

# **A very effective interpersonal information exchange within the University sub- culture; an alternative Folkloristic study carried out in relation to Peradeniya university community with special reference to ‘*Gossip*’ .**

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Although many studies on ‘*gossip*’ have been undertaken in this country only a very few broad ‘scientific’ studies with a ‘theoretical’ background and vision have been done.

Through this research, it is expected to establish the need to utilize various research methods adopted in the universal field of gossip. What is anticipated in this research is to enquire how ‘gossip’ on a strong medium of interpersonal information exchange inside the sub- culture of the university operates on a vital element when defining gossip in the Sri Lankan context, the interconnection between gossip and social mass media will be examined. The main focus here will be on how the communicated message impacts on the subject of social functioning.

Questions and interviews were employed as the principal methods of gathering data in the field survey. In it, the entire student community of the four years who belongs all faculties and staff members of different grades were randomly made use of.

For the purpose of this research 436 individuals from the university community (89 of the staff members and 347 of the students) were involved (see Tables 3). While places such as academic departments of various faculties and university halls and residence, canteens and common rooms were made use of as venues, 6 staff members and 8 members from the student community assisted in collecting data. Data was collected for an entire period of the 4 months commencing from September 2014. Here, attention was mainly focused on the academic staff members and the student community. In order to maintain impartiality and equilibrium, I attempted to obtain data to represent all faculties. There, representation occurred in proportion to the staff members and students in respective faculties. Questionnaires were distributed among samples representing every community and every religion. In addition, information was explored personally using formal and informal strategies.

Halls of residence, common rooms, academic departments, canteens, free open air places and at times even lecture halls were able to be recognized as places of face to face exchange of gossip.

**Table 1****Academic Staff Members who have an intension of exchanging/listening gossips**

	Arts	Engineering	Medical	Science	Management	Law	Veterinary	Dental	Agriculture	Allied Health	Total
Yes	14	05	04	10	04	00	02	06	04	03	<b>52</b>
No	10	03	06	05	01	01	01	02	04	00	<b>33</b>
Other	02	00	00	00	00	01	00	01	00	00	<b>04</b>

**Table 2****Students who have an intension of exchanging/listening gossips**

	Arts	Engineering	Medical	Science	Management	Law	Veterinary	Dental	Agriculture	Allied Health	Total
Yes	84	20	22	15	33	15	09	17	20	08	<b>243</b>
No	25	08	04	09	07	00	09	02	05	04	<b>73</b>
Other	21	02	02	00	00	01	00	02	00	03	<b>31</b>

**Table 3****Students from All Faculties**

	Arts	Engineering	Medical	Science	Management	Law	Veterinary	Dental	Agriculture	Allied Health	Total
Female	79	07	15	17	34	16	08	11	10	09	<b>206</b>
Male	28	23	13	07	06	00	10	11	15	06	<b>119</b>
Clergy	23	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	<b>23</b>
Buddhist	110	28	25	24	30	11	18	17	20	15	<b>298</b>
Hindu	10	01	01	00	02	00	00	01	05	00	<b>20</b>
Christian	4	01	01	00	00	00	00	02	00	00	<b>08</b>
Islam	6	00	02	00	08	05	00	01	00	00	<b>22</b>
Sinhala	112	28	25	24	30	11	18	17	20	15	<b>300</b>
Tamil	8	02	01	00	02	00	00	01	05	00	<b>19</b>
Muslim	6	00	02	00	08	05	00	01	00	00	<b>22</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>347</b>

Table 4

## Academic Staff from All Faculties

	Arts	Engineering	Medical	Science	Management	Law	Veterinary	Dental	Agriculture	Allied Health	Total
Female	12	07	05	08	04	02	03	05	06	03	55
Male	10	01	05	07	01	00	00	04	02	00	30
Clergy	04	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	04
Buddhist	23	06	10	15	05	02	03	07	07	03	81
Hindu	01	02	00	00	00	00	00	01	01	00	05
Christian	01	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	01
Islam	01	00	00	00	00	00	00	01	00	00	02
Sinhala	23	06	10	15	05	02	03	07	07	03	81
Tamil	01	02	00	00	00	00	00	01	01	00	05
Muslim	01	00	00	00	00	00	00	01	00	00	02
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>89</b>

What is a gossip? This is a question which arises in studies concerning gossip in the field of anthropology. The exchange of ideas among people in relation to society, culture and religion, especially the exchange of ideas between small cultural social groups, plays an extremely vital role in the process of building up inter-personal friendship. Although gossip is an essential component within the society of this country, up to now there has not been a systematic academic attention on how individuals use it, the attitudes and especially how it is exchanged within the university sub-culture comprising small groups. Therefore, it is vital that it is recognized on an academic field of study.

The issue of what position gossip occupies in the social community has to be first reviewed. The rejection of gossip on a mere unimportant medium or form of speech among the community is a commonly recognized feature. Many believe gossip as medium of man communication which exists only among the rural folk, not used among the educated and on one which should not be accepted. This is a common belief revealed through organized and unorganized interviews (conversations) held within the university and the outside society.

However, it has to be examined whether there is a challenge to this common belief through the revelations or findings of this research. Hence, an opposite review was done on the gossip exchanged among the entire community through selected samples for this.

It is expected that this study would provide open avenues for the exploration of other social groups and sub-cultures. They who are contently active in an academic setting within the university environment. Although their activities are centrally confined within the said academic setting, it is evident that there are also opportunities for engaging in gossip.

