



Living Faith: Faith of the Burgher Community of Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Religious education, religion and philosophy, and spirituality in individuals and families are current and pertinent to Sri Lanka today. The topic will discuss the religious faith of the Dutch Burgher community in Sri Lanka. It will investigate whether Dutch Burghers' have been impacted by Christianity. The objective of the study is to ascertain whether moral, Christian, and social values, crucial for the development of an individual's spiritual life or personality, are derived from religious faith and spirituality, which are associated with personality formation. Carl Muller's trilogy- *The Jam Fruit Tree*, *Yakada Yaka* and *Once Upon A Tender Time* a rigorous account of the Burgher community, will be used to analyze this in light of Sri Lankan fiction. *The trilogy* will be textually evaluated as part of the methodology by applying post-colonial and psychoanalytic theories. It will also offer a sociological examination of the Dutch Burgher community in Sri Lanka. The study aims to explore whether religion has influenced the development of the faith of the Dutch Burgher population in Sri Lanka and whether the Catholic environment Dutch families, the Catholic environment, and the clergy have contributed to the creation of responsible, socially acceptable individuals. According to the study, citizens engage in religious activities on various days, months, and seasons as part of their routine. Consequently, religion has devolved into something shallow. It will look into whether Dutch Burghers are spiritually and religiously hybrid, as Bhabha claims, or if they are victims of modernism and are not actual Christians. The study concludes with a specific reference to Carl Muller's trilogy Christianity had no bearing on the lives of Sri Lanka's Dutch Burgher community or the formation or development of any faith.

INTRODUCTION

What constitutes Religious Faith? Oxford Dictionary defines faith as absolute trust or confidence in an individual or entity (Soanes, 1991, p. 199). The Holy Bible describes faith as the assurance in what we anticipate and certainty regarding what is unseen (Hebrews 11:1). Carl Muller, a contemporary author from the Dutch Burgher community, conducts a comprehensive exploration of Burghers in his trilogy: *The Jam Fruit Tree*, *Yakada Yaka*, and *Once Upon a Tender Time*, which focuses on the Dutch Burgher population in Sri Lanka. The study examines how the Dutch Burghers trust God and align their lives with His teachings. Religious education, family, school, and

the environment are primary contexts for a child's development. The study will examine the extent to which the school, familial education, and environment have influenced the development of religion and spirituality and the role of religious education in character formation within Carl Muller's trilogy.

The designation Burgher pertains to the progeny of Dutch Portuguese and other Europeans born in Ceylon; the legitimacy of this distinction must be determined by the nation of origin of the father or paternal ancestors (Campbell, 2005, p. 94). Many writers analyze Carl Muller's trilogy, asserting that his books are significant for comprehending the history, origins, and lifestyle of Dutch Burghers. As depicted in the trilogy, the Burghers lead a 'madcap, merry lifestyle' (Sarvan, 1997, p.529). He also illustrates their perspective on Sinhalese and Tamils, referring to them as pagans (p.528), so emphasizing the racial disposition inherited from Western Christians. Numerous publications analyze their overall prejudice and emphasize that Sinhala-only policies have marginalized minority groups, particularly Burghers (Broheir, 1985, p. 118). In the text "The Hybrid Island," the author examines the lives and sociological backgrounds of the Burghers (Silva, 2002, v). This study addresses the research vacuum concerning the religion and religious faith of the Dutch Burgher population in Sri Lanka by merging and elaborating on the perspectives above, providing a comprehensive assessment of their religious beliefs. It generally addresses the condition of Christianity and the adherence to religious faith. This seems to serve as a societal critique of Catholicism in Sri Lanka. The trilogy is a metaphor for our society, illustrating how Burghers have become its victims. It is reasonable to assert that it constitutes a critique of the clergy, Christian educational institutions, Christian bourgeois families, and Christian settings. It is a satire on how Dutch Burghers embody Christian beliefs in various life circumstances.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research article will analyze the influence of Christianity on the Dutch Burgher community through several theoretical frameworks. The analysis will utilize psychoanalytic theory, using Sigmund Freud's notions, to examine the characters and determine if their inability to resist cravings is attributable to their age. The influence of their surroundings or family on the formation of their personalities during critical developmental phases will be considered. The analysis will employ psychoanalytic theory to examine whether peer influence or adult behavior shapes the sexually abusive behavior that is against the religious practices of the following generation.

