

A Study on the Contribution of Radio Song Lyrics to the Implementation of Development Projects in Sri Lanka (Focusing on the “Cultivation Campaign and Cultivation War”)

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ABSTRACT

Historically, the Sri Lankan government used radio songs to promote its development projects. Radio Songs held a special place in programming since radio's introduction in Sri Lanka in 1925. Those songs, known as 'Light Songs', were also employed by ruling parties to promote state development projects. The purpose of this paper is to study the radio songs used for such a development project, the 'Cultivation Campaign' and the 'Cultivation War'.

This study analyses how radio song lyrics were used to support two important projects: the "Cultivation Campaign" and the "Cultivation War". This is grounded on the period from 1965 to 1977. During that period, the ruling power was the National Government headed by Mr. Dudley Senanayake and the Samagi Peramuna (United Front) Government led by Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike. They used radio song lyrics to make their development project, cultivation campaign, and cultivation war meaningful. Also, the radio intervened to play the role of educating people about development projects on behalf of the government. This was implemented on the concept that radio should be used for national development. For that, the lyrics of the radio song were used. The purpose of the lyrics created in this way was to direct the people to cultivation. That is, persuading society through literature. Therefore, the collection of lyrics is also significant here. Accordingly, these lyrics are analyzed using the concept of 'Hegemony' of the Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Representing the field of sociology in literature, this study identified the use of song to communicate outside of common moods such as love and aesthetics. Also, lyrics can be introduced as a literary category that depicts the lives of the people of the 60s and 70s and the past social and political environment of Sri Lanka.

Keywords - Radio Song, Lyrics, Cultivation Campaign, Development Projects, Hegemony

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Dudley Senanayake, who came to power in the period of 1965 - 1970, implemented the government's agricultural policy under a theme called the "Cultivation Campaign." The agricultural policy continued until the collapse of Mr. Dudley Senanayake's government, known as "Hathhula (7 Groups)" in May 1970 (Depp,2012:50-52). Then the Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike-led "Samagi Peramuna (United Front)" government came to power. The 1972 Republic Constitution adopted by that government prioritized the cultivation of food for consumption and to save money flowing abroad (Wickramaratne and Others,2000:84). The project was called the "Cultivation War". The Radio Corporation also contributed to the government's role in educating the people about this cultivation campaign and the cultivation war, which were large projects implemented under the state auspices.

Accordingly, radio songs also contributed to spreading farmers' songs on the morning radio (Karunanayake,1989:57), which were broadcast on many radio programs about these projects. Non-classic songs created by radio were called light songs. They were translated into Sinhala as "Sarala Gee" for the convenience of radio broadcasting (Ariyaratne,2015:30). These Radio Songs, sung by singer, accompanied by a musician and written by a lyricist were a collective result of the trio (Ariyaratne,1999:05) and there were a number of

reasons that influenced it to be the basis for these projects. Among these, raising awareness among listeners quickly, having uncomplicated, easy-to-understand lyrics, and providing it to listeners with melodious, attractive music and singing were noted.

Thus, many songs with lyrics written under this theme emerged. Furthermore, the authorities took steps to allocate more airtime for those songs (Gunasekara and Galahitiyawa, 2014:30). The lyrics were built around themes of nationality, patriotic feelings, importance of labor and cultivation, and appreciation for local and country-specific rice and food. The works were sung by graded singers classified under radio ratings. The purpose of this study is to investigate the contribution of radio songs to those development projects based on the lyrics thus created.

RESEARCH CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

This study investigates an amount of N=12 radio songs (LS#7202, LS#7212, LS#7278, LS#7916, LS#9886, LS#9996, LS#10117, LS#10288, LS#10348, LS#10370) selected from the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation records based on the following conditions:

- (1) songs broadcast during 1965-1975,
- (2) clear thematic concentration on cultivation,
- (3) enclosure in official “Cultivation Campaign” or “Cultivation War” programming agendas, and
- (4) obtainability of complete lyrical records.

