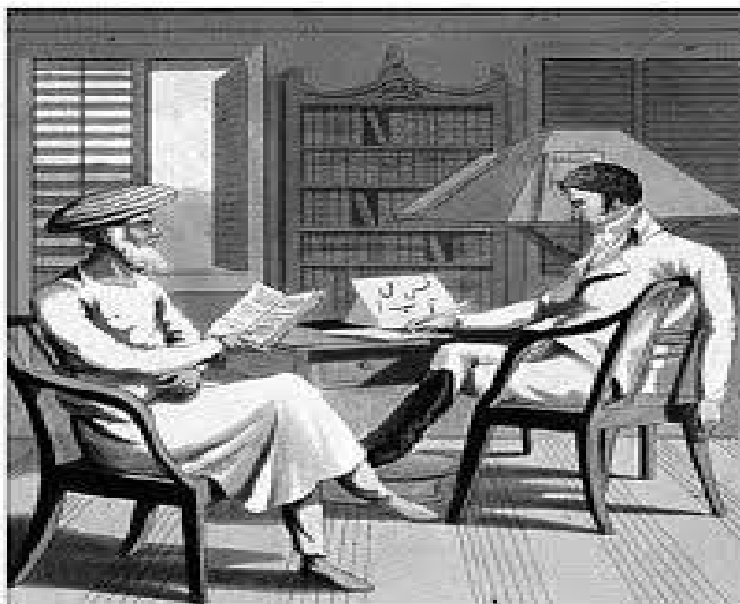


The National Trust – Sri Lanka
Monthly Lecture Series No- 129
October 29, 2020

Colonial Knowledge Formation under British Rule and
Modern Sri Lankan Historiography

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I am extremely thankful to Mr. Kanag-Isvaran, Chairman, the National Trust- Sri Lanka, for introducing me to this distinguished audience. I take this opportunity to thank the National Trust for the honour, bestowed upon me by inviting to deliverer this lecture. I really appreciate the kindness of Mr. Wickremerathne, Vice-Chair of the National Trust, who contacted me on behalf of the National Trust first, for giving me the liberty to decide the theme of the lecture. I decided to present my thoughts on 'Colonial Knowledge Formation under British Rule and Modern Lankan Historiography'.

I am a historian by training. I am proud to be a historian. What we study in history is not really a dead past. Even though the events and personalities that we study are dead and gone, the thinking process behind these events and personalities are living and reemerging again and again in the minds of generation after generation. In that sense, all history is contemporary. The theme we discuss today is more relevant to the contemporary Sri Lankan political discourses. Tracing the genealogy of modern Sri Lankan historiography would help understand historical roots of the concepts on which the contemporary political discourse is centered.

In my lecture I wish to elaborate three main points. First, the knowledge formation was a key component of the British colonialism project in Sri Lanka. The political and economic aspects of colonialism, the political domination and the extraction of resources have been given adequate attention. But, without paying attention to the Colonial knowledge formation, the totality of British colonial project cannot be grasped. Second, re-reading history in terms colonial political categories is a main component of colonial knowledge formation. The gathering information about the past of the colonial territories and their subjects was considered essential for building colonial hegemony and resource mobilization and exploitation in colonial territories. Third, the modern Sri Lankan Historiography took its form in the context of colonial knowledge formation under British rule. The main thrust of my argument is that modern Sri Lankan Historiography originated as a British colonial project.

Re-reading Sri Lankan History under British rule did not take place in an empty space. What really happened was that the text of pre-colonial Sri Lankan

historiography was re-read in terms of the evolving new political categories. As a point of departure to my argument, I wish to draw your attention to attention to Historical traditions in Sri Lanka prior to colonialism.

Pre-colonial Sri Lankan Historiography

Sri Lanka had one of the oldest and continuous historical traditions in Asia. The origin of this historical tradition could be traced back to the introduction of Buddhism to the island in the 3rd century BC. When the Buddhist cannons were presented, they accompanied an historical introduction in the form of *attakatha* in order to prove that it was the true Buddha's teaching. Accordingly, *attakatha* to the *Pitaka* became an integral part of the introduction of Buddhism. This historical tradition was naturalized subsequently in Sri Lankan soil and the Sinhala *attakatha* were produced with added details of the history of the island. The Buddhist texts in Sinhala, including the commentaries, were once again translated into Pali in the 5th century A.D. The *Samantapasadhika* is a Pali translation of the Sinhala *atuvva* of *Vinaya Pitaka*.

