

# Exploring the Impact of Noguchi Tadashi on Japanese-Sri Lankan Cultural Relations

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**Abstract:** *This paper delves into the significant contributions of Noguchi Tadashi in enhancing the cultural and academic ties between Japan and Sri Lanka. Noguchi Tadashi's tireless efforts in promoting Japanese studies and fostering a deeper understanding of Japanese culture in Sri Lanka have left an indelible mark on the bilateral relations between these two nations. The study meticulously examines his early life, tracing the origins of his passion for cultural exchange and education, and how these formative experiences shaped his later initiatives. Noguchi Tadashi's role in the establishment and development of Japanese language courses and academic programs in Sri Lanka is thoroughly explored. His visionary approach led to the creation of numerous educational opportunities for Sri Lankan students, enabling them to immerse themselves in Japanese language and culture. This, in turn, facilitated a greater appreciation and understanding of Japan among the Sri Lankan populace.*

*In addition to his academic contributions, the paper highlights the various cultural exchange programs Noguchi Tadashi spearheaded. These programs not only enriched the cultural landscape of both countries but also fostered mutual respect and admiration. By facilitating the exchange of ideas, traditions, and customs, Noguchi Tadashi played a crucial role in bridging the cultural gap between Japan and Sri Lanka.*

*Furthermore, the paper discusses the long-term impact of Noguchi Tadashi's work on Japan-Sri Lanka relations. His legacy is evident in the continued collaboration between academic institutions and cultural organizations from both countries. The enduring nature of these relationships underscores the importance of his contributions and the potential for future cooperation.*

*By delving into Noguchi Tadashi's life and work, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of his legacy. It underscores the significance of cultural and academic exchanges in fostering international relations and highlights the enduring impact of one individual's dedication to promoting mutual understanding and respect.*

**Keywords:** *Noguchi Tadashi, Japan-Sri Lanka relations, Cultural exchange, Japanese studies, Academic collaboration.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION :

Literature plays a pivotal role in fostering intercultural relations and cultural diffusion. Despite the global interest in translating foreign works into Sinhala, there remains a significant gap in translating Sinhala literature into other languages. Professor Noguchi Tadashi of Japan has notably contributed to bridging this gap. He was a pioneer in translating Japanese literature into Sinhala and authored independent novels in Sinhala, despite it being a language and culture foreign to him. This paper highlights Noguchi's immense contributions to Sinhala literature, marking the 70th anniversary of Japan-Sri Lanka friendship.

Literature is a fundamental tool for creating and maintaining intercultural relationships and promoting cultural diffusion. It allows different cultures and societies to share their stories, philosophies, and traditions, enriching the global literary landscape. In Sri Lanka, there has been a growing interest in translating foreign literary works into Sinhala.

However, the translation of Sinhala literature into other languages has not seen comparable progress. This disparity highlights a significant gap that needs to be addressed to ensure the global representation of Sinhala literary works. Despite the richness and uniqueness of Sinhala literature, its presence in the global literary arena remains limited. This limitation is not due to a lack of quality works but rather the scarcity of translations that make these works accessible to a wider audience.

Professor Noguchi Tadashi from Japan has made significant contributions to bridging this gap. As a pioneer in translating Japanese literature into Sinhala, Noguchi has introduced Sinhala readers to many Japanese literary works, thus enriching the Sinhala literary landscape. His efforts have provided an opportunity for Sri Lankans to appreciate Japanese literature in their native language. Furthermore, Noguchi has authored independent novels in Sinhala, demonstrating his deep understanding and appreciation of the language and culture, despite them being foreign to him. This paper aims to highlight the immense contributions of Professor Noguchi Tadashi to Sinhala literature, especially in the context of the 70th anniversary of Japan-Sri Lanka friendship. Noguchi's work serves as a testament to the power of literature in fostering intercultural understanding and appreciation. His translations and original works have not only enhanced the Sinhala literary landscape but have also strengthened the cultural ties between Japan and Sri Lanka. This celebration of his contributions provides an opportunity to reflect on the importance of translating literary works into different languages to promote global cultural exchange.