The analysis applies a coding context based on Gramscian hegemonic approaches (see Table 1)

Table 1: Mapping of Radio Songs to Hegemonic Strategies

Song (LS)	Title	Year	Primary Hegemonic Strategy	Secondary Strategy
LS#7202	“Kanda uḍin hiru”	1966	Embedding in cultural common sense	Mobilizing consent
LS#7212	“Allak vapurā”	1966	Directive collective will be shaping	Unity invocation
LS#7278	“Peralamu peralamu”	1967	Cultural common sense	Nationalist myth-making
LS#7916	“Geviliyanē”	1969	Gendered narrative mobilization	Unity invocation
LS#9886	“Næv purā sahal yavā”	1973	Nationalist myth-making	Moral ideology
LS#9996	“Sītala ræyē”	1973	Cultivation as political ideology	Personal duty framing
LS#10117	“Pænə gattath”	1974	Youth mobilization	Patriotic duty
LS#10288	“Siṅgā yamin”/ “Sinhala hālē”	1974	Nationalist myth-making	Ethnic identity construction
LS#10348	“Ratna Praba Hiru Kirana”	1974	Gendered narrative	Kinship-based persuasion
LS#10370	“Obē shaktiya”	1974	Unity invocation	Collective will formation

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1965 - 1970, the government implemented the government's agricultural policy under a theme called “Cultivation Campaign”. It was the radio corporation that informed the people about the cultivation campaign. The ruling government clearly used the radio corporation under its control for its own purposes. It is for both implementing its government's development projects and communicating election promises. It is also confirmed by the following statement. “Samagi Peramuna did not have a radio corporation to campaign for victory. There

are no Mahaweli musical dramas, Mahaweli songs were not sung (Fernando,1969:34)". Fernando further revealed that "every moment the radio brags about the success of the crop, but if the cultivation is successful, why can't the cut food quota be returned? Why can't the needy patients be given a meal? Minor problems like these made the condition of the cultivation campaign worse. The United National Party's attempt to throw sand in the eyes of the common people failed (Fernando, 1969:59)".

Therefore, the Samagi Peramuna (United Front) government came to power as the national government, which implemented the cultivation campaign, failed to win the people's trust as expected. The 1972 republican constitution approved by that government also gave priority to the cultivation war. Its aim was to grow food for domestic ingestion and save foreign exchanges spent on food imports. The project was designed by veteran politicians Dr. N. M. Perera, Dr. Colvin R. De Silva, Leslie Gunawardena, Peter Kenneman, T. B. Subasinghe, Hector Kobbekaduwa, Felix R. D. Bandaranaike, T. B. Ilangaratne, Maithripala Senanayake. This cultivation war showed the characteristics of a situation that trains the people of this country for long-term self-sufficiency (De Silva,1998:34). It was a large project that was implemented under the auspices of the state. Accordingly, a number of radio programs on crop warfare were broadcast. That is due to the concept that radio programs should be used for national development (Karunanayake,1989:57).

However, the Samagi Peramuna government was also ultimately rejected by the people, as reflected in contemporary reviews. Gamlath (1974:59) recorded public mockery: "There was no limit to the jokes made by the government to the public. When a female voice said that 5000 acres had been cultivated, the male voice said that 800 acres of land had been distributed among the farmers. People heard interesting songs with such details. These are the words of that song: 'We were told the hope that the sun will rise tomorrow' (*heṭa hiru pāyana sē balāporottuva apaṭa kīyē*). As they say, the people waited for the 2555 days, they said tomorrow. I remember a verse from another song: 'cut down the forest and prepared the ground, a new world has dawned for us' (*kælæ koṭā val uḡulā sakas kaḷā apaṭa inna alut lovak udāvelā*). Another time I heard a song called 'bring the hoes' (*udalū aran varō*)."

