# Writing Militancy: Literature, Identity and the Politics of Place

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By

**Simran Chadha**


**Centre for English Studies**

**School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies**

**Jawaharlal Nehru University**

**New Delhi-110067, India**

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**Centre for English Studies**
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
**Jawaharlal Nehru University**
**New Delhi-110067, India**

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# CERTIFICATE

This thesis titled **"Writing Militancy: Literature, Identity and the Politics of Place"**, submitted by **Ms. Simran Chadha**, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**(Prof. G.J.V. Prasad)**
SUPERVISOR

Prof. GJV PRASAD
Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067

**(Dr. Saitya Brata Das)**
Chairperson

Chairperson
Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067

Date: 06.09.2016

# DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This thesis titled **"Writing Militancy: Literature, Identity and the Politics of Place"** submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

**(Simran Chadha)**
**Ph.D. Student**
**CES/SLL&CS**
**JNU**

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# CONTENTS

# CHAPTER ONE

## SINHALA SELF-FASHIONING AND THE APRIL INSURGENCY IN THE NOVELS OF EDIWIRA SARACHCHANDRA, JAMES GOONEWARDENE AND PUNYAKANTE WIJENAIKE

As a watershed event in the history of the post-independent nation-state of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), the student insurgency of April Nineteen Seventy-One was a clear indicator of the brewing discontent regarding governance on the island and that henceforth, Sinhala Buddhist identity assertions on the island would take a militantly aggressive stance. In this regard, this movement of armed resistance by the youth intended to overthrowing the elected government but wiped out with numbing brutality by the state, foreshadowed the violence that would dominate civil society on the island in the decades to follow. Ideologically, the hybrid cosmopolitanism so characteristic of the island of Ceylon was soon to be a relic of its colonial past.

Writing about the event, Fred Halliday, in an article entitled *The Ceylonese Insurrection*, describes this post-independence, post-colonial insurrection in the following words:

> In April 1971 a revolutionary insurrection exploded in Ceylon. Unanticipated by imperialism and unexpected by revolutionaries elsewhere, sections of the rural masses rose in organised rebellion against the very government they had voted into power in the previous May. A brief resume of the political situation in which it exploded will indicate its astounding and unique character….Secondly, the resistance to this government did not take the form of fragmented and spontaneous resistance, nor of organised strikes, nor even of initial low-level guerrilla actions: it assumed the form of widespread armed insurrection, the most advanced and most complex form of revolutionary combat. (Halliday, 1971:55)

Spearheaded by the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna*, (JVP), the "rural masses" referred to by Halliday were young men and a few women drawn mostly from the Sinhala-Buddhist community of southern Sri Lanka. As a communist party with Marxist-Leninst leanings, the JVP, driven by its socialist agenda was founded sometime in the late sixties by a certain Patabendi Don Nandasiri Wijeweera or Rohana Wijewera. By Nineteen Seventy-One, the year of the Revolution, the organisation had recruited "over 100,000 members", a figure which clearly illustrates

the popularity of this movement and the faith it inspired amidst the Sinhala-Buddhist youth (Gunaratna, 1990:9). By the late sixties, university campuses across the island, apart from Jaffna and Batticaloa were JVP strongholds (ibid). Gunaratna unambiguously states: "Undoubtedly the most powerful arm of the JVP, only second to its military wing happened to be its student wing" (Gunaratna, 45).[1]

The factor binding together this group of young people was the employment crisis which successive governments on the island had been grappling with since independence. Halliday attributes this economic impasse, acknowledged as the prime impetus for the insurrection, to the population boom in Sri Lanka during the seventies. This, along with the repercussions of the welfare subsidy of free-education initiated by the government, Haliday feels, led to the youth unrest (Halliday, 1971: 55-90). By the eighties, as per the statistics provided by Gunaratna the number of unemployed persons on the island had escalated to: "one million two hundred thousand" (Gunaratna, 63). The sense of disillusionment and betrayal felt by the youth with their elected representatives found active reprisal with the ideology propagated by the JVP, particularly its faith in socialism as a class-leveller and the answer to the economic stalemate on the island.

A.C Alles (Hon. Justice Anthony Christopher Alles, 1911-2003) on the other hand, while acknowledging the primacy of the population factor stated by Halliday, and asserting that education is: "the birthright of every citizen", draws attention to the "indiscriminate lines" along which the state-funded welfare scheme of free education was being disseminated across the island.[2] Alles's categorically states that the teaching of Sinhala in lieu of the English language in the government-aided schools, and the focus on Arts and Humanities therein rather than the science streams created a body of students, from the rural areas, who were ill-equipped for the competitive job

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1 For more on this phase of Sri Lankan history, refer to Neil De Votta's *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*, Stanford Uni. Press: 2004; *Sinhala Buddhist National Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka*, EastWest Centre, Washington: 2007 and R.A. L. H Gunawardena's "The People of the Lion: Sinhala Consciousness in History and Histography" in *Ethnicity and Social Change*, Colombo: Social Scientists Association, 1985.

2 Government initiatives towards establishing free education across the island began in 1938. Secondary schools, *Madhya Maha Vidyalayas* were set up across the island to provide instruction in either Sinhalese or Tamil. For more information consult www.moe.gov/lk

market. Alles categorically asserts that it was the creation of this disparity through education which: "contributed in no small measure to the April tragedy" (Alles, 1990:243).

As part of the wider Sinhala-Buddhist discourse intent upon the fashioning of a Sinhala-Buddhist nation the preferred self-fashioning of the JVP student-cadres was as *bhumiputra* or "sons of the soil", and sometimes also as the "Che-Guevarists". The epithets indicate the ideological currents fundamental to the movement and while the latter, (also referred to in Sarachchandra's *Curfew and A Full Moon*) shows the influence of the Cuban Revolution and the revolutionary ideology of Che Guevara, the former links directly with exclusivist ethnic posturing put forward by this new nationalism afloat in the nation, particularly its territorial and economy claims.[3] The epithets together indicate the nexus established by the JVP between the ethnic and economic agenda.

In this regard, the JVP, clearly was very much a part of the discourse of Sinhala nationalism manifest after the 1956, Language Act or the "Sinhala Only" Act. Michael Roberts refers to 1956 as: "a convenient shorthand", for the various challenges the new, post-independence order posed to the earlier version of an inclusive, trans-ethnic Ceylonese nationalism (Roberts, 2001:11).[4] While a cohesive sense of collective Sinhala-consciousness had always existed on the island, and this could be on account of various factors such as shared cultural mores, the *vamsa* ideology, the onslaught of Portuguese proselytising in the sixteenth century and the Kandyan wars, it was however not set apart from the wider Ceylonese identity, as per Roberts.[5] Linking the religion with the language, Gananath Obeyesekere states: "up to

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3 For more information refer to Michael Roberts, "Sinhala-Ness and Sinhala Nationalism" in A History of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Reinterpretation and Reconciliation, Colombo: Marga Institute, 2001; Exploring Confrontation: Sri Lanka—politics, culture and History, New York: Routledge, 1995.

4 Post-independence Sinhala nationalism acquires added significance when set against its predecessor, the Ceylonese nationalism. This made an appearance on the island around 1815, following British occupation and administrative control of the island. Ceylonese nationalism encompassed the various indigenous and hybrid races inhabiting the island, such as, the Burghers, Malays, Moors, Muslims, Sinhalese and Tamil as the original inhabitants of Ceylon, as opposed to the British coloniser's. Refer to Michael Roberts, 2001:1,17.

5 The *vamsa* ideology originates from the *Mahavamasa*, an ancient Sri Lankan chronicle relating the origins of Sinhala-Buddhism on the island. As Michael Roberts points out, it is from the

the sixteenth century, being a Sinhalese implied being a Buddhist", (Obeysekera, 1979: 279, 314) but this did not impact the sense of a Ceylonese nationalism as did exist on the island prior to self-governance.

As is the case with most cultural nationalisms, Sinhala nationalism too propagated itself through ideas of cultural authenticity and racial purity which soon became an integral part of the Sri Lankan public sphere.[6] Sinhala consciousness as it developed after independence, as iterated by Roberts, displayed a prominent purist streak. This was manifest in the zeal to ferret out an exclusive, authentic, uncorrupted and pure Sinhala tradition or 'Sinhala-Ness", as Roberts refers to it. This purity, as the ideologues of this new "purist" nationalism declared could be re-discovered and re-learnt through the uncorrupted simplicity of the Sinhala villagers and their way of life.[7] It is ironic in this regard that the armed insurrection broke out first in the rural areas.

Michael Roberts locates the prominence acquired by the JVP in the arena of youth movements within the wider framework of this Sinhala ethno-nationalism which was fast replacing the trans-ethnic and inclusive Ceylonese nationalism. The ideological currents that went into the making of this movement, as stated by Roberts, explain the wide and contemporary appeal of the movement for the Sinhala youth:

> The indigenous and economic nationalism of 1956 was carried out through the JVP insurrections of '71 and later '87-90 …. The JVP, as I have briefly suggested elsewhere, were (are?) children of 1956 as much as the children of

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*Mahavamasa* that the concepts of the island as *Dhamadipa* and *Sinhaladipa* evolve. This makes Sri Lanka the land blessed by the Buddha and the Sinhalese: "the chosen people". However, as Michael Roberts points out, the belief in Sinhala exclusivity and all other races as foreigners and enemies does not appear till the Kandyan period. (ibid)

The Kandyan Wars were waged against the British; the Uva Rebellion: 1803-1805; 1815;1817-1818.

6 Refer to Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge Polity Press, 1989. Habermas shows how public opinion became a political and social force in the eighteenth century on account of the popularity of public debates on political issues. He shows how political matters were discussed and debated by private individuals in spaces such as coffeehouses, for instance and the political weightage this carried.

7 The activist strain in the writings of Anagrika Dharampala and the novels of Piyadasa Sirisena helped propagate belief in the idea of Sinhala cultural as a discreet and vulnerable entity. The need to protect this identity from the other ethnicities residing on the island arose from this discourse. This fed into the discourse of the Sinhala nationalism as it developed during the post-independence years.

> the Old-Left-gone-Maoist and Guevarists. That is, they embodied a synthesis of two powerful streams of ideology with a further twist provided by Marighella, Guevara and Mao.
>
> (Roberts, 2001: 11)

Roberts adds that it was after the onset of Sinhala nationalism that the earlier "Ceylon-Tamil", as distinguished from their counterpart, the Indian-Tamil now were bifurcated into the "Jaffna Tamil", the "Colombo Tamils" and the "Coolies" (ibid). Ethnic nationalism was here to stay.