## **2. AN INTRODUCTION TO PROFESSOR NOGUCHI TADASHI :**

Noguchi Tadashi was born on November 14, 1944, in Chiba, Japan. His early fascination with the Sinhala language began at the age of eight, influenced by Ven. Mirisse Gunasiri, a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk. Noguchi's passion led him to the University of Ceylon in 1964, where he studied Sinhala language and literature under renowned scholars. His academic journey and personal life intertwined deeply with Sri Lankan culture. Noguchi taught Sinhala to Japanese students and translated significant literary works between Sinhala and Japanese, leaving a lasting legacy in both countries.

Noguchi Tadashi was born on November 14, 1944, in the Chiba region of Japan. His father was an artist, which perhaps influenced Noguchi's creative inclinations. Noguchi's love and passion for Sinhala literature developed at an early age. In 1952, Ven. Mirisse Gunasiri, a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, traveled to Tokyo to attend a Buddhist conference in Japan. During that visit, he met Noguchi's father, the artist. The monk's friendship with the artist led to frequent visits to Noguchi's home, where he became close to young Noguchi. The monk taught Noguchi the Sinhala alphabet, sparking an interest in the language's shapes and sounds. This early fascination with Sinhala language and culture grew over time.

Noguchi's interest in Sinhala led him to pursue higher education in Sri Lanka. In 1964, after completing his schooling in Japan, Noguchi traveled to Sri Lanka and enrolled at the University of Ceylon, now the University of Peradeniya, to study Sinhala language and literature. There, he received academic guidance from esteemed scholars such as Professor D.E. Hettiarachchi, Professor Ediriweera Sarachchandra, Professor M.B. Ariyapala, and Professor Ananda Kulasuriya. These mentors helped shape Noguchi's deep understanding and appreciation of Sinhala literature and culture.

Noguchi's academic journey and personal life became deeply intertwined with Sri Lankan culture. He married a Sri Lankan woman named Indrani Noguchi, and they had a daughter named Medhavani Tamami Noguchi. Noguchi's connection to Sri Lanka went beyond academia; he immersed himself in the local culture, becoming a part of the community. He taught Sinhala to hundreds of Japanese students, including diplomats and volunteers from the Japan Special Cooperation Program, fostering a cross-cultural exchange of knowledge and understanding.

Professor Noguchi also dedicated himself to translating significant literary works between Sinhala and Japanese. He translated many publications from Sinhala to Japanese and vice versa, making these works accessible to a broader audience. His translations were not limited to literature; he also compiled and developed Sinhala-Japanese and Japanese-Sinhala dictionaries, providing invaluable resources for students and scholars. Additionally, Noguchi wrote and published an independent novel in Sinhala, further demonstrating his mastery of the language.

In his later years, Noguchi faced health challenges, battling cancer. Despite his illness, his love for Sri Lankan culture remained strong. He expressed a deep fondness for Sri Lankan food, often requesting his family to eat it near him, finding comfort in its aroma. This connection to Sri Lankan culture persisted until his final days. Noguchi's desire to see the University of Peradeniya, where he had spent significant years of his life, was fulfilled in his last days. Dressed in

traditional Sri Lankan attire, he visited the university, reflecting his profound connection to the institution and its community.

Noguchi's final wishes further exemplified his deep bond with Sri Lanka. In his last will, he requested to be dressed in the same traditional attire for his final journey and to have his body covered with the Sri Lankan flag. He also selected four songs by Pandit Amaradeva to be played at his funeral, with Japanese translations of the songs distributed to attendees. These wishes highlight Noguchi's lifelong dedication to and love for Sri Lanka, its language, and its culture. Professor Noguchi Tadashi passed away on April 13, 2021, at the age of 76, leaving behind a legacy of cross-cultural understanding and literary contributions that continue to inspire.