According to the above evidence, it can be recognized that the government used radio songs to cultivate public consent. However, existing discussions have not closely examined "how" this was done through the songs themselves. While political histories note that radio was used for propaganda, there has been no analysis of the lyrics—the specific words, metaphors, and emotional appeals used to make state projects feel natural or desirable to the public. Furthermore, public response was sometimes critical or derisive. The role of these songs as a cultural bridge between government policy and popular feeling remains underexplored. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing the lyrics of radio songs to understand not just "that" they were used, but "how" they worked to build consent and shape public experience during the Cultivation Campaign and Cultivation War.

Research Problem and Research Objectives

This study enquires: How did the lyrics of radio songs contribute to the "Cultivation Campaign" and the "Cultivation War" development projects of the 1960s and 70s?

The purpose of this paper is to study the lyrics of the radio song used for such a development project and examine how it was done.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study based on textual analysis. The primary sources are the lyrics of radio songs produced for the "Cultivation Campaign" and "Cultivation War" during the 1960s and 70s.

The analysis applies Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Gramsci saw hegemony as rule through social and cultural consent, rather than force.

Governments operating in the 60s and 70s used radio lyrics to communicate their ideas to society, as Gramsci noted. That is with the aim of getting the necessary power to implement development projects through "Public Approval". Accordingly, Gramsci's concept of hegemony has been used to analyze the data of this research.

DISCUSSION

This discussion investigates the lyrics of radio songs from the Cultivation Campaign and Cultivation War through the vision of Antonio Gramsci's hegemony. The aim is to prove how these songs were not merely informational but operated as cultural tools to build public consent for state policy by restructuring popular "common sense" and duplicating a collective will around agricultural production. The government acquired the contribution of the Radio Corporation for development projects with the intention of informing the general public about it. Otherwise, the purpose of directing the people to cultivate. However, efforts by radio songs to communicate the ideology of the ruling class to the general society and thereby indirectly gain societal consent can be identified. Hegemony is the implementation of rule through consent, which is called hegemony. That is, the transformation of the review of a particular social class or group into a common vision (Mouffe, 1979:217). The ruling class ideology is not established directly on society here, and the common perceptions of reality are structured by the framework of the worldview of the ruling class. Then, even other elite class options are seen only at the limit imposed by the thinking horizon of the ruling class.

Embedding Policy in Cultural Common Sense

Gramsci claimed that hegemony works most effectively when the ruling class's worldview is absorbed into people's every day, split beliefs, which he called "common sense". The lyrics reliably tap into this existing cultural society to make state orders feel familiar and natural.

Lyrics created in 1967, "Peralamu peralamu..." a clear example of this. It hires traditional Sinhala proverb "gōviyā rājā vē" (the farmer is king). It means that in Sinhala culture; after washing the mud the farmer becomes the king. This is just a strategy used to attract farmers in a country that claims an agricultural economy. Instead of giving proper value to the farmer's labor, a symbolic reward has been given. The other thing is to illuminate the lust of the past. That is what ancestors have done by remembering. This is just an exaggeration of farming. In from that instead of offer materialistic rewards to the farmer, it is done to provide a symbolic boost from an acceptance of public consciousness to encourage participation. The aim of these lyrics is to make the the country self-sufficient in rice and export rice.

"Peralamu peralamu pasa helā polāwe- nillā gasā nil palā palāwe

rān muthu palandā aswanu mathu we – goviyā rājā ve

Gasana gasana udalu pahara - agulū vē Lankā polovā kidā yē

kiri uthurā memulū raṭa ma vagāvē gaṅgā vaev sinā sē" (1967:LS7278)

Literal gloss: "Let us turn the earth, let blue plants grow their leaves. When golden pearls appear as harvest, the farmer ascends as king. With spades pounding, Lanka's soil accepts them; milk overflows, the land becomes a lake of cultivation."

Similarly, the 1966 lyric can be pointed out. A common sense of public consciousness is also used here.

"Kanda uḍin hiru eliyā vēṭennavā laṇḍa purā mal mēnduru thānenavā

satara varam devi pihīṭa lēbennavā evan balen apī goyam kapanavā.