### Commonly used university 'terms' for gossip

Attention should be paid first on the two terms '*Thela*' and '*Mada*' employed within the university sub-languages which are akin to the meaning attached 'gossip' in general social usage. Publicizing '*Thela*' and '*Mada*' at any given time among the community could be recognized as slinging '*Thela*' and slinging '*Mada*'. '*Thela*' can be defined on the common medium of communication among the student community. Nevertheless, while it is expected to cause damage to a person's character through '*Mada*' there lays a certain amount of exaggeration in it. At the same time, a certain affinity/ similarity can be recognized between '*Gonthela*' and '*Mada*'. As revealed through interviews held with students, '*Thela*' used within the university sub-culture for the purpose of accompanying personal and common aiming can be classified/identified under three headings.

Creating and Publicizing false information and meaningless/baseless episodes or stories about different people are done here. This is a common publicizing strategy among the student community launched with the objective of defaming individuals. It can also be identified on a means used in achieving group objectives. Sending/Slinging '*Gonthela*' takes place inside the university on a strategy for behavior control of those with opposing ideas. They can be recognized as those aimed at single individuals or small groups of individuals. A temporary achieving of objectives may take place through this.

Slinging '*Pol Thela*' is done in order to recruit students to various political groups through spreading ideas relevant to a political party or an ideology. On many occasions, senior students, especially political activists can be seen to be engaged in slinging '*Pol Thela*' aiming at new students. Most of the time, it is in the first and second year students who are targeted for the purpose. The practice of slinging '*Pol Thela*' frequently takes place during the ragging season. Through this, it is expected that the new students will toe the line with the seniors. However, the concept with regard to this among students of different years is varied. Despite many female students saying that Slinging '*Pol Thela*' is totally prohibited during the first year ragging season, the majority students' view is of an entirely different nature. Their opinion is that every kind of '*Thela*' of different levels is employed during the ragging season.

(Publicizing a piece of news or a message. Through this it is expected to bring together students for an important purpose. However, the view of the students in that, there can be varied degrees of '*GonThela*' and '*Pol Thela*' even within this category.) Slinging '*Sirathel*' is done for the purpose of launching

projects/movements against common injustices on well an winning student rights. Also, almost every publicized true message is known as ‘*Sirathel*’.

Deliberate publication of false information with the sole intention of defaming a person or a group of persons occurs here. Defaming people and thereby obtaining personal and social advantages within the university is expected by ‘*Slinging Mud*’.

### **Definition, Contents, regulatory significance and academic accesses**

In this research, the definitions of gossip put forward by folklorists, anthropological linguists, and structured anthropologists will be discussed fundamentally. Further, attention is paid on the researches done on gossip by Max Gluckman, Robert Paine, Gary Gossens and Roger Abraham who are well known folklorists. It is also hoped to identify the principles/ theories of reputation gossip, interpersonal gossip, media gossip and strategy learning gossip. Nevertheless, an in depth study with special attention is intended on interpersonal gossip through this research.

Although ‘gossip’ is traditionally defined as a method of speech that could be seen among social groups in the world who engage in ‘face to face conversation’, it could be recognized on taking place through technological kits in modern time as revealed by the study. In addition to direct chats that take place among the members of the university community on a method of communication both within and outside the university, the use of telephones (chats, short messages, internet, Skype, face book, twitter, viber, whatsapp, line), defamatory posters (leaflets) and notices were able to be recognized. It was who revealed that many groups desire to access Gossip Lanka Website with an interest to explore information especially with regard to film stars, cricketers and popular politicians.

By revealing the intention with which a gossip has been used, its contents can be recognized. The opportunity to study a gossip on a text and a phenomenon is constrained by focusing solely on the Contents of the gossip. Generally, through the way topics of gossip are presented and their rules, it is also vital to observe how important they are on a social activity in the rural society.<sup>1</sup>

It is essential here to raise the issue on to what purpose gossips are woven about (subject and content). Details with regard to man and culture are critically and analytically presented through gossip. However, attention on these details is ignored here and special attention is paid on the subject of people and their meaning.

Max Gluckman states that gossip and scandal are of great value in maintaining positive unity, appreciation and values of a social group. It also affords the opportunity for every individual in competitive groups to come to prominence.<sup>2</sup> According to him, the content and the message that unfolds through a gossip also

<sup>1</sup>Donald Brenneis, *American Ethnologist*, 1984 August, pp. 487-506, No. 3, Vol. 11; Gluckman, Max, “Gossip and Scandal” in *Current Anthropology-4* by Charles Goodwin, pp. 307-316

<sup>2</sup>R. Paine, “What is Gossip About (An Alternative Hypothesis)” in *Man*, 2, 1967, pp. 278-285



projects a positive or a negative meaning of the basic values of the group to which he product the gossip belongs.

The essence of gossip elucidates group ethics. The subject of a gossip spreads the details of the links between those who are subject to the gossip and carriers of the gossip. For instance, the understanding and knowledge between each other develop with the beginning of knowing someone well. At that instant, it becomes easier to be surprised on a result of unexpected behaviors of individuals. Along with it, the particular piece of information will be seen on an attractive as well as a good gossip.