As a number of Buddhist centers of learning emerged in the island, there were many variations of historical narrations. The available evidence clearly shows that the ancient historical thinking of the island was enriched with multiple perspectives. In order to understand the ancient historical traditions of the island, *Mahawamsa* and its tika, *Vamsatthappakasini* are very useful. According to Mahavamsa Tika, the *Mahavamsa* was based on the *Sihalatthakatha Mahavamsa*. The *Vamsatthappakasini* mentions about *Uttaraviharatthakata* and also *Uttaravihara-vasinam Mahavamsa*. *Uttaravihara* was Abhayagiriya, a rival Buddhist center that competed with Mahavihara. *Uttaravihara* historical perspective was not similar to Mahavihara. Almost all the quotations from the *Uttaraviharatthakata* in *Mahawamsa* are either to point out differences in the tradition or to provide additional information not found in *Sihalatthakata*. The author of *Mahavamsa* (first part) was Mahanama thera of Mahavihara and it presented the tradition nurtured in the Mahavihara.

The earliest known chronicle of the island was *Dipavamsa*, written around the mid 4th century A.D., little earlier than *Mahavamsa*. As Luxman Su Perera pointed out, *Deepawamsa* gives us a fair indication of the nature of the early historical tradition. “ The memory verses, the double versions and numerous repetitions show that it stands very close to the original. Consequently, it gives us a fair indication of the nature of the early historical tradition. The many references to *bhikkunis* have led scholars to suppose that this may be the work of the *bhikkunis* of the in the Hatthalhaka nunnery.

Even though there were multiple narratives, the unique place of the *Mahavamsa* and its overriding importance must not be underestimated. It continued to shape the dominant historical thinking of the island for generations. The *Mahavamsa* was in circulation as reference material for generations up to the 18th century. It is evident from a reference made by John Davy a medical officer of the British Army who served in Sri Lanka in the period 1816-1820, in his book, *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and of its Inhabitants*.

The historical sketch which forms the tenth chapter, and concludes the first part of the work, was drawn up chiefly from the information which I was so fortunate as to extract from the late Dissava of Welassey, Malawa, an old man of shrewd intellect, a poet, historian, and astrologer, and generally allowed by his countryman to be the most able and learned of all the Kandyan chiefs. Part of the information that he communicated was given from a very retentive memory, and part was drawn from an old chronicle, or other historical romance of Ceylon, which he had by him, and to which he referred when his memory failed him.

The ‘old chronicle’ that Davy referred to was no doubt *Mahavamsa*.

Pre-modern Sri Lanka historiography emerged and sustained in a particular socio-political and economic order. It was an organic part of reproduction of culture in that particular socio-political order. This order was replaced by a colonial order under the British rule. The colonial knowledge generation on acquired territories and subjugated people was a key component of colonial project.

Colonial knowledge formation

The practice of gathering information on the land, people, religions and languages of the East by colonial agents began from the very beginning of western

colonial encounters in Asia. The Christian missionaries took the lead. They believed that familiarity of native languages, manners and customs would be essential in carrying out missionary work successfully.

Building knowledge of the colonial territories and their people in the East reached a new phase in the mid-19th century along with British colonial dominance in Asia. Its epicenter of British colonialism in Asia was India. Soon after the British acquired Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in the second half of the 18th century, the process of studying the people and their language and culture commenced systematically with the patronage of Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of British India. The connection between the colonial power projects and the renewed interest in the study of ancient languages, religions and history of the oriental people is abundantly clear. With the help of Brahmin Pandiths, Charles Wilkings *translated Bhagavad Gîtâ* into English in 1785. Writing a preface to the first English translation, Warren Hastings stated:

Every accumulation of knowledge and especially such as is obtained by social communication with the people over whom we exercise domination founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state...it attracts and conciliates distant affections; it lessens the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in subjugation; and it imprints on the hearts of our countrymen the sense of obligation and benevolence....Every instance which brings their real character home to observation will impress us with more generous sense of feeling for their natural rights, and teach us to estimate them by the measure of our own.