This will examine post-colonial theory, particularly about Bhabha, and his adaptation to Sri Lankan society, assessing whether they have culminated in hybridity. After considering the aspects above, I will analyze the verbal and unspoken underlying themes of Carl Muller's Trilogy, which is set against a Christian backdrop. The close reading methodology will be implemented. It will also examine more scholarly publications, journals, and critiques about Carl Muller's trilogy to analyze the living faith of Dutch Burghers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Dutch Burgher families and their religious Faith

In *The Jam Fruit Tree*, Carl Muller explicitly emphasizes that Burghers possess a general understanding of the religious activities articulated by the church. The narrative especially discusses the extensive lineage since the trilogy encompasses Cecilprins and Maudiegirl, extending to their offspring and grandchildren in contemporary times. Muller characterizes Cecilprins and Maudiegirl as individuals who favor adhering to the doctrines of the religion. Upon his son Viva's conversion to Pentecostalism, (Muller, 1994, p.67) He encountered rejection from his family, who firmly adhered to the belief in the existence of only One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church (The Apostles Creed, n.d). Meanwhile, Ludwick, his Protestant neighbor, engages in nocturnal singing and prayer, eliciting amusement from the Von Blosses despite his Burgher status. Thus, it can be inferred that they were aware of the principles established by institutionalized religion. They exhibited patriotism towards their faith and emphasized their familiarity with the oral traditions conducted in a Catholic context.

Individual variances in faith or beliefs are prominently evident in the book, *The Jam Fruit Tree* specifically addresses Maudiegirl's failure to comprehend the fundamental principles of religion. Maudiegirl shows a surface devotion to religion. When Anna, their eldest daughter, wishes to marry a Sinhalese Buddhist, Cecilprins expresses his disapproval, stating that despite being "educated good and Cambridge Senior" (Muller, 1994, p.35-36), he opposes the prospect due to a lack of shared faith. Maudiegirl finds solace in her illness and uncertainty about life by rationalizing her situation with the assertion, "Father telling in the church love the neighbors" (Muller, 1994, p.43). Consequently, religion is employed to alleviate the circumstances, as Maudiegirl is ill, and should she perish, she will not see any of her offspring's marriages. When Colonta arrives, they adorn the house with images of saints, proclaiming, "We must demonstrate that we are a good Catholic family" (Muller, 1994, p.44), and compelling the Cecilprins to instruct Anna to attend church on Sundays, First Fridays, and all feast days (Muller, 1994, p.44). The Maudiegirl's assertion particularly underscores the parents' failure to comprehend that the essence lies not in mere church attendance but in embodying the teachings of Jesus in daily life. Consequently, the children would not have assimilated the principles of the practical religion, and might not have developed any faith towards religion.

Muller emphasizes the Burghers' failure to adhere to God's precepts. In the context of the Burgher community's beliefs, both homicide and abortion are regarded as commonplace occurrences. Abortion is condemned in the Bible and by the Catholic Church. To attain eternal life, one must adhere to the commandments of God. (Luke 18:18- 30). Nevertheless, they appear to be casualties of contemporary society, as evidenced by Beryl's decision to engage with Kinno despite her marriage to Sonnaboy in *Yakada Yaka* (Muller, 1994. p.214) This behavior does not indicate a deficiency in her life but rather a pursuit of primal instincts. The modern world has liberated them from religious conventions and governed them solely by instinctual impulses. Beryl succumbs to her desires and acts on her impulses, disregarding her husband's reputation. She had pledged at All Saints Church to be true to him in both good and bad times; nonetheless, her actions demonstrate a violation of the sanctity of marriage, indicating her lack of awareness regarding the sacramental vow she made before God. (Ephesians 5:31) Consequently, she is oblivious to the reality that she is engaging in adultery,

(Exodus 20:14) and law against murder (Exodus 20:13), so breaching two fundamental prohibitions established by God.