By studying the way how '*GonThela*' and '*Mada*' operate within the university, the above mentioned negative connotation, as revealed by Gluckman, was established. While the university community shows a high level of interest in gossiping and listening to gossip, a majority of them stated that they engage in gossip for the purpose of getting information about other people, to which away the time and for entertainment. Nevertheless, they say that 'other people' gossip with the basic purpose of defaming (See Tables 5 and 6). However, the views expressed with regard to this by staff members and students take various forms. But according to the way both these parties think, the commonest topics for gossip are academic ones (162 of the staff community and 68 of students, see Tables 7 and 8). As mentioned earlier, the '*Thela*' by staff members and students can be seen as a popular mode of publicity to create certain academic courses and subject popular. It was disclosed in this research that '*Thela*' and '*Mada*' are used inside lecture halls by certain academic staff members for the purpose of building up their personal images and damaging those of other lecturers and also with the intention of making certain course of study popular among the students community. Using '*Thela*' and '*Mada*' with regard certain courses and staff members in common takes place even among the student community. Especially in the faculty of Arts, during the period of choosing special degree programmes, sending '*Thela*' targeting first year students in a popular publicity method adopted even by senior students.

**Table 5**

**Common Topics for Gossips among Students**

Topics	Arts	Engineering	Medical	Science	Management	Law	Veterinary	Dental	Agriculture	Allied Health	Total
Boy friends/Girl friends	67	03	02	07	12	02	10	08	18	08	137
Lectures	69	03	05	07	25	03	10	11	06	11	150
Educational	70	04	07	10	24	06	10	08	12	11	162
Political	72	03	04	06	05	07	12	06	15	07	137
Love affairs of students	63	02	04	04	15	09	13	06	12	04	132
Drug Habits of students	59	01	02	06	14	08	10	02	08	04	114
University Managements	61	03	01	04	11	08	09	02	18	08	125

Vice Chancellor	46	00	00	01	02	00	09	00	00	03	<b>61</b>
Usage of Liquor Of students	54	04	03	08	13	08	12	07	03	05	<b>117</b>
Cricketers	55	04	04	06	18	07	11	09	06	06	<b>126</b>
Smoking habit of students	46	01	03	06	03	07	09	02	00	00	<b>77</b>
Extra love affairs of students	54	03	03	04	09	08	12	06	18	02	<b>119</b>
Actors/Actresses	45	01	04	05	02	00	10	08	05	02	<b>82</b>
Other	33	02	00	00	00	00		00	00	00	<b>35</b>
Student Politics	42	02	02	07	14	06	11	11	10	05	<b>110</b>
Sex	42	01	06	06	21	07	09	08	18	00	<b>118</b>
Boyfriends of friends	46	01	03	03	11	08	07	05	06	02	<b>92</b>
Girl friends of friends	31	00	03	03	03	06	07	09	06	01	<b>96</b>
Other Personal issues of students	26	00	02	03	08	00		01		04	<b>44</b>
Love affairs of Staff	29	01	02	03	01	00	11	06	06	03	<b>62</b>
Other Personal issues of lecturers	30	00	00	01	09	09		02		08	<b>59</b>
Dean	29	00	03	02	00	00	10	01	00	03	<b>48</b>
Extra love affairs of lecturers	10	01	02	02	00	00	12	05	01	00	<b>33</b>

Table 6

## Common Topics for Gossips among lecturers

Topics	Arts	Engineering	Medical	Science	Management	Law	Veterinary	Dental	Agriculture	Allied Health	Total
Boy friends/Girl friends	02	03	04	11	01	00	01	05	04	00	<b>31</b>
Lectures	11	06	08	10	03	02	02	06	05	02	<b>55</b>
Educational	23	06	07	12	04	02	02	07	02	03	<b>68</b>
Political	19	05	04	02	00	02	01	04	00	02	<b>39</b>
Love affairs of students	07	01	00	05	00	00	00	04	04	00	<b>21</b>
Drug Habits of students	18	01	00	04	00	02	01	04	03	02	<b>35</b>
University Managements	19	00	00	05	04	01	01	02	00	03	<b>35</b>
Vice Chancellor	04	06	00	00	02	00	00	03	00	02	<b>17</b>
Usage of Liquor Of students	00	02	01	00	00	00	00	00	02	00	<b>05</b>
Cricketers	04	05	02	05	02	01	02	03	00	00	<b>24</b>

Smoking habit of students	02	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	02	00	<b>04</b>
Extra love affairs of students	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	01	<b>01</b>
Actors/Actresses	00	00	03	04	02	00	00	02	00	01	<b>12</b>
Other	09	03	03	00	00	00	00	04	00	00	<b>19</b>
Student Politics	02	04	00	00	03	01	02	03	00	02	<b>17</b>
Sex	03	03	07	00	01	00	01	06	05	03	<b>29</b>
Boyfriends of friends	00	00	06	00	01	00	00	03	00	01	<b>11</b>
Girl friends of friends	00	00	02	00	00	00	00	02	02	00	<b>06</b>
Other Personal issues of students	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	<b>00</b>
Love affairs of Staff	17	02	04	00	00	01	01	04	00	01	<b>30</b>
Other Personal issues of lecturers	14	06	05	02	03	02	03	05	03	02	<b>45</b>
Dean	01	00	02	05	02	00	00	02	04	02	<b>18</b>
Extra love affairs of lecturers	08	00	00	03	00	00	00	00	00	00	<b>11</b>