Charles Wilkins and Nathaniel Halhed, writers of the British East India Company in Bengal were among the first to study the Sanskrit. In 1783, William Jones came to India as a judge in the newly established Supreme Court of Bengal. As a judge in the Supreme Court, he was first interested in translating *Manusmati* (Laws of Manu) into English. He later translated Kalidasa's *Abhiknana Shakuntala* and *Ritu Samhara*, and Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* into English. In the process of studying the society, he started learning Indian languages with the help of Brahmin Pundits of Bengal. William Jones was instrumental in establishing the Asiatick Society in 1784

in Bengal under the patronage of the Governor General Warren Hastings. In the third anniversary lecture of the Bengal Asiatic Society in 1786, William Jones stated:

The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologist could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists.

This statement not only challenged then prevailing Western perceptions of language history but also paved the way for the development of racial anthropology. William Jones statement of common source of origin of Sanskrit and the European classical languages received a wide publicity. European philologists, historians, archeologists and ethnologists rushed to the East for intellectual pursuits in colonial environment.

In 1800, Governor Lord Wellesley established the Fort Williams College in Calcutta in order to train colonial civil servants. The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Fort William College became one seat of Orientalist research where the concept of Indo-European family of languages originated. A while later, in 1812, Francis Whyte Ellis Colonial Collector of Madras presidency established the College of Fort St George to train young colonial civil servants of the Company in South India. The colonial administration in Madras, the Literary Society of Madras and the College of Fort St. George remained the triad of the Madras School of Orientalism. In 1816, F.W. Ellis first published proofs of the existence of the Dravidian language family, after studying '*dhatu malas*' of the three South Indian languages- Telugu, Kannada and Tamil.

In 1856, Bishop Robert Caldwell, elaborated it further and used the term 'Dravidian' to identify that language group in his *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*. by quoting Pānini and other ancient grammarians, Henry T. Colebrooke had argued in his article in *Asian researches* in 1801, titled 'On the Sanskrit and Prakrit languages', that Prakrit was the precursors of modern Indian languages, giving birth to the concept of linguistic unity of India.

Now, the concept of linguistic unity of India was challenged by the Madras School of Orientalists, namely, Ellis, Campbell, and Caldwell.

Even though Britain took the lead in building new knowledge on the East but the other European colonial powers also claimed their shares. The first Oriental Society in Europe was the one founded by the Dutch in 1781 in order to map the languages in South East Asia. While Britain had its Royal Society (1823) the French had its own society- *Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles Lettres*. The competition between British and French orientalists to claim authority on oriental scholarship provided an impetus to 'Oriental Studies'. Anquetil-Duperron, who worked for the French India Company in Pondicherry, returned to Paris with over two hundred manuscripts. His translation of *Zend-Avesta* and *Ouvrage de Zoroastre* was a reflection of French interest in Oriental Studies. William Jones who studied Persian at Oxford first came into prominence when he challenged the authority of Anquetil-Duperron.

The European contribution to the development of Oriental scholarship is important at this point. Paris became the main centre of the continental Europe for the construction of knowledge on the Orient. The first Chair of Sanskrit outside Britain was Antoine-Léonard de Chézy at the Collège de France. Eugène Bournouf later succeeded him. The first translation of *Mahavamsa* into an European language was done by Eugène Bournouf. In Paris, France Bopp and Max Müller Studied Sanskrit under Bournouf. I will come to them later.

In the 19th century, the epicenter of Oriental Studies moved from colonial India to Europe. In this process, characteristics of early orientalism were also changed. Trautmann summarizes this change as a shift from indomania to indoforbia. The earlier admiration of oriental culture was gradually replaced with colonial contempt towards 'native' things in the frame of Civilizational Mission and 'White Man's Burden'. After the mid-18th century, the ideological agency of Western colonialism masqueraded as 'enlightenment' 'Civilization Mission' and 'White Man's Burden'.

The identification of Dravidian language family parallel to the Indo-European language family and subsequent linking language with races was to have a profound

impact on colonial historical thinking. The classification of languages into language families had deeper political implications. The languages was linked with the race and nation. In this process history of language was deeply implicated in history of national and cultural identity. The notion that languages and nations are tightly connected to each other gave birth to the tendency of studying nations through the genealogy of languages. It paved the way for the development of comparative philology and ethnology as academic disciplines in the 19th century. Franz Bopp set the tone of new discipline of Comparative Philology in his pioneering work, *On the Conjugation System of Sanskrit in comparison with that of Greek, Latin, Persian and Germanic*, in 1816. He identified the common origins of grammatical forms and reflections of composition of a family of languages identified as Indo-European group of languages.