As the "sons of the soil", the rallying cry of the JVP cadres was for change, change in existing modes of governance and ossified class structures. Violence was an integral component of this change as envisioned by the JVP and the cadres pledging allegiance to the organisation needed to embrace this injunction. The prime aim of the JVP cadres as "sons of the soil" was to rescue the motherland from the capitalist clutches of, the elected government, the Tamil separatists and in later years, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF).

Regarding terrorist groups, Julia Kristeva has made an interesting observation whereby she focuses on the increased involvement of women in terrorist groups, such as the Palestinian commandoes, the Baader-Meinhoft Gang and the Red Brigade among others. In her essay *Women's Time*, Kristeva posits this involvement on account of the marginalisation, nay exclusion of women from the domain of "power, language and meaning":

> When a subject is too brutally excluded from this socio symbolic structure, when, for example, a woman feels her affective life as a woman or her coalition as a social being too brutally ignored by existing discourse or power (from her family to social institutions) she may, by counter investing the violence she has endured, make herself a "possessed" agent of this violence in order to combat what she has expressed as frustration with arms that may seem disproportionate, but which are not so from the subjective or more precisely narcissistic suffering from which they originate.
>
> (Kristeva, 1981:28)

members of such groups (women included) as Kristeva analyses, while united in their hatred and desire to change: "the bourgeois democratic regimes in power", do not consider the terrorist violence posited by the group as an end in itself but rather: "a programme for liberation"; however, the pressures of belonging to such groups proves

to be even more oppressive, exploitative and even "sacrificial" when compared to the system they are combating, and this "system", as Kristeva clarifies:

> Strangely enough, it is not against totalitarian regimes that these terrorist groups with women participants unleash themselves but, rather against liberal systems, whose essence is of course exploitative, but whose expanding democratic legality guarantee relative tolerance. ( Kristeva, 1981:28,29)

while Kristeva focuses exclusively on women in terrorist outfits, her insight can well be applied to the JVP cadres, most of whom were from the disenfranchised sections society.

The Insurgency began with attacks by the student cadres during the early hours of the morning of the 5th of April, 1971.[8] Centres of government control, police stations and administrative offices were attacked, burnt and the personnel manning them executed. In parts of the rural south, the insurgents were successful in established administrative and judicial networks until overrun by the police and paramilitary forces.[9] The bloodbath that ensued sent shock waves through the Sri Lankan public sphere. The disproportionately harsh state action sowed the seeds of distrust regarding elected governance. It was almost as if a state of unofficial mourning had been declared across civil society.

Literature written in the wake of this tragedy bears witness to the outpourings of grief and guilt for having failed to heed the voices of the younger generation, of being indifferent to their aspirations and for having rendered them vulnerable to state action. Expressions of this guilt inundate most of the poetry and prose produced in the wake of the insurgency. Referring to the effect of the insurgency on the people of the island, Lakshmi de Silva stated: "it shook not only our complacency but our conscience". The collective "our", used by De Silva refers to the middle-class bourgeois so insulated in their privileged urban lifestyles that it rendered them

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8 One of the causes cited by the JVP, in hindsight, explaining the failure of the Seventy-One insurrection refers to a miscommunication regarding the time slotted for the insurrection. Refer to A. C Alles 's *The J.V.P 1969-1989*, Colombo: Lake House Investments Ltd, 1990 and Rohana Gunaratna's, Rohana. *Sri Lanka A Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the JVP*, Kandy, Institute of Fundamental Studies: 1990.

9 James Goonewardene's *An Asian Gambit* renders a vivid account of the attempt at administering justice by the kangaroo courts set up by the student-rebels.

oblivious to the clamour of young voices in need of redress. Ashley Halpe, in the lines below, acknowledges the guilt and regret of his times when he writes:

> I do not know
> The thin reek of blood
> Of seared flesh,
> The cracked irreducible bone, I know
> The harsh edge of self-contempt,
> The ashy guilt of being too old,
> Salaried, safe and comfortable. (Goonetilleke, 2005: 11)

While documentation regarding the Seventy-One insurgency is aplenty - historical and political analysis, testimonials of insurgents and judicial proceedings, it is the literary insights that I will be dwelling upon regarding this instance of armed violence by the Sinhala-Buddhist state against Sinhala-Buddhist youth. The texts to be discussed are: Ediwira Sarachchandra's *Curfew and a Full Moon* (1978), James Goonewardene's *An Asian Gambit* (1978) and Punyakante Wijenaike's *The Rebel* (1979).[10] My discussion will focus on the following factors, the emergence of the youth-as-insurgent and the stance of the novels regarding the new nationalism. What factors drew the youth to don the mantle of insurgents in opposition to the non-violence of their Buddhist upbringing? How was this transformation accomplished? Do the narratives subscribe to the *bhumiputra* ideology regarding the rebels or do they view them as pawns for the party politics transpiring on the island? In the final reckoning were the insurgents, "misguided" and/or "misled youth" or more (Halliday, 1971; Gunaratna, 1990; Alles, 1990)? The texts selected for discussion were written around the same time, in English and deploy a realist mode of narration whereby they seamlessly weave historical events, personages and places with the narrative yet each

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[10] Sri Lanka's leading playwright, social commentator and a lecturer at various Sri Lankan universities including Peradeniya, Ediwira Sarachchandra (1914-1996) also served as the Sri Lanka's ambassador to France. Most of his work including the play *Sinhabahu* has been adapted from the *Jathakas* or Sinhala folklore. Sarachchandra converted to Buddhism soon after independence and adopted the name of Ediwira Sarachchandra in lieu of his Christian name, E.R De Silva(as cited in D.C.R.A Goonetilleke. ed., Introduction, *The Penguin New Writing in Sri Lanka*, New Delhi: 92); James Alexander Shedden Goonewardene (1921-1997), a prominent Sri Lankan writer was a former broadcaster with Radio Ceylon and wrote scripts for the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Commission apart from other eminent positions with media; Punyakante Wijenaike (1933) is a pre-eminent Sri Lankan woman writer. Her work has been broadcast on the Sri Lankan television network and on BBC.

text provides a radically different perspective and insight regarding the event of Seventy-One.[11]

All three novels are located in centres of higher learning which were also the spaces from where potential cadres for armed insurrection were recruited. This provides a deeper insight into the ground reality of the movement as it shows the interaction between the two main players, the students and the teachers. The action of Ediwira Sarachchandra's novel *Curfew and Full Moon* unfolds against the backdrop of the Peradeniya campus and the text shows the transformation of this once idyllic campus - a seat of intellectual inquiry - into a nerve centre for Insurgency. James Goonewardene's *An Asian Gambit*, on the other hand is located in the government-aided *Mahavidayala* of Medatonta, a village in southern Sri Lanka and with Punyakante Wijenauke's *The Rebel* the action shifts between the protagonist Kumari's village Kegalle located on the outskirts of Colombo and the University where she has procured admission. Through *The Rebel*, Wijenaike addresses the possibility of female emancipation and liberation during these revolutionary times. Her protagonist Kumari, the daughter of a Sinhalese peasant farmer, is a resilient and articulate young lady who ruthlessly questions the new ideology of violence against her traditional Buddhist upbringing.

The tone and tenor of the novels is determined by the author's choice of protagonist. Professor Amaradasa, in *Curfew and a Full Moon* is a teacher of Archaeology at Peradeniya, best described as a liberal humanist. This explains his innate resistance to the state rhetoric which blatantly indicts his students as insurgents and terrorists. The text shows the gradual building-up of xenophobia leading to the incarceration and branding of Amaradasa as a traitor to the state and people of Sri Lanka, charged with having masterminded the student rebellion. Goonewardene text on the other hand is narrated through the sensibility of Deva Ratnakriya, an expatriate and a sculpture of international repute who, prodigal-like has returned to the island and has procured employment as the art teacher at the Medatonta *Mahavidayala*. Art and the creative sensibility therefore form the parameters against which the

[11] Ru Freeman's *A Disobedient Daughter*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2000, and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, Canada: Vintage, 2001, are notable books on the first and second JVP insurrections respectively.

Revolution is cognised. Deva's process of re-acquaintance with the land of his birth provides the justification for the lengthy treatises on Sri Lankan politics with which the text is suffused.[12] It is with the gaze of the insider-outsider that Deva views the changes on his homeland, such as for instance, the glaring disparity between the cities and the villages: "the scramble was in the cities, and the towns; in the periphery there was still desolation and hunger." (Goonewardene, 4). Wijenaike's *The Rebel* foregrounds the viewpoint of her protagonist Kumari, who gets drawn into the movement out of feelings of love rather than patriotism or nationalism. Through the omniscient narration framing the plot, Wijenaike subjects the ideas of change and progress, so rampant in the Sri Lankan public sphere during this time to stringent critique. Did the terms socialism, proletariat, capitalism, so rampant in the Sri Lankan public sphere at this time, hold similar resonances for the female cadres as they did for the male? Wijenaike's novel draws attention to these questions through the travails of her protagonist Kumari, a female insurgent who believes:

> Tomorrow she would be destroying old beliefs, old ways, helping bring about the birth of a new world. Tomorrow she would not be among her family for she would have no family, no kith or kin except the revolution. And yet she felt no fear, no doubt, no qualms. (Wijenaike, 8)

It is Kumari journey from the questioning and sceptical vacillation to steadfast adherence to the ideals of the movement which the text explicates.

Sarachchandra's narration closely follows historical fact. The text depicts the tension in the electorate following the victory of the United Front party in general elections held in 1970. Hitherto, the precincts of Peradeniya were perceived as nurturing ivory-tower intellectualism remote from the reality of life on the island, particularly its rural masses and agriculture economy:

> If ever a community of young and old sought the tranquillity of inspiration of a natural environment in which to engage themselves in the pursuit of knowledge, they could not have found a place where nature was more kindly or more anxious to please them than the valley of Peradeniya.
>
> (Sarachchandra, 1978:3)

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[12] The novel, *An Asian Gambit*, was initially conceptualised in the form of serial publication for a leading Sri Lankan daily, *The Tribune*. Perhaps this explains the extensive analysis of the political situation of the times as incorporated into the narrative.