### **3. NOGUCHI'S ACADEMIC SERVICE FOR THE SINHALA LANGUAGE :**

#### **3.1 INDEPENDENT NOVELS**

In 1969, Noguchi published his first novel, "Anithya Jeevithayak," which reflects his experiences in Sri Lanka and offers insights into Sri Lankan society from a foreign perspective. The novel is noteworthy for its smooth and eloquent use of Sinhala, highlighting cultural and social comparisons between Sri Lanka and Japan. Noguchi's second edition of the book emphasizes his intention to explore Sri Lankan attitudes toward foreigners.

In 1969, while still a student at the University of Peradeniya, Noguchi published his first independent novel, "Anithya Jeevithayak" ("An Impermanent Life"). This novel, though written as an exchange of letters between Noguchi and his girlfriend in Japan, transcends the conventional love story. It offers a profound exploration of Noguchi's experiences as a foreign student in Sri Lanka. The second edition, published in 2000, includes Noguchi's reflections on the book's initial reception and his intentions behind writing it. He clarifies that his purpose was not merely to tell a love story but to critically observe and report the attitudes of Sri Lankans towards foreigners.

"Anithya Jeevithayak" stands out as a significant literary achievement, especially considering it was written in Sinhala by a Japanese national. The novel offers a unique perspective, blending Noguchi's experiences with social and economic comparisons between Sri Lanka and Japan. This cross-cultural narrative is enriched by Noguchi's smooth and eloquent use of the Sinhala language, which he mastered through his dedication and study. The novel's preface reveals Noguchi's intent: to record his observations and experiences in Sri Lanka through a critical and reflective lens.

The narrative provides insightful comparisons between Sri Lankan and Japanese customs and cultures. For example, Noguchi describes the Sinhala language as soft and feminine compared to the more rapid and noisy Tamil language. His observations of everyday life in Sri Lanka, such as the bustling train compartments and the local customs, are detailed and vivid. These descriptions not only highlight the cultural differences but also reflect Noguchi's deep immersion in and understanding of Sri Lankan society.

Noguchi's ability to convey his experiences in such an eloquent manner in a foreign language is commendable. His novel serves as a bridge between two cultures, offering readers a window into the life of a foreigner in Sri Lanka. It also underscores the power of language and literature in fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

#### **3.2 TRANSLATIONS**

Noguchi was instrumental in introducing Japanese literature to Sri Lankan readers. He translated Natsume Soseki's "Kokoro" into Sinhala in 1979, marking the first Japanese novel translated into Sinhala. He also translated works of Ediriweera Sarachchandra and Martin Wickramasinghe into Japanese, facilitating a cultural exchange between the two countries. His translations are celebrated for their accuracy and cultural sensitivity, showcasing his deep understanding of both languages and cultures.

Noguchi's contributions to the field of translation are remarkable and have significantly enriched the literary landscapes of both Japan and Sri Lanka. In 1979, he translated Natsume Soseki's novel "Kokoro" into Sinhala, marking a historic moment as the first Japanese novel translated into Sinhala. This translation introduced Sri Lankan readers to the depth and sensitivity of Japanese literature. "Kokoro," a psychological novel exploring themes of loneliness and isolation, resonated with Sinhala readers, thanks to Noguchi's skillful translation.

In the preface to "Kokoro," Noguchi explains his motivation for translating the novel. He believed that Japanese literature, with its unique cultural and philosophical perspectives, had much to offer Sinhala readers. His translation was not merely a linguistic exercise but an effort to bridge cultural gaps and foster mutual understanding. Noguchi's translation of "Kokoro" was well-received, and it paved the way for further translations of Japanese literature into Sinhala.

In addition to translating Japanese works into Sinhala, Noguchi also translated significant Sinhala literary works into Japanese. He translated the "Sinhala Gemi Kathawa" ("Sinhalese Village Story") by Ediriweera Sarachchandra and "Gamperaliya" ("The Uprooted") by Martin Wickramasinghe into Japanese. These translations opened up Sinhala literature to Japanese readers, providing them with insights into Sri Lankan culture and society.