Table 7

## Popular topics of gossips among students

	Arts	Engineering	Medical	Science	Management	Law	Veterinary	Dental	Agriculture	Allied Health	Total
To insult others	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	<b>00</b>
To get information of others	58	14	14	16	31	01	07	10	14	12	177
For enjoyment	72	10	18	22	36	13	16	18	22	14	<b>241</b>
To increase knowledge	22	00	04	02	08	00	01	00	03	03	43
To widen the social experience	32	08	07	04	09	03	03	04	06	05	81
To put others in trouble	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	<b>00</b>



Pass time	64	20	22	23	31	11	14	17	18	11	231
To build friendship	37	18	19	15	09	08	03	12	09	09	133
To present personal openions	42	03	04	01	04	03	03	03	02	04	69
To establish personal openions	17	08	04	01	02	02	03	04	03	04	48
To control behaviors of others	05	05	03	04	06	00	02	00	02	02	29
To damage one's personality	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
To build personality	05	04	02	04	00	00	01	00	03	02	21
Other	08	06	04	02	01	00	00	00	01	00	22

Table 8

## Popular topics of gossips among lecturers

	Arts	Engineering	Medical	Science	Management	Law	Veterinary	Dental	Agriculture	Allied Health	Total
To insult others	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
To get information of others	20	05	07	13	05	01	02	06	07	07	73
For enjoyment	08	07	08	12	04	01	03	08	07	07	65
To increase knowledge	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
To widen the social experience	24	06	04	08	01	00	01	02	04	04	54
To put others in trouble	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
Pass time	05	05	06	13	04	02	02	08	06	07	58

To build friendship	09	06	05	11	03	01	03	08	05	06	57
To present personal openions	02	01	04	00	02	00	02	01	02	03	17
To establish personal openions	02	00	00	00	01	00	00	01	00	02	06
To control behaviors of others	04	01	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	05
To damage one's personality	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
To build personality	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
Other	04	02	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	06

Information about a person in absentia (“Absent others”) will be presented to a large extent by a gossip. What is special is that is a discussion regarding an individual or individuals rather than a certain activity that is taking place. Even the opinion of 335 out of 436 who were under the field study was that ‘Thela’ and ‘Mada’ are generated around ‘individual an individuals’. In addition, 360 out of them stated that they were subjected to gossip of the type which was detrimental to their personal character. It was also revealed that the subject which was common to this type of gossip was love affairs (221 had stated this). This point is established by the fact that those who were targeted to most appealing or attractive gossip were female students (168 stated that it was 80). Normal love affairs, illicit love affairs, lectures by lecturers, use of alcohol/ drugs, smoking, personal information of exclusive cricketers, famous film stars and activities of higher officials of the university were identified as the moral topics of gossip. Even at an instant when the content of the gossip does not have any defamatory intention, it is evident that there exists a certain unethical (anti-ethical) air in it because of the fact that it is taking about a person’s character or an activity in absentia.

Any definition of gossip depends on two factors namely its nature of social activity function and the content. There are four avenues for the purpose of basic/fundamental study of gossip. They will be considered along different planes according to the above dual. Those researchers and intellectuals who had undertaken studies along these planes had firstly introduced the use of ‘gossip’ as a phenomenon of publicizing the basic function of information exchange and socializing. Presently many researchers have gone beyond gossips information production meaning and are highlighting its role of creating ‘knowledge’.

The second avenue basically focuses on its (gossips) contents. The moral value of a gossip concentrates on the subject of establishing with the patterns of normal functions. As anthropologists argue, although there

is an affinity towards moralvalue, basically the carriers of gossip as individuals or groups strategically socialize them so that their likes and dislikes become prominent. It is established that this concept is a composite, wholelinked with the slinging of '*Thela*' and '*Mada*' within the university.

What becomes apparent when both these objectives (the dual objectives) are considered is that the most debatable factor about gossip is either its topic or the subject matter. However, it cannot be seen that there is an agreement among them on to how these topics and the relationship between them should be analyzed/examined. The traditional dual, itself reveals the existence of 'inter-cultural bonds' which are exhibited in the process of gossip.

As focused by the third educational/study group, primarily the folklorists and anthropological linguists, gossip is a process of analysis that has become critical and aesthetic. Here they have paid attention on the role played by the 'general nature of rule' which is included in the gossip on the medium of exchange of ideas within the relevant social group. It can be introduced on a research method what has taken an extremely different path from taken hither to about gossip.

In spite of the fact that gossip has been identified/recognized as a more traditional spoken method, it has beenrecognized to be obviously different in terms of tradition as revealed by the studies/researches, of Gary Gossen done on 'Mayan Indians' and by Roger Abraham done in relation to African-Caribbean societies.

Many anthropologists have shown the importance of paying attention to the hidden regulatory characteristics of a group. How social relationships are built by the interrelationships formed by the ideas of the public and communication became apparent here. Instances of spreading political ideologies can be recognized among student groups through the cautious exchange of '*Pol Thela*', among university students in particular.

The fourth avenue/method in, making use of gossip on a medium of maintaining social relationships, especially treating on 'gossip copies'and analyzing along conversation analysis methods. It is connected with the analysis of the organization of "speech" along a descriptive method of study.It should be understood that this is a field which requires an extensive mode of study although it is not explained/dealt with in this study.