In the recent elections however, on account of active campaigning by the Peradeniya student body, the party elected to govern the island is formed on the basis of a coalition between the three leading parties - Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), the Trotskyist -Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist – United National Party (UNP). The resulting United Front (UF) government at the centre has been instated entirely on account of student campaigns.[13] The jubilation on the island on account of this electoral victory is witnessed at the May Day Parade, an annual event held at the Galle Face Greene in Colombo. *Curfew and a Full Moon* captures the mood of festivity as cadres of all three parties march in unison to the "high-pitched" slogan called out by the captain of the parade:

'*Mother's on her way, she is coming*'!

followed by the thundering refrain from the marching cadres:

'*Measures two of rice she is bringing'*! (Sarachchandra, 78:3)

The slogan while being indicative of the dismal economic conditions prevailing across the island reflects the euphoric belief that change is close at hand. Politically, it foregrounds the centrality of the masses for the new political regime of electoral democracy and this also explains the deployment of the mother-figure therein. The nurture and compassion traditionally associated with the mother (also an appeasement to the leader of the SLFP, Sirimavo Bandaranaike), is deployed here, as the text explicates, to render politics acceptable to the unlettered peasant, the "common man", now a significant participant in the democratic process (ibid).[14]

Disillusionment regarding electoral governance soon set in. *Curfew and a Full Moon*, records this unrest and the violent turn it was taking this:

> socialism could not come into being within the framework of a capitalist economy. The ruling classes must be overthrown and power had to be wrested from their hands and given to the oppressed classes
>
> (Sarachchandra,78:21)

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13 The 1970 General Election of Ceylon was the last election held under the Soulbury constitution. In 1972, the UF Government established the "free, sovereign and independent Republic of Sri Lanka", also thereby breaking its final ties with colonialism. For more information, refer to Jane Russell's *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution*, 1931-1947; K.M de Silva's, *A History of Sri Lanka*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2005, among others.

14 Raja Proctor's novel *Waiting for Surabiel* fictionalizes this early political phase of party formation.

In *An Asian Gambit* the political unrest is depicted not en masse but through the sensibility of Deva Ratnakriya who is quick to associate the: "pools of stagnant water and the filth choked drainage" (Goonewardene,1) with the pathological state of the nation. This is borne out by the sense of apathy and inertia of: "the police station, the universities, the government offices" (Goonewardene, 77) and also the cynical attitude of his students, who Deva feels: "had no illusions about what this so-called schooling was all about, and they were watchful and angry" (Goonewardene, 42). At the same time, the new nationalist rhetoric heard all around, vociferously advocates: "….the love of country and nation, for love of motherland, of language, of race" (Goonewardene, 77). It is regarding the new nationalism that Goonewardene and Sarachchandra part ways. Published in the same year as Sarachchandra's *Curfew*, Goonewardene's *An Asian Gambit* exposes the fascism underlying the libratory discourse of Revolution while Sarachchandra celebrates the heroic valour of the young rebels sacrificing their lives for the betterment of community.

Rumours of an impending youth insurgency have been rampant across the Peradeniya campus since the beginning of the academic term. The graffiti that appears time and again on the walls of the campus is a manifestation of youth anger and the violent future it portends:

> kill everyone over forty….Class hatred is the Love of the Motherland….with your guns you can destroy us but not our voice….
>
> (Sarachchandra, 22).

The graffiti splayed on the walls of the campus is informative about the ideological framework of this movement - it is a youth movement with class-based agenda's and is up against the GoSL. The graffiti moreover bears testimony not only to the violence underlying the convictions of the cadres but also their deep-rooted sense of marginalisation, disenfranchisement and the desperation of their need to be heard. The extent of the alienation however goes unheeded by the educators. At the Faculty club for instance, the movement is accorded no more attention apart from a couple of drunken jests: " This is a Revolution in truly indigenous style. Victory to the home-spun freedom movement of the true sons of the soil!" (Sarachchandra, 53). It is this indifference of the older generation towards the young minds they are tutoring

that was responsible in no small measure towards forging the path of violence which the students eventually embarking upon. In *An Asian Gambit* too, Kulatilleke, the school Principal, dismisses the incendiary pamphlets found around the campus inciting students to join the movement as no more than yet another boy-scout movement. Ironically, it is Amaradasa, also deemed as a terrorist by the state, who has intuited this anti-establishment movement but is powerless to avert it or accord it a different direction. As he confides to his wife Susheela: "when our boys plot to overthrow the government can we save them? Do they realise the seriousness of what they are doing? (Sarachchandra, 68).

As a mark of respect towards his students, the Professor had subscribed to their party newsletter or propagandist pamphlet - as it would be deemed in state jargon. The newsletter, the professor notes, while replete with dissension, regarding government policy also celebrates resistance movements in the Latin American countries and expounds the revolutionary philosophy of Che Guevara. Given his intellectual depth, it is unlikely that the professor will be swayed by the rhetoric of what he reads, rather, dissension is an integral component for democratic governance, and it is on these grounds that he values what he sees unfolding before him.

Documenting the historical significance of the party pamphlets and the graffiti, A. C Alles highlights the disseminative role played by this body of writing and the manner in which its emotive force helped in the spread of the new ideology and the recruitment of cadres. It is the endorsement of violence that Alles focuses on and as he points out, unlike the anonymity accorded to graffiti, the pamphlets were acknowledged as written by the leader of the movement, Rohana Wijeweera. One such example cited by Alles illustrates how Wijeweera renders violence acceptable to a body of predominantly Buddhist youth. Violence, as propagated for purposes of revolution, is effectively cloaked with intellectual appeals to political philosophy and the deployment of naturalist symbolism. One of the citations selected by Alles to illustrates the case, states: "As Karl Marx has shown it is violence that plays midwife to every ancient society pregnant with the new" (Alles, 2001:49). The intellectual authority of Marx and the deployment of the birthing process serve to naturalise violence and even render it acceptable to the cadres.

Sinhala nationalism is not an overt narrative aspect of *Curfew and a Full Moon* but rather it is the class or economic perspective which Sarachchandra foregrounds as responsible for their marginalisation and as the text states, the Peradeniya campus emerged as the nodal point for the Revolution on this very count. The student body on the Peradeniya campus comprises mostly of youth from the surrounding villages which renders the difference between the privileged and marginalised extremely pronounced. During the course of a conversation with the Professor, one of the final-year students Munasinha unflinchingly states:

> Here the class struggle is seen in a heightened form. On one side are the teachers who live in luxury homes….on the other side are the poor students who come from village homes where they have only the bare necessities of life and sometimes not even that….what a wide gap there is between these two groups who live within the small precincts of the campus.
>
> (Sarachchandra, 33).

while Munasinha's logic is amiss as it is applied to a centre of learning and intellectual inquiry such as Peradeniya, it is a clear indicator of the temper of the times. When an accidental explosion on campus leads to the discovery of: "dynamite, gelignite and other explosives found hidden on campus" (Sarachchandra,72), the text juxtaposes the state attitude, accusing the students as "enemies" of the GoSL as opposed to Amaradasa's sensitivity towards them:

> They now came from a different social class, from poorer homes in the villages, and their immediate need was to improve their position in life. In fact, it was the main reason for which they sought a higher education. Could a teacher's responsibility, therefore, end with giving them instruction? (Sarachchandra, 29)

It is a similar issue that Wijenaike posits through the detail of Kumari's father William Singho having mortgaged a portion of his land to enable her to procure a university education. As William Singho reminds his daughter:

> 'Write home if you need anything. I can get Vimala to read the letter to me. Work hard and pass the examinations that will fit you to be an asset to yourself and us. Do not let anything hinder you until the goal is reached, your monthly rent of eighty rupees I will send you through a postal order.'
>
> (Wijenaike, 1978:11)

During the course of his interaction with Munasinha, the Professor realises the class-hatred from which the revolutionary discourse draws impetus. As Munasinha categorically states:

> This country cannot progress as long as there are institutions of this nature in it. These exist only for the benefit of a certain class. And unless these institutions as well as the class for which they exist are completely exterminated, and we begin once more from the beginning, there is no hope for us.

(Sarachchandra, 31)

Class positions, as the Professor is keenly aware, are not as discreet, clear-cut or inviolable as the young Munasinha has made out to be in the above enunciation. The Professor for instance, far from being the privileged bourgeois that the Revolutionary-clique slots him as, had been a scholarship student. Similarly, Goonewardene's protagonist Deva, in *An Asian Gambit*, is a product of the urbane, upper-class Colombo- Sinhala society and therefore technically a bourgeoisie but he has shunned a life of privilege to teach in a government school located in a rural area.

Wijenaike's *The Rebel*, states the repercussions of this disparity as the leader of the women's wing, Kusuma informs Kumari of this fundamental logic propelling the Revolution. Kusuma reminds Kumari that after the completion of their university degree, there are no jobs for the likes of them:

> Those who have influence, those who have friends to help them will find jobs once they leave here. But for people like you and I, life is not so rosy."

(Wijenaike,21).

This theory of a controlling network, of the power-elite controlling the economy on the island has been posited by Gananath Obeysekera who cites it as prime cause for the unrest, in his influential study on the Seventy-One insurgency. Bolstering the idea of the bourgeois or "ruling elite" network prevalent on the island, Obeysekera writes:

> It consisted of politicians, an administrative and professional elite including the security services and business elite either having direct control of economic wealth or holding business appointments in large European owned enterprises particularly tea plantations.

(Obeyesekera, 1974:)

This network, as Obeysekera goes on to specify, was characterised by a common lifestyle such as the use of the English-language and colonial mannerisms, even at home. This network was formed through long-standing affiliations, such as elite schools, colleges and recreational clubs established by the colonial elite and which continue to command a formidable presence in the postcolonial nation. Stressing the impregnable barriers created by this network, Obeysekera, points out that all important political leaders, regardless of their political alliances, were a part of this power-elite. Clearly, this network cut across ethnic affiliations and was based on class privilege. As a grass roots movement, the JVP intended to disseminate this impregnable network.

Egalitarianism however is not practiced within the movement despite the ideology it propagates. Indicating the authoritarianism spawned by the movement, Sarachchandra shows a research scholar, Heenileme baited on account of his father being a *mudalali*, a term that literally means, shop-keeper but on account of the class-discourse has acquired connotations akin to the swindling moneylender within the village economy. Class disparity is debated even during the fateful archaeological excursion to Anuradhapura as the students debate on whether it is advisable to preserve the *viharas* and palaces as heritage sites or convert them into budget housing for the masses. In the campus the rural and urban divide takes on draconian proportions as Somaratne, a village lad for whom Colombo is at best a distant metropolis is clubbed with the fresh entrants from the city being shamed as: "bourgeois bastards…who had cultivated…western ways" (Sarachchandra,193). The nexus established between the economic and cultural aspect is rendered apparent through this communication. In *The Rebel*, Kumari witnesses the brutalisation of a student from a Colombo school:

> Kumari saw, to her horror, that the boy's face was smeared with tar and that he was being spun round and round in a ruthless fashion. Finally he collapsed to the ground and they jeered at him "Come to look down on us did you? Just because you have lead an easier life than us, you think you are better?"
>
> (Wijenaike, 14).