The Dutch Burgher group does not engage in Christianity- traditionally, as they perceive religious holidays on the calendar as occasions for celebration. In *The Jam Fruit Tree* the readers could observe their gathering for Christmas to cook a cake, pack spirits for their guests, and celebrate by igniting fireworks (Muller, 1994, p.185-188). They lack awareness of the necessity to prepare their souls spiritually via the confession of sins and adherence to the teachings of Christ. For them, Christmas is merely another occurrence in December. They are entirely uninformed regarding the proper approach to accepting Christ into their hearts through the purification of their sins, so underscoring their profound ignorance of the philosophy underlying religious rituals.

The Clergy

It is essential to recognize that the priesthood has evolved into a profession within the context of religion. Jesus was accessible to individuals, as indicated in the Bible. In contemporary society, many exemplify what *The Jam Fruit Tree* describes as “work to rule” (Muller, 1994, p.191). For instance, Father Robert expresses annoyance when Sonnaboy visits Wellawatta church to request the last sacrament for his father, who passed away on Christmas Day. Sonnaboy informs him of the death and requests a blessing; however, the priest questions whether his father is a parishioner and suggests he consult the Kotehena Parish Priest instead (Muller, 1994, p.191). It is unethical for him to make such a statement, as the priest should be prepared to serve his parishioners. By serving individuals, they serve God. The text emphasizes their failure to fulfill their responsibilities and how these actions alienate individuals from the clergy, and church activities.

Muller's trilogy also emphasizes the clergy's detachment from the realities of life. Individuals gain income through arduous means, and survival becomes challenging under the capitalist system. *Yakada Yaka* examines the disadvantages faced by Catholics in Sri Lanka, particularly with their preference for enrolling their children in Catholic schools. In the text, Sonnaboy visits Mother Gonzaga, the principal of Holy Family Convent Bambalepitiya, to request a fee reduction for his children. Mother Gonzaga callously declines, asserting that she has not requested admission due to Beryl's advanced age, and emphasizes the necessity of making sacrifices for their children (Muller, 1994, p.198-199). Sonnaboy highlights how the school is economizing by soliciting funds for events in school. Catholic schools were established by missionaries to educate the poor youngsters. Nevertheless, the Catholic schools referenced by Muller appear to have neglected their purpose, and for many, they are merely profit-driven institutions. Muller indicates that Sonnaboy transfers children from St. Peters and Holy Family Convent Bambalapitiya to St. Clares and Royal College, as government schools offer complimentary education for children (Muller, 1994, p.201). The clergy has failed to comprehend the challenges faced by common individuals, rendering their behaviors an affront to the principles of Catholicism. Such actions of the clergy disrupt the Christian faith and spirituality of the individuals who follow Catholicism. Sonnaboy, in striking contrast to Cecilprins, does not uncritically adhere to religious doctrines; He examines the treatment of individuals by the clergy, despite the fact that 'clergy' does not exclusively refer to the church.