As Robert Paine mentions any gossip that function with an active/ functional purpose/ aim, can also be identified as a cultural application used by a single individual according to his or her own will. Information regarding the rest of the individuals is contained within a gossip. It could be seen that speaker in eager to narrate it according to his or her own will/ discretion.<sup>3</sup> The majority view of the university community in that gossip is a thing which exists in between a fact and a non-fact. It was to recognize on many occasions that a gossip finally turns out to be an interesting creative piece of news produced according to, the will of its carrier. '*GonThela*' and '*Mada*' are made use of in order to achieve this.

<sup>3</sup> R. Paine, 1967, pp. 278-285

Paine also states that attention could be paid on for basic finding about gossip through a research carried out with such an objective.<sup>4</sup>

According to his findings, while a gossip always carries information about something, it is possible to identify something specific to it as well, within its publication mechanism. In such a study it is vital to consider it as a copy of the gossip as well as a social activity.

In this study, the main attention was paid on themes and works/books on gossip. According to this research it was possible to identify a few common topics/themes specific to those within the university. Information on education, sexual matters, fiancé/ fiancée, friend's lovers, love affairs of other students, illicit love affairs of students, lectures by lecturers, love affairs of the academic staff, illicit love affairs of the academic staff, university administration, the vice-chancellor, the Dean, state politics, student politics, smoking and the use of alcohol and drugs by students and gossip concerning cricketers and film stars could be considered on main topic of gossip in the university. Although those recognized on the main ones, alternatives by many others were presented. A few of those important subjects were conversations pertaining to clothes, hair styles of students and academic staff, family backgrounds, special religious and national statuses /positions of the country, music, literature, anti-rag student groups, dreams of the future (Marriage, building a house etc), unemployment, uncertain, future and pets. These are included in the 'Thela' and 'Mada' on alternative ways of the development of the friendship or goodwill among many students in the faculty of arts.

### Carriers of gossip

A discussion on 'whom' and 'what' is basically built up around a 'gossip'. Many gossip take on their subjects, the 'other' person's an unanticipated behavior.<sup>5</sup>

This is an important coverage in our field study. What is established by inquiring the responses to the questions as to with whom individuals frequently gossip is that they always do it among their associates. It was revealed that the university community always shows an affinity to share information about others with one's best friend (198), inmates at a hostel who are friends (167), mother, brothers and sisters (89). However, engaging in gossip with one's (fiance or fiancée) lover can be considered as an exception (only 29). Nevertheless it was found that the members of the academic staff frequently gossip with one's lover, husband/wife or with those close to them in the academic staff.

This establishes that gossip is not always built on people who are familiar to us. A kind of gossip built basically around habits and activities of people like cricketers and popular films stars, politicians and those

<sup>4</sup> U. Hannarz, "Gossip, Networks and Culture in a Black American Ghetto" in *Ethnos*, 32, 1967, pp. 35-60

<sup>5</sup> A. Ben-Ze'ev, "The Vindication of Gossip" in *Good Gossip*, ed. R. Goodman & A. Ben Zeev, Kansas, University Press of Kansas, 1994, pp. 11-24; H. Davis, & L. McLeod, "Why Humans Value Sensational News, An Evolutionary Perspective" in *Evolution and Human Behaviour*, 24, 2003, pp. 249-264; J. Levin, & A. Kimmel, "Gossip Columns: Media Small Talk" *Journal of Communication*, 27, pp. 169-175; E. Schely-Newman, "Mock Intimacy: Strategies of Engagement in Israeli Gossip Columns" in *Discourse Studies*, 6(4), 2004, pp. 471-488.



who are total strangers to us always exists in any society.<sup>6</sup> They may be defined as ‘media gossip’.<sup>7</sup> The most attractive data revealed/discovered in this field research was that 100% believe that gossip is the subject matter in mass media programmes in this country.<sup>8</sup> Among those, Sinhala TV channels take a foremost place while according to many people, Swaranawahini, Hiru, Derana and Sirasa have taken leading positions in that order.<sup>9</sup>

### The role or function of gossip

Any gossip is linked with twofold social relationships. These relationships can be identified on:

- Those between the conveyors of gossip
- These between the conveyors of gossip and their subject matter

It is evident that a gossip is not a thing that a merely exists in isolation but in always and expression about something or someone and is a descriptive reporting which is conversational that function in the society.

It is a very common and popular interrelated phenomenon among various groups, especially among small groups. It was revealed above that a kind of evaluation of moral aspect of the people taken place through a gossip. Gossip also plays a role as a medium of dissemination of information regarding violators of values and estimations of a group or a society. Any spreading information about those who breach social ‘values and estimations’ and through punishing those who break laws/rules within the sub-culture, and also by protecting the prevailing tradition within the group, the existence and the co-existence of the particular social group is consolidated. An extreme dualism can be recognized in the social control mechanism. It includes rejecting anti-ethical behaviors as well as reconstructing individual behaviors. Acting against those who exhibit anti-ethical behaviors with the help of ‘*SiraThel*’ used within the university community/society as well as rejecting anti-ethical behaviors with the help of imposing ‘*Brahma Dhandanaya*’, were able to be recognized ‘*Ganja Heen*’) which exists in the university community as well as ‘*Thela*’ and ‘*Mada*’ which are exchanged with regard to the use and sale of drugs could be cited as examples of these.

There are a lot of vital facts that have been revealed by studies done on this world over. Accordingly, ‘gossip’ could be further identified as novel or unexpected information about those who act differently, contrary to group ethical principles.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless it is surprising that a vast number of definitions and theories regarding gossip have been put forward by studies conducted in variety of cultures. It can also be seen that they tend to complete with each other in order to the prominent.