Unlike Wijenaike and Goonewardene's narratives, the dominant impression created through Sarachchandra's rendition of the insurgency is of the insurgents as

well-intentioned young men and women, stepping out in life, each with his/her individual talents and personalities. As the Professor reminiscences, he recalls Somaratne as the skilled violinist, Nandasena, always eager to parade his newly acquired knowledge of socialism and the mettle and sincerity of the young Wijeseere and Munasinha. The narrative moreover has clearly foreground the primacy of their marginalisation by the system and also shown that the system left the student-insurgents with no choices apart from armed insurgency. The narrative of *Curfew and a Full Moon* however does not deviate from the dominant perception of the insurgents as misguided or misled youth. While this viewpoint undercuts the agency and initiative accorded to the young rebels by foregrounding their naivety, in all probability, it stood them in good stead during the judicial trials by deflecting culpability. Deflection of culpability is accomplished through the incorporation into the narrative of the "Five Lectures", acknowledged as responsible for the training of the insurgent mindset. Scholars such as A. C Alles (1990) and Rohana Gunaratna (1990) have stressed the method of the "Five Lectures", intended for insurgent training. Sarachchandra's narrative incorporates this detail into the narrative through the testimony of one of Amaradasa's students, Somaratne. Writing to his teacher from the high security Bogambara Prison where he has been incarcerated for terrorist activities, Somaratne's letter bears testimony to the "study camps" and the "five lectures", conducted in remote hamlets away from the public eye and by persons of unknown identity[15]:

> The sessions began on Friday night and ended on Sunday evening. Only five hours were allowed at night for sleep. Different people came on different days to take classes. The lecturers were older people whose names were never revealed to us. Sometimes they stood behind a curtain and lectured, so that we never got to see them or know who they are.
>
> (Sarachchandra, 195)

The shrouding of the identity of the speakers, by a "curtain", while being illustrative of the policing of free speech, a fundamental democratic right, is also a metaphor for the ambivalence regarding the "truth" of the past. It illustrates that

[15] Sarachchandra adheres closely to official histriography with regard to the "five lectures", undertaken by future cadres. These have also been documented A.C Alles in *The J.V.P 1969-1989* and Rohana Gunaratne's in *Sri Lanka A Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the JVP*, among others.

"truth", just like the true identity of the speaker behind the curtain, is always a matter of conjecture and therefore to establish or construct "truth", in terms of unique singularity is an anomaly. Sarachchandra illustrates the point through the inclusion of a sutra called the sutra of "The Great Passing". As Amaradasa meditates on this famous stone sculpture typifying the last moments of Shakyamuni Buddha, he is struck by the simultaneous presence of different, diverse and contrary truths that emerge in stark clarity. The sculpture shows three figures, in three different postures by the side of Shakyamuni Buddha before he passes from the mortal frame. Buddhist scholars have debated the identity of these figures - are they his disciples, or is it the figure of Ananda, in different postures or then is it Shakyamuni himself moving towards a prostrate position as he breathes his last. While each theory advances interpretation to another level, the uncertainty lingers. The Professor cognises that fact that each age advances the interpretation it find the most "attractive" or most "useful", which makes "truth" subject to the criterion used for establishing it as *the* truth.(Sarachchandra,106).

Sarachchandra adds another example regarding truth and its ambivalence. Each year, on the Peradenita campus, the freshly sprouting leaves of the *Na* tree show the enriching effects of this plurality. Even as the Professor tries to ascertain a singular colour for the leaves, he is struck by the multiplicity of shades on a single leaf: "pink, crimson, red or mauve? But how many shades there could be in between these!" (Sarachchandra, 48). It is this insight regarding the multivalent dimension of truth which need be applied towards arriving at *the* "truth" of the past. As the sutra illustrates, a new perspective/truth/interpretation must not be posited as replacing earlier interpretations versions but simultaneously exist alongside. So apart from the official version of the event as documented and archived through newspaper reports, academic journals, official documents such as testimonials before Criminal Justice commissions, alternative modes of historical archiving such as for instance, diary entries, eye-witness accounts procured through private letters and most importantly works of literature impart undeniable historical valence to the "truths" of the past.[16]

[16] For more on the "Archive" refer to Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression.* Trans. Eric Prenowitz, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Regarding the "five Lectures" (ibid), the insurgents-in-the-making are lectured on the evils of capitalism as the cause of their oppression to which is added the ethno-nationalist component. The stress is on the uniqueness and vulnerability of the Sinhala race and the responsibility of the Sinhala-Buddhist youth towards protecting this fragile race from invasions by "foreigners" and "alien" races:

> I particularly remember one lecturer who spoke to us behind a curtain….he mentioned the Sinhalese kings of olden days and their exploits, and especially the heroes of Ruhana who drove out the Tamil hordes who came from the South of India and attempted to destroy Buddhism and the culture of the Sinhalese. Although these heroes were Buddhist they were faced with a situation in which they could not avoid warfare and bloodshed.
>
> (Sarachchandra,196)

The student as insurgent-under-training is then reminded of the multiple colonisations of the island by the Dutch, Portuguese and British with the final reiteration of the oft-repeated phrase: "socialism could not be established by parliamentary government." (Sarachchandra, 196).

Violence as an altruistic act is the lesson preached to the Buddhist youth as s/he is fashioned into the identity of an insurgent. Violence, they are taught will be performed not for personal or self gain but altruistically undertaken for the greater good of the community. Then, in keeping with the cultural nationalism so fundamental to the discourse of this revolution, it is impressed upon the cadres, that the Revolution will not be a miming of western revolutions but will meet the needs of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation. Violence formed the exclusive thematic of the final lecture as Somaratna's letter explicates:

> This lesson included practical classes which began at four o'clock in the morning. We were taught how to handle rifles, make bombs, and conduct guerrilla warfare. We were taught the strategy of the armed struggle as it was to take place in Ceylon and were given the reasons why this was to start with an attack on police stations. All these exercises and demonstrations were conducted in the open, and in the jungle surrounding the hut, in the early hours of the morning before the villagers in the neighbourhood woke up.
>
> (Sarachchandra, 2001:196)

As Somaratne admits, awed as he was by what he was witnessing, the most appealing was the idea of eradicating poverty and levelling out the class hierarchy.

Also, being a part of the power-clique on campus was, as he confesses, attractive for one hitherto marginalised by the system. In *The Rebel*, Wijenaike's shows the material basis of the revolutionary ideology through the figure of the youth leader Aruna Dias, whose deepest desires, as he confides to Kumari are to own and possess capital goods which he may otherwise, publicly disdain as bourgeois:

> 'I will marry you somehow one day. No one, not even our leader himself can prevent our marriage. One day, when this country is ours, we will live in a furnished house and ride in a car….'
>
> (Wijenaike,35).

James Goonewardene's *An Asian Gambit* shows how class disparity was the tool used to ignite the youth to anger and rebellion. The cadres are reminded of the brutality meted out to them at the police stations, of the bureaucratic corruption and favouritism engendered by the capitalist system. The identity of the insurgent as per *An Asian Gambit* is forged in this very smithy of marginalization compounded as it is with humiliation. It is this factor that the leader of the movement, in Wijenaike;s *The Rebel* capitalises on in his speeches:

> 'Comrades', he called them. 'We have to unite to be strong. We have to be selfless, fearless and think in terms of everyone and not a chosen few. We are the down-trodden and we must fight for everyone who is like us'. (Wijenaike, 25)

With Goonewardene, it is the cultural nationalism that bears the brunt of his trenchant critique particularly the ideas of cultural purity and authenticity. These he demolishes through the inclusion of the space of the jungle. While it is in the jungle bordering the hamlet that the "new gospel", of revolution and martyrdom is being preached, the jungle is also the space wherein exist the earliest forms of cultural practice on the island. (Goonewardene, 165).

The jungle has been a significant trope in colonial discourse as it literally signifies the savage, un-civilized and heathen space in urgent need of the civilizing influence of colonial modernity. Colonial exploitation, as we are aware, was euphemised as the white man's burden.[17] The colony then is the civilized space

[17] The "Jungle" has been a popular trope for depicting the colony in colonial theory and fiction. In contemporary Sri Lankan literature it acquires resonances related to extreme forms of brutality and

rescued from the cannibalism and savagery of the jungle and this justified colonial conquest and the imperialism that followed. The jungle acquires new connotations with Goonewardene's *An Asian Gambit*. It is the post colonial space where the tactics of mass-terror are taught. However, Goonewardene invests it with more meanings than just one. it is the space of the jungle that enables Goonewardene to critique the cultural aspect of Sinhala nationalism. Deva for instance, is critical of the new nationalism and compares it to the cultural nationalisms as practiced in Germany under the Third Reich or Russia under Stalin:

> …in Kampuchea, under the Khmer tribe, in Vietnam, in Iraq, in Palestine, in Gautemala, in all those small, tragic Latin American countries, and in Africa, in Uganda, along the Congo, small countries, driven up the wall and then falling under the heel of the military dictator and the police state. (Goonewardene, 157). it is a similar pattern that Deva sees being as enacted on the island, and realises that it is but a matter of time before: "terror becomes a system of governance". (ibid)

Through the space of the jungle and the tribes that inhabit it, Goonewardene draws attention to cultural practices that run deeper than the authentic traditions and rituals identified by the contemporary Sinhala-Buddhist discourse. The practice of drum-beating for instance signified incomprehensible heathen beliefs for the colonisers but has deep-rooted cultural significance for the habitants:

> The temple drums, the hevisi, different in sound and rhythm from the yak bera. He couldn't mistake them. Deep, somewhere, in the pulse and heart beats of the people these rhythms were, no doubt, so embedded they could not help but respond to their sounds. The hevisi had started around six thirty, and a little after seven it ceased suddenly-for the gilan pasa, thought Deva, the light evening refreshment for the monks….
>
> (Goonewardene, 91)

Sanctified through centuries, such practices, rooted in the cultural memory of the people were labelled as primitive, superstitious and heathen by the colonisers. The *Katadiya* or the village doctor is a person more feared than respected in the village community, and coincidentally also belongs to the drummer caste. By highlighting the continuation of these cultural practices in the post-colonial nation state Goonewardene