Nivuḍu kækulu rasa divaṭṭa ḍānenavā alut bathē rasa nithara hāṅgenavā

nāevum sithangi apa manasa puranavā evan balen sitha eliyā vaḍanavā.

Kapanā goyamin kamatha pirenāvē kamatha pirunu viṭa sihta da pirenāvē

nivuḍu bathin apa sitha da pirenāvā yala maha dekatama goyam kapanāvā.” (Kankanamge,1966:LS7202)

Literal gloss: “The rays of the sun rising over the mountains fill the heart with happiness. With the blessings of the four guardian deities, we harvest rice. Nivudu (brown rice)) tastes good on the tongue. We feel the desire to taste the new rice. Our hearts are filled with new wishes. Those wishes bring light to our hearts. The threshing floor is filled with harvest. Because of that harvest, our hearts are also filled. New brown rice fills our hearts. We harvest twice a year.”

The lyrics highlight how important rice production is in one's own country. People consider harvesting a spectacular task. However, there is a story about hard working people's labor. The writer has suppressed its depth by feigning a mind-blowing scene. This physical labor process is hidden in beautiful vocabulary and presented to the public because the following social agreement must be gained. The “Satara Varam Deva” (“Satara varam devi” - four guardian deities) shown here is a common belief. Also, applying “nivudu kækulu rice” (“nivudu kækulu” - brown rice) explains the effort to include the agreement of the common people. Attempts have been made through song compositions to fulfill the will of the government by combining even such sensitive sectors with cultivation.

All these points are included to highlight the value of cultivation. “Common sense ideas like the smell, taste” of new rice have also been deliberately used for the harmony of the society. The “Nivudu rice” (brown rice) mentioned here has a taste and the memory of that taste in consciousness, so people crave it. The writer has been anxious to highlight that the value of this rice grown in this country is higher than imported rice. To that end, “normal intelligence is a chaotic combination of disparate concepts, which suggests that one realizes that whatever one wishes for can be found there (Crehan,2016:51)”. By associating state-led cultivation with protection, tradition, and beloved local flavors, the policy is presented not as an external imposition, but as an organic extension of the people's own world.

Mobilizing Consent through Gendered Narratives

The hegemonic project has expanded into the domestic sphere by assigning specific roles in the cultivation movement. “Geviliyanē...” the duet was written in 1969, using a tactually feminine voice to expand that narrative. Here, the woman is not a passive assistant but a declared participant. She explains that she is contributing to “quenching the world's hunger”. In her hope for a “prosperous tomorrow” is symbolized by “waving”. These lyrics reframe duty both personally and locally as an important part of the mission, not only nationally but even globally. It is an enclosure of the traditional character of women in the hegemonic construction, turning social reproduction into an act of political support for the cultivation movement.

Male voice –

“Geviliyanē vel eliyē aḍasanda sē nāemi-nāemi kāṭa æhenn da sīpad rāva naṅgannē.

Female voice –

Lovat æsennayi sīpad rāve naṅgannē dækati gena vel eliyē goyam nelannē.

Male voice –

Geviliyanē niyar digē maddahanē læsi gamanē

oba kāṭa da rasaṭa uyā æmbul genennē.

Female voice –

Lova sāgini nivannaṭayi æmbul genennē mihimaṇḍalē ran dahadiya pokuru isinnē.”

(Ariyaratne,1969:LS7916)

Literal gloss: “O Village woman, in the field, bend like a crescent moon, to whom is poems? I recite poems as I harvest from the sickle for everyone in the world to hear.

O Village women, for whom do you prepare and bring delicious lunch? I bring this delicious lunch to people who sweat in the fields. Because they struggle to quench the hunger of everyone in the world.”

Here, a man from the village asks the woman of this village a few questions. If so, why do you curve like the half-moon and sing from the field? Why bring a delicious lunch? Who are you thankfully waiting for? etc. The purpose of writing these lyrics is clear in the answers given by the women of the village to these questions.