Max Müller borrowd the term Arya from Sanskrit and applied it to the family of languages and also to the people who speak this language group. Max Müller who studied Sanskrit first under Franz Bopp came to Paris to continue his Sanskrit studies under Eugene Burnouf. Later, he came to London to study Sanskrit text in the collection of East India Company. In 1851, he became a member of Christ Church, Oxford and, in 1854, became the Professor of Modern European Languages and Professor of Comparative Philology. Max Müller not only linked Aryan language family to the Aryan race but also advocated the brotherhood of the Aryan people. In Max Müller's words, "Ram Mohun Roy was an arya belonging to the south-eastern branch of the Aryan race and he spoke an aryan language, the Bengali".

In order to understand the full implications of the construction of the phenomenon of Aryan race on the basis of Aryan languages, we should pay attention to the development of race sciences in Europe in the second half of the 19th century. The publication of '*The natural history of man; comprising inquiries into the modifying influence of physical and moral agencies on the different tribes of the human family*' by James Cowles Prichard's in 1843 manifested this development. Prichard argued that race is a sign of civilization and the cause of racial differences is not any

environmental factors but civilization itself. In the hey day of British colonialism, it conceptualized the European superiority.

In his paper, *On the relations of the Bengal to the Arian and aboriginal languages of India*, presented in 1847, Max Müller identified two races in India- lighter civilized race and darker savages. Max Müller presented a racist frame to the Indian History and a justification to the British colonial rule in India: “*it is curious to see how the descendents of the same race, to which the first conquerors and masters of India belong, return, after having followed the northern development of the Japhetic race to their primordial soil, to accomplish the glorious work of civilization, which had been left unfinished by their Arian brethren*”.

When the concept of the Aryan was passed from the Sanskritists to the anthropologists after 1850, in the context of prevailing racist prejudices, the concept got further racist in terms of ‘pure Aryan race’ giving ideological rationale for the fascism in Europe. Later stage of his life Max Müller came forward to accept that language and race were not necessarily connected but by that time the Aryan concept got entangled with ‘crazy doctrines of racial anthropology’.

The impact of the Aryan Concept and identification of ethnic groups in line with language groups on the historical thinking of Sri Lanka under British colonial rule in the 19th century must be analyzed in line with the building of a colonial state in Sri Lanka under the British colonial rule. Conceptual and institutional developments linked with the imposition of the colonial state in Sri Lanka under the British rule offered a new form to re-read the history of Sri Lanka. The Aryan concept and other social constructions in redefining collective self in terms national identities provided the text for the reading of the past. In the European context, the formation of ‘modern state’ converge two distinct historical processes, namely and the building of ‘modern nation,’ in the formation of nation state. In the colonial context, the colonial state absorbed these two historical processes and superimposed a political form (colonial state) and national content. In this process, the material of the pre-

colonial historical tradition were contextualized and reread in terms of the 'nation state' political framework to offer ideological rationale for the new political space.

Identification of the Sinhala language with the newly invented Indo-European Family of languages and the people who speak Sinhala with the Aryan race and parallel identification of the Tamil Language with the Dravidian family of languages and the Tamil speaking people with the Dravidian race had a far reaching impact on the reading of the past of Sri Lanka. The phenomenon of Aryan settlements in Sri Lanka can be cited as an example. As Pal Ahluwalia remarked in relation to Orientalism, *"such was the vigour of the discourse that myth, opinion, hearsay and prejudice generated by influential scholars quickly assumed the status of received truth"*.

Colonial knowledge formation and reading history

When the Maritime Provinces in Sri Lanka became a crown colony of the British Empire in 1802, discourse of new oriental studies linked with building of knowledge was in full swing. The first to get involved with the evolving discourse on Oriental scholarship in Sri Lanka was Joseph Eudelin de Jonville who came to Sri Lanka with Frederick North, the British Governor of Sri Lanka. He first served as clerk for Natural History and Agriculture and later became the Surveyor General. In 1801, de Jonville contributed to the seventh volume in *Asiatick Researches* in response to an article of Buchanan 'On the Religion and literature of Burma' appeared earlier in the same journal. The intervention of de Jonville in the Orientalist discourse was important for three reasons. Firstly it introduced Sri Lanka to the new Oriental scholarship. Secondly, the arguments that de Jonville's presented were drawn not from Sanskrit sources but from Pali, another equally important classical language. Thirdly, together with Buchanan's contribution, it manifested the beginning of Buddhist Studies (Buddhology) in the West, marking a new dimension of Oriental research.