<sup>6</sup>E.K. Foster, “Research on Gossip: Taxonomy, Methods, and Future Directions” in *Review of General Psychology*, 8 (2), 2004, pp. 78-99

<sup>7</sup>R.L. Rosnow, & G.A. Fine, “Inside Rumors” in *Human Behavior*, 3, 1974, pp. 64-68

<sup>8</sup>G.A. Fine, “Social Component of Children’s Gossip”, *Journal of Communication*, 27, 1977, pp. 181-185

<sup>9</sup>J.S. Charlotte, De Backer and M. L. Fisher, “Tabloids as Windows into Our Interpersonal Relationships: A Content Analysis of Mass Media Gossip from an Evolutionary Perspective”, *Journal of Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Psychology*, 2012, pp. 406-407.

<sup>10</sup>U. Hannarz, 1967, pp. 35-60, G.A. Fine, & R. Rosnow, “Gossip, Gossipers, Gossiping”, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 4(1), 1978, pp. 161-168.



As a phenomenon interpersonal gossip is a common usage. Treating interpersonal gossip exchanged among individuals who know each other very well and trust as reliable information is a characteristics that can be identified.<sup>11</sup> The study revealed that the 'Thela' and 'Mada' are widely exchanged among the university community as 'reliable information'. In the study of interpersonal gossip it was forward that individuals like to hear positive news about their family members and friends while they do not like to hear negative news about their family members and friends. At the same time they do not like to hear positive news about their enemies/opponents. Negative gossip receives a higher response than positive gossip. It is also a characteristic that such gossip is better established with high informational value/press value.<sup>12</sup>

The question as to why people like to engage in gossip should be asked here. On the other hand, there arise opportunities of highlighting moral and social values through gossip. It can be identified as a social function occurring voluntarily or without any effort (spontaneously). It can also be identified as a computer but a phenomenal medium of expression of ideas consisting of large functional classes. 'Polthela' and 'Sirathela' used among students can be cited as an example.

### University Community

In the view of the university community, there are certain factors which can have an effect on this (see Table 5,6,9,10), One of them according to students is that the main reason why 'others' like to engage in gossip is for the purpose of getting information about others. (242 hold their view). But they state that they themselves get involved in gossip for the sole purpose of entertainment (241). Further, they state that they also do it not to deliberately embarrass or damage the popularity enjoyed by anyone. Nevertheless, the revelations by academic staff members portray a different view from this (see Table 6,9,10). In their opinions, although 'others' who are involved in the activity of gossip do it for gathering information about others, for whiling away the time and for entertainment, must of them do it for the sole purpose of damaging the popularity enjoyed by a person. However, they (academic staff members) revealed that their purpose of engaging in gossip is to get information about others and to while away the time, to improve their knowledge, make a person embarrassed, to damage a person's earned popularity or building up leadership, is a salient feature.

<sup>11</sup>J.S. Charlotte, De Backer and M.L. Fisher, "Tabloids as Windows into Our Interpersonal Relationships: A Content Analysis of Mass Media Gossip from an Evolutionary Perspective", *Journal of Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Psychology*, 2012, p. 405, ISSN 1933-5377, Vol. 6(3).

<sup>12</sup>R.F. Baumeister, L. Zhang, & K.D. Vohs, "Gossip as Cultural Learning" in *Review of General Psychology*, 8, 2004, pp. 111-121; R.L. Rosnow, & G.A. Fine, 1974, pp. 64-68; R.I.M. Dunbar, 1998, pp. 178-190.

Table 9

According to the student community, reasons for exchanging/listening gossips by others

	Arts	Engineering	Medical	Science	Management	Law	Veterinary	Dental	Agriculture	Allied Health	Total
To insult others	65	21	20	21	26	12	16	17	20	08	226
To get information of others	73	20	19	20	34	14	17	19	15	11	<b>242</b>
For enjoyment	70	20	19	15	18	06	08	10	16	06	188
To increase knowledge	18	00	02	04	02	00	00	00	04	00	30
To widen the social experience	36	01	04	06	06	00	02	05	03	00	63
To put others in trouble	33	15	16	06	09	08	04	06	12	05	114
Pass time	82	25	18	10	37	12	16	11	11	12	234
To build friendship	40	20	14	11	26	07	14	08	09	02	151
To present personal opinions	49	22	09	23	18	00	02	05	02	00	130
To establish personal opinions	33	15	02	16	03	01	02	03	02	00	77
To control behaviors of others	15	00	01	02	00	00	01	00	03	00	22
To damage one's personality	21	15	13	01	09	09	12	10	18	12	120
To build personality	13	03	00	00	04	00	08	00	03	02	33
Other	12	00	02	00	04	00	00	00	00	00	18

Table 10

According to lecturers community, reasons for exchanging/listening gossips by others

	Arts	Engineering	Medical	Science	Management	Law	Veterinary	Dental	Agriculture	Allied Health	Total
To insult others	10	01	03	12	03	00	03	07	07	03	49
To get information of others	23	05	08	08	05	02	03	08	08	03	73
For enjoyment	20	07	09	06	05	02	03	08	07	03	70