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violence. This is mainly on account of the fact that the student insurgency of '71 and the fact that the LTTE operated out of the jungles of Wani and Mullaituvu.

draws attention to an aspect of the indigenous culture which runs deeper than the present-day Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.[18]

However, Goonewardene's critique of the ethno-nationalist discourse was decried as unpatriotic, particularly passages such as the one quoted below:

> People, in this country, certainly, had always been capable of cruelty that could match the worst there was anywhere else. They could be vicious and destructive. They could litigate and quarrel with ferocity. The moving of a boundary wall was enough reason to cut up neighbours with razor sharp knives, destroy whole villages with a tribal ferocity….but of mass-scale, organised violence, backed by intellectual concepts there were no recent examples.
>
> (Goonewardene, 64)

This was perceived as evidence of Goonewardene's alienation from the land of his birth and its people. The eminent Sri Lankan academic and critic D.C.R.A Goonetilleke for instance, emphatically states that James Goonewardene fails to understand or appreciate the spirit of the insurrection and further justifies his negation of Goonewardene by charting out a comparison between the empathetic stance espoused by Sarachchandra's *Curfew and a Full Moon* towards the "misguided" rebels as opposed to the prophetic doom regarding the future of civil society on the island as iterated by Goonewardene in *An Asian Gambit*. Comparing Goonewardene and Sarachchandra's perspectives on the Insurgency, D.C.R.A Goonetilleke expresses the view: "Goonewardene is unaware of divisions and tendencies in his own mind" (Goonetilleke, 19), further adding that the author much like his protagonist Deva, both, on account of their upper-class predilections fail to appreciate the point-of-view of the insurgents, who were after all, rural youth. Goonetilleke adds that Goonewardene's lack of empathy accrues from his distance and inability to comprehend the Sinhala culture unlike Sarachchandra, who is: "steeped in Sinhala culture in which the rank and file of the rebels were rooted." (Goonetilleke, 1992).

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[18] For a study of the prevalence of belief in meta-rational theology in Sri Lanka, consult Mihindukulasuriya Sauantha Fernando's *Ritual, Folk Beliefs & Magical Arts of Sri Lanka*, Colombo:susan International, 2002. This is not to suggest that this meta- rational aspect is an exclusive essentiality of Sri Lankan culture as the strain runs through South Asian cultures despite the modernizing impulses wrought by the colonizers.

Goonetilleke's critical stance can be ascertained from his essay *Sri Lankan Literature in English and the Changing Phases/Faces of Nationalism*,[19] wherein he begins by pointing out the distinction between patriotism and cultural nationalism, with patriotism being allotted Dr Jonhson's directive, as being: "the last refuge of the scoundrel" (Goonetilleke, 96, 238). It is against this that Goonetilleke proceeds to evaluate writers, their alignment with the Sinhala-Buddhist national consciousness as opposed to a composite national consciousness. Sinhala nationalism or cultural nationalism as Goonetilleke refers to it in his essay is the rarefied touchstone against which a Sri Lankan author must be evaluated.

Goonewardene empathy with the disenfranchised, in *An Asian Gambit*, is clearly conveyed through his protagonist Deva's interaction with Rakhita, a student with a natural eye for detail and colour, an innate artist. Art, and the freedom of insight and imagination it affords is juxtaposed against the oppressive authoritarianism demanded of the movement. Rakhita is a misfit amidst his revolutionary peers; clearly, he is not insurgent material but unfortunately is of the class and age deemed fit for recruitment. The text shows the damning effects of peer pressure on this lad through his desperate bid to belong to this power clique and their promise of eradicating poverty. It is Rakhita's dilemma and the suffering that ensues which is the tragic hubris informing Goonewardene's *An Asian Gambit*.

The freedom of thought required for creative, imaginary works is anathema for the architects of this revolutionary ideology. Works of art were not celebrated for the alternative and radical insights into reality they offered but decried as bourgeois and elitist. It is through this prism that Goonewardene launches a scathing critique of his times including state mechanisms of surveillance and corrupt governance, all of which ensured an overwhelmingly negative reception for his novel on the island. Waxing critical about Goonewardene's novels at large, Goonetilleke says: "the central motif of Goonewardene's novels is that of an urban hero, dissatisfied with town life, seeking fulfilment in the village", which leads logically to Goonetilleke's next statement that Goonewardene's novels set up a urban/rural opposition wherein the rural landscape holds the virtues of "lost innocence and truth" (Goonetilleke, 1992,

[19] Published in the *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Volume 31, Nos. 1 & 2 (1997)

intro).[20] Goonetilleke's criticism appears unfounded when applied to *An Asian Gambit*, as the text shows the economic reasons for the dystopia prevalent in the village and the protagonist Deva's concern for his student Rakhita. The prime concern of the text is to show the fascism inherent in the ethno-nationalism fast gaining a foothold on the island; this however erned Goonewardene the ire of his contemporaries.

It is through his characters that Goonewardene allegorises the dominant nationalisms on the island, the all-inclusive Ceylonese nationalism and the new Sinhala-Buddhist version. Kullatilleke, the school principal stands for the old order of Ceylonese nationalism while Hempala, the new teacher - who, as we are informed - is a political implant, allegorises the new wave of patriotic violence. Sinhala nationalism gained momentum by decrying Ceylonese nationalism as an "imitation" of the "west" and extolling the cultural authenticity of the Sinhala villages. An educationist to the boot, the Principal Kulatilleke, on account of his colonial style of dress is ridiculed by Hempala as an imperialist stooge and cultural alien: "….the culture of the westernised, black Englishman smuggled in through the backdoor. The imperialists, they prowl around, corrupting the youth." (Goonewardene,113). With packages of excrement delivered to his office and the stoning of his premises by students, Kulatilleke, on account of this alienation, is reduced to a state of drunken dereliction.[21]

The fiery rhetoric of Hempala's speeches is in tandem with the discourse of cultural nationalism as he deploys the *vamsa* rhetoric replete with mythical references to apocalyptical endings and the war between the forces of good and evil. The youth are reminded of their duty towards protecting Sinhala culture against the forces of colonisation, Indian expansionism and Tamil occupation. As cadres of the movement they would be defenders of the faith, saviours of the masses and the deliverers of the new world order and on this path, death must be embraced in the spirit of martyrdom

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[20] The "village", a significant trope in post-colonial writing, has been a recurring thematic with eminent Sri Lankan authors particularly Punyakante Wijenaike and Jean Arasanayagam.

[21] See Macaulays' *Minute on Indian Education* and GJV Prasad's essay *A Minute that Stretched into Centuries: Macaulay, English and India*, New Delhi:Routledge, 2011. The essay posits a finely nuanced and fresh insight regarding Macaulay's directives on the introduction of English as the medium for education in the colony.

(Goonewardene, 95). As Kulatilleke cognises: "it is an atmosphere in which tradition and culture have become terrible words" (Goonewardene, 129).

Through Hempala Goonewardene shows the performative dimensions of the new self-fashioning. The unrest in the school begins soon after Hempala's arrival and his recruitment of students. He instructs the cadres to refer to him as "*gurunanse"*, a Sinhala term reserved for the highest practitioners of monastic discipline. Goonewardene intends this to indicate the descent from sublime religiosity to pathos and finally inhumanity as Hempala murders Kulatilleke and leaves him bleeding to death.[22] As a spectator to this cold-blooded murder, Rakhita, on account of the violence he has been witnessing and being forced to perform, blabbers a confession: "It was in the jungle- they took me – into the jungle they took me; it was there they told us these things – what to do when it happened". (Goonewardene, 99).[23] We are reminded that the narrative began with a powerful image of the unchecked undergrowth of the jungle creeping towards Medatota. Years later, as the narrative explicates, Hempala returns. No longer the unkempt hoodlum of the student-insurgency years, he is now the slick, suave arms dealer who now functions as part of an international network devoted to the spread of terrorism as: "the world system that will eventually emerge" (Goonewardene, 176). D.C.R.A Goonetilleke however is of the opinion that Goonewardene's depiction of Hemapala is but a caricature rather than a three-dimensional character (Goonetilleke, 19).[24]

While Kulatilleke provides Hempala the ground to construct a case against the earlier inclusive Ceylonese nationalism, Deva provides him the opportunity to harangue about the elitism that provides for art as a profession. His speeches however, as quoted below, inevitably touch the raw nerve of paranoia:

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[22] An insightful perspective regarding the social acceptance of women belonging to the Burgher community of Ceylon has been provided by Neloufer de Mel. She draws attention to the fact that it was with the rise of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that women from this community were constructed as amoral and licentious. On the other hand purity and chastity were associated exclusively with Sinhala-Buddhist women. Refer to de Mel's *Women and the Nation's Narrative*, New Delhi: Kali for women, 2001.

[23] Leonard Woolf's novel *A Village in the Jungle* (1913), Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2008 presents a brilliant rendition of life in a village bordering the jungle.

[24] Refer to E.M Foster's *Aspects of the Novel*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2005, for a discussion of "flat" (uni dimensional) and "round" (multi dimensional) characters.

> "Art;" he exclaimed loudly. He turned round to Deva. "Art, here, in this school?" "Is that funny?" asked Deva. "Funny, - waste of time, waste of money; student's time, school time. People need jobs, and vat they do with art, you eat art. It's a joke, no…. "what can a student do with art? That's all right for the rich people, it's for people with money. They have time to waste. An imperialist plot- that's what it is, a plot to make us the play things of the big nations."
>
> (Goonewardene, 46)

It is through Rakhita, at best a reluctant fundamentalist, that the clash between Art and revolutionary violence acquires significance. Mocked at by the Hempala coterie for his artistic temperament, Rakhita is at odds with the vileness he is called upon to practice in the name of culture and patriotism. While Rakhita's passion for art pulls him towards life and community, he is also: "the youth given lessons in violence. He was the young man who was taught revolutionary slogans.", warning him to beware of the "agents of the bourgeoisie" (Goonewardene, 74).

As Deva instructs Rakhita in the nuances of form, colour, line and movement he instructs him to paint at first in the realistic mode and depict life as he sees it in his village:

> …..the world must be shown as it is before going into deeper things like the Chinese and Japanese painters tried to do – they were not only painters – they were poets and thinkers and philosophers who were trying to discover the mystery of life…
>
> (Goonewardene, 98).

