit them to writing in the same simple way in which they were narrated to him by the villagers. The final product was printed in 1910 with the title *Village Folk Tales of Ceylon*. When viewed from a socio-cultural standpoint, this collection is an inevitable source to understand the lives of women at the time as it depicts a fairly accurate picture of the contemporary society. Through a close analysis of the tales it is possible to obtain valuable information that will contribute to the creation of an accurate picture of women in Sri Lanka at that time. The theoretical approaches adopted in this study is the sociology of literature and feminist theory. An attempt is made to study how women functioned in the contemporary society as depicted in Henry Parker's collection of folk tales translated into Sinhala by Chandra Sri Ranasinghe. In addition, inscriptions and other documents relating to history and socio cultural themes as well as relevant literary sources have also been utilized as secondary resources.

Key words: Henry Parker, folktales, depiction of women