To increase knowledge	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
To widen the social experience	08	03	02	02	02	00	03	04	05	01	30
To put others in trouble	09	03	04	07	04	01	01	05	02	02	38
Pass time	23	07	08	12	05	02	03	08	07	03	78
To build friendship	07	05	02	02	03	02	03	07	06	02	39
To present personal openions	11	06	03	07	01	01	01	02	02	01	35
To establish personal openions	11	07	03	07	01	00	01	01	02	00	33
To control behaviors of others	03	00	00	02	00	00	00	00	01	00	06
To damage one's personality	16	04	06	13	03	00	02	06	06	02	58
To build personality	02	01	00	00	00	00	01	00	02	01	07
Other	08	04	00	00	00	00	00	02	00	00	14

During the functioning the process of a gossip the listener imbibes a certain kind of knowledge (education). Accordingly he not only acquires the insight necessary to be successful, not to feel shy unnecessarily or not be embarrassed but also gains indirect experience.<sup>13</sup> It was revealed in the field research how 'Thela' and 'Mada' play a special role in accomplishing all these. Within strategy learning gossip, discussing which one is the individual who is subjected to gossip occupies a position. Instead, 'What' happened to that person is discussed more significantly. Here, it is not important for the carriers of 'gossip' to identify the person who was subjected to it. This could be defined on the principle of strategy learning gossip. This, which contains messages pertaining to activities of a third party known to carriers of gossip, differs from population gossip. According to this, a gossip alters the ideas about characters of individuals. When explaining the comparative special features between strategy Learning Gossip and Reputation Gossip, it is important to address the multipurpose functions of gossip. Many people engage in gossip in order to socialize information about themselves or others (these many be negative or positive).<sup>14</sup> It can be seen that individuals spread positive as well as negative gossip with regard to the reputation of others. Taking a step

<sup>13</sup> F. McAndrew, & M. Milencovic, "Of Tabloids and Family Secrets: The Evolutionary Psychology of Gossip" *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32(5), 2002, pp.1064-1082.

<sup>14</sup> R. Paine, 1967, pp. 278-285.

further, another group of critics/analysts state that individuals gossip they themselves as well.<sup>15</sup> Attempts not only by students but also by certain members of the academic staff to build up their personal images by praising themselves within lecture halls are relevant to this. Here the carriers of gossip act in way to elevate their social status to an attractive level.<sup>16</sup> This is a clear revelation of the study. 'GonThela' and 'SiraThela' are utilized for this purpose. It functions on a measuring tool for comparing behaviors with behaviors and activities of other members.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, due to emerging debatable points in such instances, it may be cause for enhancing the group feeling among individuals as well as breaking down of these feelings.

In Structural Anthropology, two fundamentally important probabilities are analyzed within a group/clan;

- Preservation of unity
- Preservation of the equilibrium

This is the fundamental dual. Solely due to this gossip came to existence as a special group/clan. It could be made to decide the outcome or the status of the relationships within the group and between individuals. However, according to the argument built up by Paine, the emergence of independent ideas of 'single individuals' as well as their inevitable operation are factors that warrant attention. What in fact happens is that gossip is presented through individuals in a group rather than through a group on a whole. Here, adept gossip carriers attract the attention of others towards their own purpose. In such instances, the attention is focused on social meanings and values only in a circuitous manner. Gossip also can be introduced on a cultural means (strategy) of expressing their own ideas by single individuals. In order to prove this argument he cites a study done on a nomadic social/ethnic group called *Sarakasthans* in Greece. The attempt to safeguard the honor and dignity of their own social in common is a special feature. In this process it as revealed how single-parent families take all possible steps to damage the honor and dignity of such of the other families. How fabrication and spreading of defamatory are used as its steps and methods have been identified with examples. However, it is also said that establishing the gossip firmly depends on strategies applied the target family in order to counter it. Which engaging in committing deformation is not a thing to be ashamed of at any time according to their socio-cultural background, they will be embarrassed only by on act of defamation focused their own family. If they facial to respond against that insult, they will become the real victim of the social condemnation and they will be marginalized. In this process each family members will rebel against any insult suffered by him or her. Even the chief occupant of house engages in fabricating gossip in order to avenge him enemies. Even unmarried young men behave in an aggressive manner exhibiting their bravery. In that manner the opportunity arises to exhibit bravery that is considered the highest social value of *Sarakasthans*.<sup>18</sup>

The identity and honor of the shepherd community depends on fabricating/constructing and spreading gossip and the action taken to counter the operation of gossip against they themselves. It is evident that

<sup>15</sup>R.I.M. Dunbar, "The Social Brain Hypothesis", *Evolutionary Anthropology*, 6, 1998, pp. 178-190.

<sup>16</sup>R.D. Abrahams, "A Performance-centered Approach to Gossip" in *Man*, 5, 1970, pp. 290-301; E.B. Gelles, "Gossip: An Eighteenth-century Case", *Journal of Social History*, 22, 1989, pp. 667-683; R. Paine, 1967, pp. 278-285; L.C. Smith, K.J. Lucas, & C. Latkin, "Rumor and Gossip: Social Discourse on HIV and AIDS", *Anthropology and Medicine*, 6, 1999, pp. 121-131.

<sup>17</sup>J. Morreal, "Gossip and Humor", ed. R.F. Goodman & A. Ben-Ze'ev, *Good Gossip*, Kansas, The University Press of Kansas, 1994, pp. 56-64; O. Nevo, & B. Nevo, "The Tendency to Gossip and its Relation to Vocational Interests", *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 6(3)1993, pp. 229-238.