The clergy's preaching has notably failed to influence the lives of the Dutch Burghers. In *The Jam Fruit Tree* Father Romial states, “Marriages are ordained in

heaven before God, the Angels, the Saints, and the Blessed Mother of God.” If the church does not bestow its blessing and the marriage is not consecrated at the altar of God, you and your daughter will suffer eternally. (Muller, 1994, p.48) Nevertheless, Cecilprin asserts, "You are teaching that God is omnipresent, correct?" Father Romial expresses his anger, stating, "Do not instruct me on the whereabouts of God; that is for me to determine" (Muller, 1994, p.49). These remarks would have been superfluous had Catholics been informed about such topics. Suppose the clergy informed their congregants about the sacramental significance and pertinent gospel passages within the liturgical calendar. In that case, individuals may have avoided such marriages or reduced intermarriages with non-Christians. As Muller describes his characters' actions one could assume that, the Dutch Burgher community appears to be unaware of the Catholic Church's discouragement over such critical issues.

It is essential to recognize that clergy should serve as exemplars for ordinary citizens, drawing many individuals towards God via their conduct. At Carloboy's school, Father Theodore unjustly charges and punishes him based on numerous falsehoods. Therefore, *In Once Upon A Tender Time*, humans perceive the priest's conduct as evil, and Sonnaboy confronts him, saying to Beryl, "I dealt with that wretched priest harshly, punishing him for no reason, correct?" (Muller, 1995, p. 49) The clergy must be cognisant of their conduct and refrain from violating God's commands, as the populace will inevitably perceive no distinction between the clergy and the laity. This concept is further developed in *Once Upon a Tender Time*, where the priest expresses annoyance at confession upon discovering that Carloboy has assaulted the hens at church using his catapults. Carloboy acknowledges his transgressions, although his father, losing his composure, seizes him by the collar and threatens to disclose his additional misdeeds (Muller, 1995, p. 150). This will inhibit Carloboy from participating in confessions, as psychoanalytic theory asserts that past experiences determine future identity, hence impacting the development of the unconscious mind (Tanasugarn, 2020).

Catholic Environment

The environment that children live in matters in imparting values to children. Christian values should be imparted to youngsters in Catholic schools, as they constitute an integral aspect of the hidden curriculum. Muller in *Yakada Yaka* asserts that Beryl, an alumna of Holy Family Convent Bambalapitiya, possesses no understanding of religion beyond the curriculum. Following her marriage to Sonnaoboy, she accompanies Kinno, underscoring that no significant development has occurred in her life within the convent. In contrast to her mother, she does not depend on God and fails to acknowledge Him in her daily activities. She apprehends the repercussions she would encounter with Sonnaboy and has not comprehended the seriousness of her actions, which disgrace her family. (Muller, 1994, p.214) This highlights that Christian education has failed to have an impact on the lives of girls in general. However, from a sociological perspective, Burgher Women are frequently criticized for their sexual permissiveness (Silva, 2002, p.v) as they prefer to adopt Westernized cultural norms.

Carl Muller asserts that sexual abuse frequently occurs in Dutch Burgher society. *The Jam Fruit Tree* examines Dunnyboy's maltreatment of the household servant, (Muller, 1994, p.113) while *Once Upon a Tender Time* emphasizes the incestuous relations between Carloboy and his cousins. Dunnyboy being the uncle of Carloboy, he is mistreating Carloboy, (Muller, 1995, p.143) underscoring the absence of principles

and ethics among adults, indicating a failure to develop a collective unconscious, and suggesting that religion has not influenced or imparted cultural or social values to them. (Fritscher, 2023). Additionally, the psychoanalytic theory posits that children acquire knowledge through the modeling of adults. (Salisu & Ramson, 2014, p.54) *In Once Upon A Tender Time* Carloboy acquires knowledge by emulating Alloboy, the servant girl, and his uncle Dunnaboy. (Muller, 1995, p. 143- 206). As adults, individuals seek to fulfill their intrinsic need for sexual fulfillment, which is one of the fundamental needs illustrated by Maslow in his hierarchy. (Ocean, 2024) The primary concern pertains to pursuing objectives through socially undesirable methods, affirming their divergence from religious and cultural norms. They lack reverence for God and are oblivious to the conduct necessary for attaining salvation. Consequently, it underscores significant corruption and human exploitation in modern society in the absence of religion.