Ironically, it is his paintings that illustrate Rakhita's dilemma. The peasants painted by Rakhita appear not like the farmers' at work in the fields surrounding the village but rather like factory workers wielding their agricultural implements as though they were handling weapons. These figures have no semblance to the peasants tilling the fields at Medatota. When queried, Rakhita answers that indeed these are the peasants or the workers of the future: "the workers there'll be under a people's government". (Goonewardene, 75). The paintings of Rakhita, the Revolutionary are in tandem with the propaganda demanded by the Revolution regarding "people's art", or literally art that would serve the propagandist illusions disseminated by the party. Art, as creative activity signalling imaginative freedom, is the touchstone against which Goonewardene evaluates the movement and this enables him to expose the fascism on

which it is founded. This authoritarian aspect is critiqued in Wijenaike's *The Rebel* as well. The party clearly demands unquestioned obedience from its cadres as evidence of their assimilation with the party ideology. To qualify as a cadre, it is essential to inculcate unquestioning obedience to party dictates, and it is this that Kumari finds difficult to inculcate. As Kusuma warns her when she objects to the treatment meted out to the boy from the Colombo school:

> You will have to accept our way of making people equal. You will have to learn submission. It is not for you, as a fresher, to ask questions, only to answer them.
>
> (Wijenaike, 14).

Depicting the counter-insurgency from the student's point-of-view, Sarachchandra chooses the opportune moment when the Professor's class is on an archaeological excursion to the ruins of Anuradhapura. News of the counter-insurgency reaches the group with shoot-at-sight orders issued by the government. Before the night is out Nandasiri is caught in the crossfire as he is studying the monuments and his body is spotted on a tractor-trolley stacked with bloody gunny sacks, bearing, presumably, the bodies of student insurgents. The death toll rises as the innocent too are slaughtered in the mindless violence that ensues. Regarding the counter-insurgency, Goonewardene's narrative states: "there were no laws the military observed when stamping out an insurgency" (Goonewardene, 192). The movement of heavy artillery on the rickety, old wooden bridge used for ferrying cyclists or the occasional provisions truck allegorises the onset of a new world order - the beginning of the Police state: "the desecration the soldiers had perpetuated in the place had caused it to be impregnated with the presence of an invisible and unseen menace and evil." (Goonewardene, 205). With Rakhita killed by his comrades and his sister by the avenging forces of the state military, the tragedy is etched on the racked faces of Sandoris Appu and his wife Sophy Hamy and like a whip-lash the trauma is re-enacted with each re-telling. The horrific deaths of their children are as if frozen in time like a grotesque collage of horror, death and mutilation. Describing the village after the counter-insurgency operation, Deva states that it was: "as if someone had gone to work on the flies with a flit gun" (Goonewardene, 195).

Counter insurgency operations however continue well after the military action. They involve the incarceration of the innocent, imposition of curfew, news censorship and shaming and humiliation techniques continue henceforth. The xenophobia spills over into the Peradeniya campus and even the possession of revolutionary literature renders one suspect as indicated by the line-up of heavy artillery to confiscate Marxist literature from Amaradasa's library. Likewise, an author of pulp fiction is arrested on account of the inflammatory speeches of one of the characters in his novels. *Bhikkus* accused of links with the rebels are stripped and paraded around campus, and teachers believed to have masterminded the insurgency similarly paraded in the marketplace with placards around their necks stating:

> A REBEL LEADER
> Look at the man
> A LECTURER FROM THE UNIVERSITY
> Drawing a salary of Rs 700/ a month
>
> (Sarachchandra, 2001:150)

The effect of this on civil society can be measured by the resulting paranoia which erodes any sense of community and even news of a burning corpse by the hillside yonder, identified as a university student, is met with studied indifference.

The Curfew, a constitutional legality turns out to be a nightmare of unmitigated bestiality, as the daily jottings of the Professor's diary testify:

> ….But we know what goes on under cover of curfew. We know how young men are shot in their own houses before their parents, how half-dead bodies are piled up in the backyards of police stations and set fire to with kerosene oil and tyres…we know how jeeps drive into villages and carry away young girls from their homes for 'questioning'…. (2001:161)

Armoured trucks ply the roads; students hauled up for questioning just disappear and with violence now a quotidian reality, nothing is sanctimonious. Fear and paranoia pervade everyday life as espionage flourishes eroding the very idea of community.

Munasinha and Wijesiri, now wanted terrorists, visit the Professor one night to avoid detection. Amaradasa lights a candle and shields the flame with heavy bookends from his library. The flickering flame is metaphoric of the precariousness of

these young lives and their need for protection, even as they state: "We are ready to die. Our struggle has only started" (Sarachchandra, 180). However, it is not this metamorphosis of the university student into a hard-core insurrectionist prepared to be martyred for the cause that Sarachchandra's text celebrates, rather, the flickering flame highlights the sadness of this transformative development and the vulnerable fragility of these young lives.

Wijenaike's *The Rebel* explores the manner in which the revolutionary discourse addresses the women's question. How, for instance, did the idea of "femininity" change or evolve under an ideology that claimed to destroy ossified traditions and herald the dawn of an equitable society? To what extent were women-cadres liberated from traditional norms and social expectations regarding womanhood and what were the permissible limits regarding the freedom of choice granted to female-insurgents? These are some of the questions Wijenaike raises in the *The Rebel* along with the burning political issues of the times, such as the flaws in the free-education scheme, the employment crisis, politicisation of the monastic orders and female agency.

In *Curfew and Full Moon*, Sarachchandra makes fleeting acknowledgment of the female insurgents entrusted with the task of stitching uniform for the male cadres. A.C Alles in his documentation of the insurgency makes mention of Leelawathie W. Seneviratne, the leader of the women's wing, also the daughter of a certain Jane Nona - a domestic help earning Rs 75 at the time and a scholarship student at the university. It was on account of her dedication to the cause and her prowess in the martial arts that Leelawathie W. Seneviratne was promoted to the uppermost echelons of the movement (Alles, 2001:252). Neloufer de Mel however cites the "patriarchal bent" of the movement as reason for its inability to enlist "large scale female participation", adding: "The 1970 JVP had only five or six women at action committee level; there were no women JVP ers on the district committees or the decision making politbureau." (De Mel, 2002:210).[25]

[25] This gender imbalance in the JVP is particularly pertinent when one compares it with the vast number of women cadres enlisted by the Tamil separatist movement and the formation therein of a separate wing for women cadres.

Among the incidents of gender violence committed during the counter-insurrection, one such involved the interrogation and torture a female insurgent, Premawathie Manamperi, also known as the "beauty queen" on account of having won the local contest. Premawathie torture and murder illustrates the extent to which violence as a disciplining mechanism had seeped into the structures of civil and administrative society while the recurring epithet "beauty queen", for this young woman whose preferred mode of self-fashioning was that of an insurgent draws attention to the fact that patriarchal goalposts in this society remained largely undisturbed.[26]

By stressing the neutrality of her position in the preface to *The Rebel*, Wijenaike deflects attention from slotting her text on the Seventy-One insurgency as "feminist literature". Rather, she states:

> *The Rebel* becomes my second collection of short stories….the stories hold no high purpose, nor do they cover a large canvas. It is merely an attempt to portray certain characters and events, recorded and unrecorded these past few years, always with the human angle in the forefront and no political or any other motivation. (*The Rebel*, i)

Wijenaike dedicates her novel not to the female-insurgents of Seventy-One but to the "betrayed and the innocent", thereby towing the line regarding misguided youth. The narrative however proceeds to subvert all and any heroic sentiment invested into the movement by previous documenters. Regarding her protagonist Kumari, Wijenaike writes:

> *The Rebel* spotlights Kumari whose intention was not to rebel but to love, whose young life like a bud, is crushed before it has a chance to flower, to open to the sun. She is the innocent victim caught, raped and destroyed like so many of her kind when she participated in what she was made to believe was an act of love, faith and courage. She dies senselessly, misunderstood, misled in the rebellion of 1971.
>
> (*The Rebel*, ii)

Wijenaike's choice of words such as "bud", and "flower" to describe Kumari are not intended to convey female vulnerability and dependency but rather signify Kumari's youth and the absence of worldly cynicism. In this regard, Wijenaike aligns her

[26] See A.C Alles (1990), pg 170-176

interpretation of the event with the dominant idea of the insurgents as misguided and/or misled. Apart from that, Wijenaike's portrayal of Kumari is that of an intelligent young woman who boldly questions the idea of violence-for-change by evaluating it against the teachings of the Buddha decrying violence as anti-human. It is this Buddhist teaching that she reminds her fiancé Aruna, the student leader about. She is astute enough to realise that students like herself and Aruna are no more than a: "cog in the wheel of events to be", required to function like robots programmed for the destructive, anti-human agendas. (Wijenaike, 40).

Another instance that highlights Kumari's keen intelligence is her reaction to Aruna's spirited harangue on spotting the Star-Spangled Banner atop the American embassy. In keeping with the ethno-nationalism of the times, Aruna, in a fit of anger, states: "Those stars and stripes belong to an imperialist power that has no right on our soil" (Wijenaike,23). Kumari draws his attention to the graffiti on a nearby wall and queries:

> 'What is that flag over there?.... 'That is also a foreign flag. It is red with a hammer and a sickle painted in white' .
>
> (Wijneike, 23)

Through the portrayal of Kumari and her room mates, Kusuma and Buddhi, Wijenaike depicts aspects of womanhood. The "moon-faced, plump, fair", Buddhi, "…with the helpless look of a baby", depicts conventionality[27]:

> Last evening she had seen something, something she knew would not have been accepted by her mother and father. She had seen a young monk in a yellow robe talking to a girl in a dark corner.
>
> (Wijenaike,11-13)

Kumari's other room mate Kusuma however defies this conventionality and is ideal insurgent material. Her hair is closely-cropped and wind-tousled like the male cadres and it is the party ideology that completely subsumes her mind and will. As per her admission, she is dispassionate and cold-blooded to the point of being filled with "hate enough to kill" (Wijenaike, 9). Kusuma negates the idea of attachment between

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[27] For more information regarding Buddhist doctrine and the politics of violence in Sri Lanka, refer to Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah's *Buddhism Betrayed*.

cadres declaring that the only appropriate emotional feelings should be those for the motherland and dying-for-the-cause, is the noblest manner of proving one's loyalty to the movement: "I feel love for my country, the need to die for it. A country is more important than a person, even a family." (Wijenaike,20).[28]

Love however, as the narrative voice states, fills a deeper emotional need than violence and it is love for Aruna that draws Kumari to the party:

> Kumari turned away. She did not want Kusum to read her eyes. When rain falls, at last, on a parched earth what can it do but soften? Her eyes glowed, her heart soared with purpose, with life.
>
> (Wijenaike, 20)

Although Aruna Dias often iterates the reasons for the mmovement:

> … economic crisis of the country, our false independence, the Indians who still occupy our land….'Tell me what kind of a world will you and I have unless we change it?' ….

and coerces her towards joining the party as a token of her loyalty to him:

> '…Kumari are you with us or do you think differently?'….She raised her head and cried out against the wind: 'I am with you, with the revolution, no matter what anyone says…. he held her head tight in both his hands. 'Kumari, as much as you are a part of me, I cannot seem to be able to make you a complete part of our work. There are some who think you are too feminine to make a full time worker.
>
> (Wijenaike, 38).