These women say they are trying to tell the world that they are collecting the harvest. Lunch is brought to the hardworking people for the food they need to quench the world's hunger. These working people are farmers. They happily wave this hand to a prosperous tomorrow after the harvest. They hope to make the future of the people of this country prosperous through this hard work and reaping. The writer seeks to show the uniqueness of the new world emerging from the cultivation movement, from a woman's point of view. Their aim is not only to quench the hunger of one country. The writer is implying that there is a policy to implement a global cultivation campaign. Therefore, the women of this village have not become naive enough to limit this effort only to the village and the country. They say the importance of the whole process. Accordingly, it seems that the rulers have tried through these lyrics to convince the country that this cultivation campaign is a large-scale action.

“Ratna Praba Hiru Kirana” lyrics also express the importance of developing awareness of being a progressive woman. This is also a lyric written like a quiz. The brother-in-law has said that instead of being beautiful with red lips, it is appropriate to go down to the field to cultivate. He said again that time flies fast, and thinks of children, and now goes down to the field without getting bored. You have a country, a nation, and instead of claiming to want to protect it, her brother-in-law asks her to take to the field to prove it in action.

“Thilaka sadannē kumata da nēnō – ætavæla bændagena kumata da nēnō

thol ratu karagena kumata da nēnō – haṇikaṭa kumburaṭa bæhapan nēnō.

Kālaya taṭu læbi igileyi nēnō – mælikam atahara damapan nēnō

dū daruvan gæna hithapan nēnō – dan vat kumburaṭa bæhapan nēnō.”

(Rathnayake,1974:LS10348)

Literal gloss: “Step-sister, who do you beautify your forehead for? Why are you wearing a necklace? Who made your lips red? There is no point in doing such things. Instead, get down to the nearby field. Don't waste time; it passes. Think about your children's future”.

This is aimed at motivating women to cultivate. It has also been done in association with cousins who are in the public consciousness. It is a voluntary approval. In these lyrics, hegemonic will is exemplified through a powerful gender narrative. The lyrics naturalize nationalist and effective femininity by reshaping women's labor in the fields as an act of patriotic duty, maternal care, and social cooperation rather than a mere economic need. Basic patriarchal and nationalist dominance is unrestricted and reproduced. Within kinship and moral boundaries, the role of women is portrayed in a way that affects a broader social structure so that social consent can be obtained.

From Persuasion to Directive: Shaping a Collective Will

As the campaigns strengthened, some lyrics shifted in tone from cultural influence to direct instruction, revealing an attempt to actively shape a unified “collective will”, a key element of Gramscian Hegemony. That's why the lyrics of “Allak wapura”, written in 1966, are not creative expressions. It is a straight expression based on action.

The terms “cultivate day and night” and “strengthen the country's economy” can be taken as such humble instructions. This reflects what Mouffe recognizes as the hegemonic process of transforming public thought, which in turn aligns itself willingly with structural goals, making the will of the public a tool for achieving agricultural self-sufficiency in this case.

“Allak vapurā mallak puravanna goyamēn vasi lābā ganna

val paḷæti næti karanna allak vapurā mallak puravanna.

Nivahal raṭa dæya pirē pā eḍi bala hæma varē

raṭa vaḍanna peraṭa yanna ethakota aṭu-koṭu pirē.” (Abeysekara, 1966:LS7212)

Literal gloss: “Cultivate in a small space and you can get an advantage from the harvest. This independent country will develop. Give it your support. If you come together to develop the country, this country will be self-sufficient in food.”

The whole lyric aims to declare that the informal way to get a benefit is to 'be farmers'. Even a small plot of land is enough. What is needed is cultivation. The country can be developed only in this way. The campaign, material conditions identified; They become a tool for any desired end: “Structure stops being an external force that crushes man, assimilates and neutralizes him. Instead, it transforms into a medium of freedom. That is, a tool to create a new moral-political model and a source of new initiatives is transformed (Mouffe, 1979:34)”. This is called social will or indirect control. That is what the ruling class does with this lyric. The ruling class willingly changes public thinking without repression in a way that fits the desired structure.