Noguchi's translations are celebrated for their accuracy and cultural sensitivity. He understood the nuances of both languages and cultures, enabling him to convey the essence of the original works while making them accessible to readers in the target language. His translations are not mere word-for-word renditions but thoughtful interpretations that capture the spirit and subtleties of the original texts.

Noguchi's translation work has had a lasting impact, fostering a cultural exchange between Japan and Sri Lanka. His efforts have contributed to a greater appreciation of Japanese literature among Sinhala readers and vice versa. By translating literary works, Noguchi has helped to promote cross-cultural understanding and appreciation, highlighting the power of literature as a tool for cultural exchange.

#### **4. NOGUCHI'S ACADEMIC SERVICE FOR THE SINHALA LANGUAGE :**

Noguchi made significant academic contributions to the Sinhala language, teaching it to Japanese students and writing scholarly articles. He authored the Sinhala syllabus for the Japan Special Cooperation Program and compiled dictionaries, including the "Noguchi Sinhala-Japanese and Japanese-Sinhala Dictionary." His scholarly works on Sinhala prose fiction and essays on language and literature further solidified his legacy as a bridge between Japanese and Sri Lankan cultures.

Noguchi's academic contributions to the Sinhala language are extensive and impactful. He played a pivotal role in teaching Sinhala to Japanese students, including diplomats and volunteers from the Japan Special Cooperation Program. His dedication to education extended beyond the classroom as he authored the Sinhala syllabus for the program, ensuring a structured and comprehensive approach to teaching the language.

In addition to his teaching efforts, Noguchi compiled the "Noguchi Sinhala-Japanese and Japanese-Sinhala Dictionary," a valuable resource for students, scholars, and language enthusiasts. This dictionary, first published in 1998, includes around 30,000 Sinhala words and 60,000 Japanese words, providing a comprehensive tool for language learners. The dictionary's accuracy and depth reflect Noguchi's profound understanding of both languages and his commitment to promoting cross-cultural communication.

Noguchi also made significant contributions to scholarly literature on the Sinhala language. He authored several scholarly articles and books, including "Sinhala Prose Fiction: Part 1" and "An Approach to Sinhala Essays." These works provide valuable insights into Sinhala literature and its development. Noguchi's scholarship highlights his deep engagement with the language and his efforts to promote its study and appreciation among Japanese students and scholars.

Noguchi's academic work extended to his role as a translator, where he translated important Sinhala literary works into Japanese and vice versa. His translations, such as those of "Sinhala Gemi Kathawa" and "Gamperaliya," have introduced Sinhala literature to a broader audience, fostering greater cultural understanding and appreciation. Noguchi's translations are known for their accuracy and cultural sensitivity, reflecting his deep understanding of both languages and cultures.

#### **5. CONCLUSION :**

Professor Noguchi Tadashi's work significantly impacted Sinhala literature and cultural exchange between Japan and Sri Lanka. His translations and original works in Sinhala enriched the literary landscapes of both countries. Noguchi's

dedication to Sinhala language and literature has left a lasting legacy, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation between two distinct cultures. His contributions serve as a testament to the power of literature in bridging cultural divides.

In conclusion, Professor Noguchi Tadashi's work has had a profound impact on Sinhala literature and the cultural exchange between Japan and Sri Lanka. His translations have opened up new avenues for cultural understanding, allowing readers in both countries to appreciate each other's literary traditions. Noguchi's dedication to the Sinhala language, through his translations, original works, and academic contributions, has enriched the literary landscapes of both countries.

Noguchi's legacy is one of cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. His work serves as a testament to the power of literature in bridging cultural divides and fostering mutual understanding. Through his translations and original works in Sinhala, Noguchi has made significant contributions to the literary and cultural heritage of both Japan and Sri Lanka. His dedication to promoting the Sinhala language and literature continues to inspire and will be remembered for generations to come.

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