As per Dias, it is on account of being "too feminine" that Kumari fails to gain acceptance with the party workers. However, as the narrative indicates "femininity" in this regard implies Kumari's resistance and her inability to submit unquestioningly to party dictates. It is her independence of thought that the senor cadres cannot accept. Ironically, Kumari is deemed "feminine" on account of her inability to show submissive behaviour.

Buddhi too is considered feminine and on account of this is reduced to a: "poor wrecked creature, whimpering and crying, unable to think, sleep or eat", as she

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[28] This feeds into the discourse of martyrdom which gained rapid currency on the island following the onset of militancy by the JVP and the Tamil separatists.

has been brutally reminding that she is: "after all a woman" (Wijenaike,16). Misreading the reserved demeanour of this student for class snobbery, the ragging takes a demonic turn one night, as she is dragged screaming from her bed. Too traumatised to continue at the university after this, choosing conventional patterns of marriage and motherhood are the only choices left available to her, as she states in her letter to Kumari:

> …Once I had a dream of becoming a doctor. Because of this dream my parents spared no expense in teaching me what I wanted to learn. But in the campus I found I was not fitted to live the hard way. And so, here I am learning to cook and sew under my mother's direction. My horoscope is being compared with horoscopes of intended sons-in-law. My dowry is being collected. Perhaps this was the life my karma had intended for me. How are you getting on?
>
> (Wijenaike,19)

Through Buddhi's story and the judgment passed on Kumari for being "too feminine", Wijenaike shows not just the anti-feminist but also the inhumanity that forms the basis of this new discourse.

Love and not ideology is the catalyst facilitating Kumari's transformation into a militant. However, this too is conceived in terms of conventional masculinity as on the day of the insurgency, she sheds her feminine dress code, of skirt and blouse, to don trousers and the shirt of the insurgent:

> she was like a man now, strong of purpose, able to fight and run…. The revolution had taken the place of home, of father. She had donated her mind, as well as her body to it, just as she had surrendered to Aruna, her whole body, her mind and heart.
>
> (Wijenaike,44)

this insight into Kumari feelings just before the revolution, particularly her expression that she feels "like a man" shows the patriarchal coercion within the revolutionary clique. While earlier it was her intellect and her ability to empathise with her fellow students regardless of their social strata that distinguished her from the rest now it is on account of sporting a shirt and trousers, "like a man", a dress code she hitherto perceived as exclusively masculine which coerces her into a sense of empowerment. It is the manner in which Wijenaike positions this apparently agentive moment within

the narrative that it appears more disabling regarding women and the choices available to them. Is freedom to be determined by this breaking of sartorial boundaries? Finally, mirroring the treatment meted out to Buddhi at the hands of student insurgents at the university, Kumari too meets with a similar fate, albeit at the hands of the state- actors as she runs out naked from the police station only to be shot until dead. It is the story of Premawathie Manamperi being re-enacted yet again. While this quelling of the Seventy-One insurgency can in no manner be equated with the restoration of peace, it affirmed the beginning of civil unrest on the island. It is as Deva, the objective, even if unwitting observer/witness to the event states: "the cancer's taken root – the tumour's beginning to spill out the pus, along with the maggots." (Goonewardene,42).[29]

As post-independence Sri Lankan history records, on May 16th 1972, a Criminal Justice Commission was established to try the insurgents. Addressing the Commission during his trial, the leader of the Revolution, Rohana Wijeweera pointed out the irony of the trail wherein:

> A representative of one social class is addressing the representatives of another social class….A representative of the exploited and oppressed proletarian is addressing the representative of the exploiting and oppressing class.

Declaring himself to be an "unrepentant Marxist" and paying a fitting tribute to the cadres who had either died for the cause, Wijeweera declared:

> A retreat is not a defeat, but a phase from which it is possible to recover and march again to certain victory. No revolutionary movement has raced non-stop to victory in a straight line from start to finish….

Further adding:

> ….Whatever the capitalist class may have expected to gain through the April incidents, their ultimate results have been expressed by a revolutionary poet in the following stanza:
>
> > See these blossoms strewn on earth
> > and withered lie
> > Their fragrance shall abide, shall never die.

[29] Goonewardene does not end the narrative with the counter-insurgency but with the return of Hempala which is a prefiguring of the second JVP insurrection between the years 1987-89.

> To raise its sweetness high to limits limitless
> More buds will bloom
> and bloom and multiply.' (Gunaratne, 1990: 12, 14)

While the three novels discussed in this chapter have shown the contribution of literary texts towards understanding historical moments fraught with political tension, their indispensability for studies on conflict zones is indisputable. This is established by the narrative focus on the censorship of news from the areas affected by civil unrest. Writing for *The Guardian*, about the conflict and censorship of news from Sri Lanka, Romesh Gunesekera states:

> wherever I went on these two last visits, no one – Sinhalese or Tamil – wanted to talk about the war. They were fed up with the war. It had gone on too long, cost too many lives, hurt too many families….no one wanted to talk about it because no one believed it was nearing an end. No one believed anything about the war in the news. Too many journalists had been intimidated….even when the government forces finally took Killinochi, the LTTE administrative headquarters for years, my trishaw driver did not believe it.
>
> *The Guardian*, 30th April, 2009.

In *Curfew and a Full Moon*, the narrative takes into account the fact that the news broadcast from Colombo is radically different from the ground-reality as experienced in Peredeniya. In *An Asian Gambit* Goonewardene illustrates the resulting misconstruction of news reportage:

> the peepul are rickwested toby calm. Sum foolish eyung men, mislaid by designing peepul had been laid into attackin' polis stations and killin' men in oreder to crate a state of chaos indha country. The eyung peepul are edvised to sorrendur atdha furst operchunity so as to prevent further bludshed'
>
> ( Goonewardene, 1985: 183)

In this regard the truth-value of the professor's diary entries on the insurgency and its aftermath as he has witnessed it proves to be of immense historical import, more than the officially documented and archived versions. The texts discussed demonstrate the fact that the archival value of a work of literature cannot be undermined or dismissed as mere "fiction", as this amounts to denying and even silencing "truths" about the past.

Literature also provides a window into a world which may otherwise be remote and distant. The Professor's re-reading of Leo Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection* during the indefinite curfew enables an imaginative correlative between Tolstoy's descriptive version of injustice and inhumanity to the experience of his students under state custody:

> As he lay in bed reading it, the death-cries, muffled in the stillness around reached him as if from near at hand, wide-open eyes glittering from charred bodies….the horrible stories of rape, brutality and torture that he had been hearing everyday ceased to be mere reportage, he sensed and felt it all as if he were witnessing it with his own eyes.
>
> (Sarachchandra, 78:161)

In this chapter, I have shown the dissemination of Sinhala nationalism through narratives by three pre-eminent Sri Lankan novelists. While Sarachchandra's narrative is empathetic to the young rebels and their cause, Goonewardene places the insurgency within the wider political agendas of party politics which, in his perception, makes the student-insurgents mere pawns in the scheme of things. He evaluates the event of Seventy-One against the repercussions of terror and violence it unleashed in society. Wijenaike's stringent critique shows the oppression women faced within the ranks of the Revolution. All three texts, albeit in different degrees, credit the dominant viewpoint regarding the insurgents as "misguided" youth. Stating this to be a staple feature of the literature of 1971, Chelva Kanaganayagam while acknowledging the spate of writing in the wake of this insurgency, points out:

> the dominant ideological position worked with a particular version of the nation-state….With the insurgency, the subjectivity of the authors amounted to an understanding of grief, loss and misguided idealism, but there was no endorsement of the movement itself.
>
> (Chelva, 2007,194)

However, the stance of the authors tells us a lot about their subject positions regarding the new ideologies of governance on the island-nation. Regarding Sinhala nationalism, Sarachchandra's *Curfew and a Full Moon* is subtitled, "A Text about Sri Lanka", despite the fact that the insurgency took place while the island of Ceylon had not been renamed. While his empathy for the rebels accrues from the fact that these

were young men and women from the marginalised sections of Sinhala society for whom poverty and unemployment were very real and pertinent issues, it is ironic that in "A text about Sri Lanka", no other ethnicity, apart from the Sinhalese-Buddhist, finds mention. Tamil, Burgher, Malay or Muslim characters are conspicuous by their absence from this campus novel - so complete is this textual genocide committed by the author. Goonewardene's *An Asian Gambit*, on the other hand launches an unrelenting attack on the votaries of cultural nationalism by plainly stating the agendas they attempt to euphemise. As Deva, the expatriate realises, the change on the island is not in the compelling presence of: "foreign bred ideologies – Marxism, Socialism, Capitalism, the Party…", but rather in the tectonic power shift from the earlier cosmopolitanism to the Sinhala-Buddhist majority power brokering temper of the times (Goonewardene, 47). The student cadres of Seventy-One, in this regard, were no better than cannon fodder, for with the ethno-nationalism at work, as Deva points out: "The sale would be made of lads like Rakhita" (Goonewardene, 82).

In the next chapter I will show the seminal influence of the new discourse through the manner by which it comes to dominate liberal humanist thought and critical analysis of literary texts which are now judged according to the parameters set in place by the ideologues of Sinhala cultural nationalism.

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# CHAPTER II

## "ECO-WARRIORS": ROMESH GUNESEKERA'S *HEAVEN'S EDGE*

A Sri Lankan born British novelist, Romesh Gunesekera's "subtle and often elegiac fiction", reflects the multiple underpinnings that comprise, for him, the idea of Sri Lanka - also the land of his birth and ancestors.1 Images of the island as framed by his migrant sensibility range from vivid memories of a childhood spent on the island (before the family moved to the Philippines and then to England), to tales of myth, mystery and adventure culled from the islands epics and news coverage regarding the armed conflicts which have besieged Sri Lanka since independence. It is the lamentable chasm between the Ceylon of yesteryears and the death-trap that Sri Lanka had become during the years of civil war which finds expression in his novels.