Nationalist Myth-Making in the Cultivation War

The “Cultivation War” implemented in 1970 would incorporate nationalist illusions in the lyrics as a classic hegemonic strategy to naturalize history and policy. Succeeding Roland Barthes' mythic perception, the lyrics were used to figure a narrative that related native cultivation to Sinhala identity and historical magnificence. According to Barthes, instigating the idea of a nation brings life to the diverse name (Barthes, 1991:137-138).

Lyrics like “Simḡā yamin raṭin raṭaṭa piṃḡānen upan baṭha yaḷi novalaṇḍā apē ma batha valadannata vāsanā” (Ariyaratne, 1974:LS10288) claim that indigenous rice built the strength of “past heroes, artists, and strong people.”

Similarly,

“Sinhala hālē baṭha pisinā suvandin gæpaḷak gānē vilavun dā

apa vasanā mē Sinhala dīpaya kēthumatī nam rājadhāniya yi.

Kavsīlumini buthsarana liyannaṭa miṇipē thōpā vāpi kaninnaṭa

sīgiri beyadē rū karavannaṭa suvandæl sahalin aṭu puravamu gepalē.”

(Ariyaratne, 1974:LS10288)

Literal gloss: “This city where we live is like Ketumati kingdom because of the smell of Sinhala rice or Suwandel rice cooked in every house. For writing Kavsilumina, Butsarana, for building Minipe's Thopa reservoir, for making Sigiri's beautiful form, let's cultivate Suwandel rice in our fields.”

Explicitly names local rice varieties (Suwandel) and ties them to ethnic identity (“Sinhala hāla”). With the nationalization of local rice production and consumption as 'Sinhala', the lyric has created a new myth. As another extension of that, the works made by the Sinhalese by consuming "Sinhala hāla" have also been included in the lyrics. Those works that made the Sinhalese proud are Kavsilumina, Butsarana, and Sigiriya.

“Næv purā sahal yavā vides karā kith yayas prabhā perā udā hire” (Rathnayake, 1973:LS9886) which refers to a past era of rice exports, calls for a further lost golden age, prompting the current effort to restore that imagined national prestige. This strategy aimed to anchor an economic policy in the powerful, emotional ground of national identity.

Unity as the Strength of Hegemony

Finally, a recurring hegemonic tactic in the lyrics was the constant invocation of unity.

Lyric like “Obē shaktiya – magē shaktiya – apē shaktiya – dæyē shaktiya ovun shaktiya mudun kaḷa dā nava lovak bihi veyi.” (Rathnayake, 1974: LS10370)

Literal gloss: “Your strength - my strength - our strength - the country's strength, combining those strengths, a new world will be built.”

Frame cultivation as a singular national endeavor where individual strength merges into “our strength” to “build a new world.” This supreme term “strength” is a reflection of the collective political work adapted to the state project. A Gramscian fulfillment of work combining disparate people and classes. Thus, the cultivation campaign is portrayed as a shared struggle and the only solution for the people, not as a government program.

That is why the writer has described the support of the cultivating people as “your strength”.

Cultivation as Political Ideology

The lyric “sītala ræyē” shows that cultivation is not just an economic policy. That is how it has shifted into a political and moral ideology. The lyric translates farming into “patriotic and personal duty”. The writer here has made “unemployment” an individual moral choice out of a systemic subject.

“Sītala ræyē handa tani vama pāyannē pāluyi pilē mā vitarayi mata innē.

Keta saru vuṇoth atha paya savi balen magē

gepælak hadāganimu da ena navam mahē.” (Ranasinghe, 1973: LS 9996)

Literal gloss: “On a cloddish day, like the moon growing alone, I am alone in this verandah. I miss you. If this paddy field grows with my courage, let's build a new house next February.”