<sup>18</sup>R. Paine, 1967, pp. 280-281; J. Campbell, *Honour, Family and Patronage*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1964, pp. 265, 286.



slinging 'Thela' and 'Mada' with university fulfill a parallel social function. This could be accomplished easily within a small group. Through this, it is expected to build up a strengthening of mutual agreements made among those groups. A factor revealed on many occasions is that there exists a certain kind of competitions among the active carriers of gossip as well as a keen interest in sharpening the information they passes with others. While having hindsight on something, a gossip will also fulfil the function of storing as well as of retrieving information.<sup>19</sup>

It was possible to reveal a host of information with regard to the social function of a gossip through the data obtained in the field research. Gossip is utilized as a non-organized communicative medium as well as a mechanism of putting forward and establishing personal viewpoints. These revelations are also of value in arriving at conclusions with regard to possible theories as to the way how a gossip can exist. It was established in the research that gossip is a social phenomenon that always functions with fixed objectives as analyzed by Paine.

Within the process of slinging 'Thela' and 'Mada' in the university, the mechanism of the operation of the above mentioned definite objectives is clearly revealed. Slinging 'GonThela' and 'Mada' against ones opponents is a continuous process.

Through the process of communicative gossip social functions such as individual revelations, mutual inter-control especially within society consisting of a 'definite small group' and creation (building up) of leadership among individuals take place. Thereby, gossip opens up as a circulatory process. Since it takes place in a casual and circuitous manner, even the ability to act against it is hindered. As mentioned by Gluckman, it was revealed that gossip operates as a definite symbol of the membership of a certain social group as well as something which portrays the value of the group.<sup>20</sup> In the absence of an opponent, gossip could undoubtedly utter. But an opportunity to express insulting utterances does not arise during gossip. This is become the apparent false unity with the group then collapses. On the contrary, Gluckman states that, but for continuous official meetings such as legitimate gatherings which could exist in a group, a false friendship and co-operation could be exhibited externally by socializing information of that sort.<sup>21</sup>

'Thela' and 'Mada' could be clearly identified as the extremely vital method of exchanging and establishing values that are linked with behaviors within the university community, especially among the student community. It was possible to reveal that gossip is used as a common medium or sometimes as the only medium in the exchange of information. It was able to be recognized the following:

- Talking ill of an individual and its contribution socially
- Directing others as well towards such talk through this 'talking ill' of an individual

It was revealed in the research that there is a great desire to engage in gossip within the university community. According to the data gathered it was found that 52 out of 89 of the academic staff of all

<sup>19</sup>J.A. Barnes, Class and Committees in a Norwegian Island Parish, 1954, pp.39-58.

<sup>20</sup>Gluckman, Max, p. 313, Loudon; J. Kinship and Crisis in South Wales, *British Journal of Sociology*, p. 347, Vol. 12.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 312-313.



faculties and 243 out of 347 of the student community from all faculties show willingness to utter gossip and listen to gossip. What is meant indirectly by many under the heading 'different' in their willingness to utter gossip and listen to gossip (see Table 3,4).

As introduced above, it can be realized that the exchange of gossip, that takes place in relation to the society, culture and religion, especially among a small cultural group like the university society, plays an extremely vital role in the process of building up interpersonal relationships. The basic aim of the research was to direct a systemic study on the way gossip is exchanged especially within the university sub-culture which comprises small groups and, to recognize it as an academic field of study. The definition of gossip as put forward by many researchers and academics as a method communication of the fundamental function of exchanging and socializing of information could be understood by examining how it is used within the university community. It is also a special feature that basically the gossip 'carriers' as single individuals or as groups, strategically socialize gossip as a disorganized discussion about other people (single individual or groups) so as to highlight their likes and dislikes. Gossip is significant as a conversational and descriptive reporting of a thing or a person as well a carrier of social information.

Considering interpersonal gossip as reliable information was a characteristic which was generally recognized/identified. Even within the university community, it was found how 'reliable information' or '*Thela*' and '*Mada*' are exchanged. As analyzed by structural Anthropology, it was possible to see that within the university, the preservation of unity and equilibrium/balance among groups were/are fundamentally taking place by the use of gossip or '*Thela*' and '*Mada*'.

It became clear through revelations in this research as to how sometimes a person achieves him or her objective of becoming more successful than others by making use of gossip or '*Thela*' and '*Mada*'. Very often, accomplishing day to day objectives is also expected through gossip. It is also possible to recognize by examining the above data, how in an intellectual atmosphere gossip operates as a strong expressive medium publicity medium which strengthens inter-socialrelationships. A Language of its own is in use within the sub-culture. The student community could be recognized as it active and conspicuous group. '*Thela*' and '*Mada*' are a necessary part of the university system itself. Something which is essential to maintain the inter-relations among them(the students). Likewise, it becomes clear by inquiring from those who are subject to '*Thela*' and '*Mada*', it is frequently done with the aim of marginalizing and subjugating certain individuals. It could be recognized that slinging '*Thela*' and '*Mada*' takes place in order to breakdown personal relationships and act against personal fashions and those who go political movements. In short, slinging '*Thela*' and '*Mada*' takes place against those who do not toe the line with the accepted rules/norms of the tradition within the sub-culture.

Through these observations '*Thela*' and '*Mada*' or gossip could be identified as a vital daily device needed for the maintenance of the sub-culture.