Modern Culture and faith of Dutch Burghers

They are unaffected by their religious beliefs or societal norms and have fallen prey to modernization. T. S Eliot, who conducted extensive research with new forms and styles, found that contemporary disorder is based on religion and the cultural past (Chandran, 2005, p. 88). In contemporary society, individuals are preoccupied with competing against one another and striving to fulfill their demands entirely. In the process, they have neglected their values and morals, including religion, ethics, and the social and cultural rules that guide human conduct. *The Jam Fruit Tree* illustrates the rapid economic change in Sri Lanka, (Muller, 1994, p.176) highlighting the concomitant loss of religious, cultural, and social values during this advancement process. Muller argues that “Our ancestors were humble, God- God-fearing peasants and towns folk.”(Campbell, 2002, p. 96) however, have also evolved throughout time inside capitalist society. The Clergy, in their pursuit of sustenance, have compromised their values as individuals exploit them through religious concepts. Consequently, the conduct of nuns such as Mother Gonanza may be seen as justifiable within the text. Despite the behavior being in sharp opposition to biblical teachings, they are compelled to consolidate their abilities and share duties. A shared devotion binds them: Jesus Christ, and a collective objective: actualizing the charism and mission of their order (Catholic Diocese of Allington, n.d) Their behavior may be rationalized as a consequence of being victims of a devoid modern capitalist culture.

Hybridity within the Dutch Burgher Community

Hybridity is a term commonly used in postcolonial theory that describes how new cultures are formed in the contact zone of colonization. The concept of hybridity is associated with theorist Homi K. Bhabha, who explores how the formation and reformation of new cultures, as a result of colonial relations, disrupts any notion of a “pure” culture (Raine, 2024). Burghers are racial hybrids (Goonethileke, 2003, p. 275), and their gene frequencies were either intermediate to its parental populations or more similar to the local Sinhalese (Campbell, 2002, p.95). Many claim that the Burgher community, in their adaption process, has lost their identity and transformed into a separate entity inside Sri Lankan culture. Although they have incorporated certain cultural features from the Sri Lankan Sinhalese population about ethical standards, they remain hybrids. Similar to Westerners, they primarily prioritize their instincts and remain uninformed about the social and cultural codes inherent in Sinhala-Buddhist

culture. The Dutch Burghers are not devout but engage in religious practices as part of their daily routines. They are uninformed about the original faith, which has evolved into a mere accessory they infrequently recall. The disconnection between religion and culture has rendered them susceptible to environmental influences, resulting in a distinct hybrid entity. The Dutch Burghers engaged in effective discussions regarding the text, but the clergy also fell prey to the process. British education 'made every student in the island more familiar with the glory of being British than of what of Ceylon held him or her... Colonialism closed off to Burghers a knowledge of Sinhala (the language) and Singhalese culture while, at the same time, denying its science, philosophy, and the arts (Sarvan, 1997, p. 529) Their English was heavily influenced by the vocabulary and syntactic structures of the very language that they looked down upon...Burghers did not fully 'possess' either the language English (Sarvan, 1997, p.530) thus confirming that, it has created a trans culture. Their hybrid nature results in a distinctive manner of practicing religious faith in daily life.

CONCLUSION

Carl Mullers' trilogy underscores the significance of religion in the moral discipline of individuals. Moreover, it asserts that the education system, the environment, and particularly the family are crucial in shaping a child, integrating them into this process, and fostering a well-rounded individual. Nonetheless, Muller's trilogy underscores the failures of the aforementioned structures, notably the clergy's inability to cultivate Dutch Burghers. Dutch Burghers have ended up as hybrids, It underscores how religion has failed to shape and influence the lives of Dutch Burghers in the contemporary era. The modernization and transcultural dynamics resulting from societal adoption have produced an unusual cohort of Dutch burghers. However, Cultivating a spiritually principled individual will enhance the establishment of societal order.

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