Due to a lack of permanent income, the boyfriend is unable to get married. This has been presented as a personal failure. The author raises the idea that it can only be solved by turning to agriculture. It is said by his girlfriend, who acts as his ideological guide. She has made cultivation an emotional imperative, connecting it directly with their future.

This is a comparison with personal desire (marriage, family stability), government goals (to pay, to provide a solution to unemployment, and increased production).

Thus, the lyric has presented farming as the only solution at the moment. It is blended to match with benefiting loved ones and winning government-friendly personal ambition.

By making lyric the only “choice” to both cultivate and achieve personal ambitions and make national contributions, it has strengthened hegemonic opinion. That is, by establishing the opinion that farming is not just a job. It is a moral choice suitable for a responsible citizen and a remedy for unemployment, which is the government's expectation.

The following lyric (Pænə gattath udalu gattath) focuses on the unemployed community of youth. The lyrics intention to draw attention to that “Farming” is more important than jobs in office premises. To say that the work done with the pen as well as the work done with the hoe is important. It is to inspire jobless youth to do farming.

“Pænə gattath udalu gattath nagulu gattath koikatath huru ruwan dætak aruma dætak obata uruma yi daruvanē.”
(Algama, 1974:LS 10117)

Literal gloss: “Pen in hand, hoe in hand, plow in hand, in whatever work, your golden hands, your golden land, will shine, O youth.”

Here, the writer's attention is focused on an ideological process of instilling self-esteem through patriotism. The writer has likened the “hand” of youth and the “land” of this country to gold equally. It is a successful placement of the ideological tool.

Limits of Hegemonic Success

Despite these hegemonic approaches, both governments eventually faced public rejection. It revealed that cultural attraction is also limited when disconnected from material realities. Public satire on cultivation projects is highlighted by documented contemporary criticism. Gamlath (1974:59) records jokes about overstated claims in radio songs: “When a female voice said that 5000 acres had been cultivated, the male voice said that 800 acres of land had been distributed among the farmers.” This public incredulity emphasizes how lyrical myth-making crashed with visible realities of food shortages, unsatisfied rations, and economic privations. The disappointment to essentially corroborate the circulated myths created.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that during the 1960s–70s, the radio lyrics of Sri Lanka’s Cultivation Campaign and Cultivation War functioned as a modern “hegemonic instrument”, presenting state agricultural policy in forms that blended with public consciousness to manufacture consent. Through Gramscian strategies—repurposing familiar proverbs into state commands, mobilizing gendered narratives of duty, invoking nationalist myths of agrarian heroism, and promoting a unified collective will through inclusive pronouns—these songs transformed economic directives into a moral and patriotic movement. Tracks such as “Peralamu peralamu...” and “Geviliyanē...” naturalized cultivation as intrinsic to Sinhala identity, while later, more explicit lyrics like “Allak wapura” directly shaped public behavior toward state targets.

However, this hegemonic project ultimately encountered “material and ideological limits”. Policy failures, economic hardships, and growing public distrust fueled counter-hegemonic resistance, reflected in electoral rejections of both the National Government (Dudley Senanayake) and the Samagi Front Government (Sirimavo Bandaranaike). Thus, while the lyrics succeeded “ideologically” as cultural tools—producing an aesthetically rich repository of radio songs—they failed to reconcile propagated myths with lived realities. This underscores the “fragile interplay” between state persuasion, cultural narrative, and socioeconomic conditions.

This analysis affirms that Cultivation Campaign songs were not merely cultural supplements to policy, but “central vehicles of a Gramscian hegemonic project” that sought to embed nationalist ideology within Sinhala rural “common sense.” Their eventual weakening highlights a fundamental constraint of state-led cultural persuasion: its dependence on a “material reality capable of sustaining its myths”.

Looking forward, this study opens several productive avenues for further inquiry, including the long-term cultural afterlives of these songs—“how they are remembered, nostalgically revived, or critically reevaluated” in contemporary Sri Lanka—which could reveal the enduring echoes of state-led aesthetic projects.

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