Alexander Johnson's role in linking Sri Lanka to the emerging oriental scholarship in the West was far more important. When Alexander Johnson served in Sri Lanka as Chief Justice of the newly established Supreme Court, he collected many

classical Pali texts. In the process of collecting classical Pali texts, he came across Mahavamsa, Rajavalita and Raja Ratnakaraya. Johnston quickly realized the historical significance of Mahavamsa, which was translated to him from original Pali text by one Rajapaksa, the 'native chief of the Cinnamon Department'. After seven years of service in Sri Lanka, Alexander Johnston joined with fellow Orientalists in London and played a key role in bringing Sri Lankan substance to the ongoing orientalism discourse. He became the vice president of the RAS. Sri Lankan manuscript that he collected when in Sri Lanka was among the many donations made to the RAS in its early days. Eugène Burnouf gained access to Mahavamsa from this donation of Alexander Johnston to RAS. In 1826, , Eugène Burnouf produced translation of sections of Mahavamsa- *La Mahavamsa, transcrit en lettres latines et traduit Presque tout entier en latin* (quarto manuscript 1826) in Paris.

In the early phase of Oriental, the emphasis was to study the Sanskrit and the Hinduism. In the 1820s it is gradually shifted to the Buddhism and Pali. In the backdrop of British public interests generated by the first Anglo-Burmese war (1823-26) in the Buddhism, Alexander Johnston, then vice president of RAS persuaded Edward Upham, a West County book seller, to publish selected Sri Lankan manuscript to publish in English. Edward Upham, with the instructions of Alexander Johnston selected manuscript for two books. The second was 3 vols, work: *The Mahavamsi, the Raja-Ratnacari, and Raja-Vali, Forming the Sacred and Historical Books of Ceylon*, published in 1833¹. Upham did not have any knowledge of Pali. His translation was not a direct one from the Original Pali Text, but from the Sinhala translation by a Sinhalese scholar to Alexander Johnson.

More methodical translation of *Mahavamsa* directly from the Pali text into English came from Sri Lanka in four years later. George Turnour came to Sri Lanka as a colonial civil servant after the acquisition of the Kandyan Kingdom and the suppression of the 1818 uprising. When he was posted in Ratnapura as magistrate in 1820s, Turnour obtained his language training from a Buddhist Sanga at Mulkirigala

temple. It was his Pali language teacher who introduced *Mahavamsa* and *Mahavamsa Tika* to him. Having realized importance of these Chronicle of the Island history, Turnour embarked on translating them into English. Having learnt that the Sinhalese version brought to London by Alexander Johnston was being translated into English for Publication, Turnout at one time stopped his project. When Turnour found that it has many distortions and inaccuracies in Upham's translation, he resumed translation and completed his work. The parts of Turnour's translation were first appeared in *Ceylon Almanac for 1833* as 'Outline of History'. The full translation of *Mahavamsa* (first twenty chapters) in English came in 1837.

Development of modern Sri Lankan Historiography

In the changed historical context under the British Rule, those who came forward to write history at the beginning were not professional historians. The pioneers in the writing on the history of Sri Lanka under British colonial rule were Christian missionaries and colonial civil servants. Reverend James Cordiner, the first Colonial Chaplain in Ceylon, published his two-volume work in London in 1807, *A Description of Ceylon: Containing an Account of the Country, Inhabitants, and Natural Production*, can be considered the first publication of this kind under the British rule. Reverend James Selkirk who authored *Recollections of Ceylon*, published in London in 1844, was another example of this category.

The colonial civil servants started their venture first with collecting data relating to the economy and the people of the colony. In this process they gradually ventured into the history of the people and the country. It began with very comprehensive presentation of Antony Bertolacci who acted as auditor-general to the first British governor of Sri Lanka. His work, *View of the Agricultural, Commercial and Financial interests of Ceylon* published in 1817, is important not as an historical treatment but because of the great interest shown in the economic history of early British times. Dr. John Davy who was employed on the British colonial medical staff published *An account of the Interior of Ceylon, and of Its Inhabitants* in 1821. For years to come this work was considered an authoritative analysis of the politico-historical conditions of the Knadyan areas and influenced the mind-frame of the colonial

administrators. The most important personality in this category is definitely is Sir James Emerson Tennent, the Colonial Secretary of Ceylon in the period 1845-1850. His two-volume work, *Ceylon, an Account of the island, physical, historical, topographical with notices of its natural history, antiquities and productions*, first published in London in 1859, was the most comprehensive in the scope and most scholarly in style historical work so far authored by a British administrator in Sri Lanka.

The significance of the early works produced by Christian missionaries and colonial civil servants lies in the fact that it marked a beginning of the colonial process of reading history, carried out in a different politico-historical context. However, their treatment of the past was mostly cursory and the history of the island was presented only as historical introductions

The breakthrough in reading history under British rule came with the entry of philologists and archeologists to the scene. Their research and writings subsumed the pre-colonial historical text to re-read the past in terms of new units of learning evolved in the colonial context. George Turnour, Herman Oldenberg, Wilhelm Geiger, Edward Mueller, William Codrington, C.W. Nicholas and Senarath Paranvitana can be presented as examples. This group of scholars can be identified as true 'Orientalists'.

With the intervention of these philologists and archeologists, the Orientalism began to shape the readings of Sri Lankan history from the second half of the nineteenth century. In the long introduction to his work *The Sidat Sangarava: A Grammar of the Sinhalese Language, Translated into English with Introduction, notes and Appendices* published in 1852, James de Alvis traced the history of the Sinhala language. The impact of Orientalism and the typology of language groups as the Aryan and the Dravidian can be clearly visible in his analysis. In the introduction, James de Alvis writes:

Led by curiosity, or invited by the allurements of science, Europeans have, during the past half-century, devoted not a little of their time to the task of unlocking the rich stores of Oriental literature. Not only those whose lot has been cast in the far East, but those also who have never rounded the Cape, have made Oriental languages the subject of

deep study. England, Germany, and France have each rivaled Hindostan: whilst a Jones, a Colebrooke, a Wilson, a Wilkins, an Adelung, a Bopp, a Burnouf, and other deservedly celebrated scholars, have, by their thorough researches into Oriental literature, cast into dim shade a Kalidasha, a Pannini, a Cattyana, and a Yapadewa, in India; in our own country, a Totagamuwa, and a Weedagama”.

The historical space and structures, such as nation and race and the nation-state, emerged with the colonial knowledge building process provided a frame for reading of the past in the religious and cultural mobilization movements in the second half of the nineteenth century and the nationalist movement in the 20th century. Vinay Lal writes in relation to Indian history that “(I)f James Mill and Macaulay represented one side of the Orientalist discourse, the other face of the Orientalism, the burden of which, in time, was assumed especially by the nationalists, consisted in a glorification of the ancient Aryans and correspondingly in the denunciation of the non-Hindu, and particularly Islamic, elements of Indian civilization”. This claim is equally applicable to Sri Lanka by replacing the term ‘non-Hindu’ with non-Sinhala. Identification of the Sinhala language with the newly invented Indo-European Family of languages and the of people who speak Sinhala with the *Aryan* race and the parallel identification of the Tamil Language with the Dravidian family of languages and the Tamil speaking people with the Dravidian race had a far reaching impact on the reading of Sri Lanka’s past. The chronicles and other material of the pre-colonial historical tradition of Sri Lanka were re-read in line with the new form and text that was developed under the conceptual influence of Orientalism. As Pal Ahluwalia remarked in relation to Orientalism, “*such was the vigor of the discourse that myth, opinion, hearsay and prejudice generated by influential scholars quickly assumed the status of received truth*”. It is clearly evident in the main stream Sri Lankan History that presents a uni-linear story based on a single historical tradition and text.

By the mid-19th century, the analytical frames, units of learning and concepts for rereading the history of Sri Lanka were more or less crystalized by the evolving colonial discourse. The appropriation of chronicles by the orientalism discourse contributed to relocate them in a different historical space in order to construct the

history of Sri Lankan nation State. The Chronicles became historical sources rather than texts. The historical data and information gathered from these sources were interpreted and located in terms of concepts and frames such as the Arya, Non-Arya, nationalism and the nation state.

Three tendencies that took place in the second half of the 19th century further illustrated how the changed historical space and structures shaped the historical thinking of Sri Lanka. In 1868, the British governor Robinson appointed Edward Mueller as Special Commissioner to record all the rock scripts of the colony. In 1883 Edward Mueller published texts and translations of inscriptions recovered up to that point in his two volumes of *Inscriptions of Ceylon*. The office of the Commissioner was transformed into the department of archeology in 1890. The appointment of HCP Bell in 1890 as first Commissioner of Archeology marked a turning point in archeological research in Sri Lanka. The publication of *Annual Report of the Archeological Survey of Ceylon* began in 1890. A generation of archeologists research who came forward to read and place Sri Lanka's archeological evidence in the framework developed by the discourse of orientalism evolved. They include Herman Oldenburg, Wilhelm Geiger, Edward Muller, William Codrington, HCP Bell, CW Nicholas and Senarath Paranawithana. The findings of archeological research were interpreted in terms of the new historical space and structures.

Secondly, the growth of cultural and religious resurgence movement provided an impetus read our past, contributing to shape the direction of historical thinking. Many of them were not professional historians. But their role in socializing historical thought among general public was very significant. They took certain historical events or personalities and presented through their handy medium – dramas, poems and novels. The conceptual frames that they employed to locate these historical episodes and personalities were ones that emerged from the colonial knowledge formation process. The incipient nationalist movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries gave birth to a host of writings based on the glorious past of the island. Most comprehensive presentations of Sri Lankan history emerged from the Sri Lankan nationalist movement were found in writings of Waisinghe Harischandre (1876-

1913), Ananda Coomaraswamy, (1877-1947) and Paul E Pieris (1874-1959). The frames and concepts they employed to depict the glorious past were indeed colonial constructs. Accordingly, Colonial historiography and nationalist historiography are the two sides of the same coin.

Third tendency that shaped historical thinking of the country after 1850 was the beginning history textbook writing for the use of school students. In the second half of the 19th century, Swabasha schools expanded rapidly parallel to the socio economic transformation in the country. Inclusion of history as a school curricula created a need for history textbooks. The first such publication was *Hela Div Reginiya*, written by one John Perera, Headmaster of Colombo Teacher Training School in 1858. At the Vidyodaya and Vidyalankara Pirivenas were established in 1873 and 1875, History was considered a key discipline. *Itihasaya* written by Rev. Weligama Sumangala was an attempt to fulfill the need. At the same time, Sinhala translation of Mahawansa done by Rev. Hikkaduwe Sumangala and Batuwanthudawe Dhammarakitha came out from the press.

The tendency further evolved in the early 20th Century. A History of Ceylon written by L.C Blaze, History teacher of the Kingswood College, Kandy in 1900 was widely used in English medium schools. *A sketch of Ceylon History* by Ponnambalanm Arunachalam in 1908, and *Outline of Ceylon History* by Donald Obeysekera in 1911 were early writings meant mainly for the general public. The most scholarly presentation in this generation was H.W. Codrington's *A Short History of Ceylon*, published in 1926. The transformation of Sri Lankan History into an academic discipline, carried out by professional historians, took place in the first half of the 20th century, especially after the establishment of Ceylon University College in 1921 and later the University of Ceylon in 1942.

To conclude, knowledge generation is a discourse, within a socio-political paradigm. Discourse is play of power. It mobilizes rules, codes, and procedures to assert a particular understanding of reality. Accordingly, knowledge is a construction and its construction takes place within the parameters set forth by the related

discourse. Therefore, the key to understand construction of knowledge within ideological configuration is unpacking the discourse. As Michael Foucault once stated, what is known is more or less determined by way it is known. Reading of Sri Lankan history and the construction of knowledge on the past in the 19th century evolved as a colonial discourse. The norms, rules and procedures relating to the text and contents of the reading of Sri Lankan history came to forefront in this process. The framework laid down by this reading of Sri Lankan past in the 19th century more or less persists right up to the present day and it continues to provide the basic tempo for the mainstream historical writings even today.