*Reef* (1994), a novel rich in sensuous natural detail, draws into sharp focus these two completely disparate images of the island by describing a meeting by chance, in London between two expatriate Sri Lankans, the one, a young Tamil refugee, now a petrol pump attendant, and the other, the narrator Triton - a middle-aged restaurateur, a Sinhalese, and once a *Kolla* boy for a certain Mister Salgado in Colombo.1 While the two individuals represent the two, opposing sides of the ethnic conflict raging war on the island, their brief conversation is tinged with the sad awareness of their irrevocable loss, as each recalls the island of his memories:

> 'Very bad war now back there. My home by Silavatturai, you know?' He smiled eagerly.
>
> I could see a sea of pearls. Once a diver's paradise. Now a landmark for gunrunners in a battle zone of army camps and Tigers…. I wanted to close my eyes and imagine a warm sea and our salt in the air. I did not know what I was doing in there. I and my young refugee with his flickering cash register.
>
> (Gunesekera 1994:13)

Yet, despite the "bad war…back there" (ibid), the young Tamil refugee's eyes light-up when he speaks of "home", and it is the same spark that kindles Triton, the restaurateur's heart as well. It is "our" salt that Triton refers to, implying the shared

habitat which is "home" for both the ethnicities, now at war.

*Reef* is set against the massive political upheavals which sundered apart the celebrated cosmopolitanism of this island where different ethnicities and races had hitherto resided with conviviality and tolerance. The texts shows the fault lines of social inequalities and ideological rifts gradually becoming so insurmountable that they could only find expression through forms of terrorism amounting to decades of civil war. Insurgencies, failed coups, political murders, the rise of the JVP and the LTTE, are the events which form the political backdrop for this novel, crafted as it is through a series of brilliant juxtapositions. Politics and the violence it has spurred are, to begin with, distant and far-removed from Ranjan Salgado's languid, lackadaisical, upper-class world which Triton describes as:

> None of them, not Danton Chidambaram the lawyer, nor Vina who had started the batik boutique, nor her boyfriend Adonais with his fluorescent motorbike, nor Sarina who wanted to be a model, not Jay, not Gomes, not Sushil Gunawardene ever gave anything in return. None of them, except dear Dias….
>
> (Gunesekera, 1994,143)

a world where, catalogued by Triton above, bonds were forged irrespective of ethnicity but also a world now being rendered redundant by the new order; a world which Miss Nili, a Christian-Tamil girl of the working-class finds aimlessly "stupid", despite her love for Ranjan Salgado (158).

The violence as experienced by the young Tamil refugee from Jaffna is a far cry from Triton memories of the island which makes not just the occurrence of violence but its very nature the harbinger of change:

> Back home that April, in 1971, the first of the insurgencies erupted in a frenzy of gunfire and small explosions. Bands of zealous young guerrillas roamed the village and townships staking out their place in a crude unending cortege. Thousands were killed in the reprisals. The heart of a generation was forever cauterized…. But these were only precursors of the staggering brutality that came, wave after wave, in the decades that followed: the suffocating infernos, the burning necklaces, flaming molten rings of fire, the Reign of Terror, abduction, disappearances and the crimes of ideology, this suppurating ethnic war. the bodies would roll again and again in the surf. They would be washed by the tide and be beached by the dozen.
>
> (Gunesekera, 1994, 182)

While it is the intensity of Triton's inner world, his voyeuristic love for Miss Nili, his devotion to Ranjan Salgado and his self-education along with Gunesekera's evocative prose that compels our attention; it was clearly not so with those living and experiencing, on a daily basis, the violence transpiring on the island. The contrasting and seemingly incongruent images of Sri Lankan as evidenced in this exchange are illustrative of the reasons why Gunesekera's work, particularly *Reef* has been in the line of fire with resident Sri Lankan critics.

*Reef*, was a finalist for the Man-Booker and awarded the Yorkshire- Post Book Award for Best First Work, *Monkfish Moon* (1993) was classified as the New York Times Notable Book for the Year, and *The Sandglass* (1998) received the BBC Asia Award for Achievements in Writing and Literature. In Sri Lanka however, reviews of Gunesekera's novels display a high degree of vituperative criticism amounting to dismissal. With scant justification, Ruvani Ranasinha and Thiru Kandiah for instance denounce the Gunesekera oeuvre as exotic, and an orientalist pandering to a western readership; his representations of Sri Lankan culture, they pronounce as "inauthentic", and further declare that he is "indifference" and/or "myopia" towards the causes propelling the war - a war which has indelibly changed the reality of their lives on the island forever (Ranasinha 1997: 87-89; Kandiah 1997: 47-72). In similar vein, categorising this award-winning novel through a series of adjectives bordering on the melodramatic, Walter Perera declares: "In *Reef* Gunesekera portrays a country that is immoral, amoral, exploitative, poorly governed, prone to violence, demoralized and much more besides." (Perera 2000:102). This, Perera explains is on account of the difference between the exilic and the resident sensibility by stating that this picture of a country in its "death throes….holds no hope for those who are left behind in Sri Lanka". (Perera 2000:93). Everything good about the island, it appears to Perera, Gunesekera posits in the past with the present being but: "a house of sorrow" (Gunesekera, 190).

However, a reading of the text in question shows that of immanent concern to the author, among other factors, is with of two of the most cherished aspects of the island, one, the ethnic/racial conviviality as existed on the island even if unproductively so, and the damage accruing to the coral reef surrounding and even

protecting the southern tip of the island from the ocean. Perera's impatience, nay, intense disapproval of the decadence of this lot leads him to miss the fact that they do not warrant the narrator, Triton's approval either. Perhaps, the source of Perera's chagrin lies with the relationship of Miss Nili, a Tamil-Christian with the upper-class Sinhalese, Ranjan Salgado. The hybrid semiotics of this union go against the grain of the injunctions regarding the mixing of the races set in place by post-independence Sinhala nationalism – the logistics of which explain the criticism directed against Gunesekera. It also shows a blatant disregard for the boundaries of class, a factor which the previous chapter has shown to be the prime cause for the unrest on the island and one of the factors which the insurgents of Seventy-One which to re-address.

Ranasinha, Kandiah and Perera's criticism is congruous with the discourse of their times, a discourse intent upon fashioning of a new nation as per the dictates of the JVP. Perera shows scant regard for the fact that by the end of the novel, Salgado returns to the island now in the midst of a bloody guerilla war, with the hope of rescuing his lost love. Likewise, Salgado's valuable research on the ecological balance required to protect the coral reef, also the central metaphor of the novel, is tided over by Perera as "procrastination" and "pedantic rather than a practical approach to the problem". (Perera 1995:72). At no point in the essay does Perera provide an understanding of what this "practical" solution may entail. In an earlier essay, "Images of Sri Lanka through Expatriate Eyes: Romesh Gunesekera's *Reef*", Perera pronounces the verdict: "*Reef* is guilty of recuperating and of perpetuating certain myths and stereotypes about Sri Lanka in its often jaundiced depictions of character, class and politics." (Perera 1995:76). The two stereotypes, that *Reef*, could be guilty of reproducing, would be, one the decadent coterie that Nili and Salgado have gathered around themselves and the other, perhaps, the one that caused the real heartburn – the stereotypes of Rohana Wijeweera, the leader of the Seventy-One insurrection which occur through the course of the novel: the bearded youth, the Che Guevara caps and then Salgado's assistant Wijetunga, clearly a replica of the leader himself:

> He had grown a thick beard. His hair wa longer and he had developed a low parting on one side from which the hair was slicked over across to the other side. (120)

any doubt regarding the Wijetunga/Wijeweera replica is laid to rest by Wijetunga's patriotic speech to Triton, on learning that Miss Nili runs a guest-house for tourists:

> "Tourists" he shook his head in dismay. "Listen, these people all think tourists will be salvation. All they see is pockets full of foreign money. Coming by the plane-load. They don't realise what will happen? They will ruin us. They will turn us all into servants. Sell our children……" he gripped my shoulder hard. 'You know brother, our country really needs to be cleansed, *radically*. There is no alternative. *We have to destroy in order to create*. Understand? Like the sea. Whatever it destroys, it uses to grow something better.' .... 'Have you heard of the five Lessons?' he asked me softly. He didn't mean the scriptures – the Precepts. He meant the simplified lessons that explained the crisis of capitalism, the history of social movements and the future shape of the Lankan revolution. 'you know what happened in Cuba? Isaid, "but I am only a cook.'
>
> (Gunesekera, 1994, 121)

On the flip side, Gunesekera's works have received resounding acclaim, as the awards testify, for their "human interest and moral poise" (www.romeshg.com/reviews-page-reef/). Writing for the Boston Review, Neil Gordon applauds the lyrical intensity of Gunesekera's prose: "The perceptive, thrilling drama of his narration seems to burst the limits of his framing device, a tribute to the power of his story." (Gordon 1995). Reviewing *Heaven's Edge*, for *The Guardian*, Maya Jaggi writes:

> Despoiled paradises and desecrated Edens have always been at the heart of Romesh Gunesekera's subtle and often elegiac fiction. *Heaven's Edge*, his most compelling and powerful novel recreates the mythic fall in the Edenic garden….

*Heaven's Edge* was also hailed by *The New York Book Review* as

> Most accomplished yet…wistful, melancholy and mysterious…. A complex novel that entwines an individuals quest for wholeness with a country's longing for lost – and better - times.

Apart from Gunesekera, the Sri Lankan Diaspora comprises of a vast repertoire of writers, with Michael Ondaatje, Reinzi Cruz, Yasmin Gooneratne, Chandini Lokuge, Shayam Selvadurai and Ru Freeman being just among a few of the better known authors. The location of these writers in metropolitan centres of the world and the access this location provides to publishing houses with global networks of sales and marketing certainly enables a wider dissemination for their texts and for

the point-of-view as propagated therein. This is in stark contrast to resident writers with limited in-house or self-publishing options available within the island and whose readership consists of persons residing on the island and academic networks therein. Theirs is an audience intimately connected with the war, living and experiencing it on a daily basis and therefore vastly different in awareness and reaction to an international audience whose encounter with the civil war, in all probability, was on account of texts penned by one of the above mentioned writers of the Sri Lankan diaspora, as was the case with the author of this thesis.1 Apart from reactions to the war, spatial location affects the aesthetics deployed by the authors and one noticed a vast difference between the texts of resident writers as opposed to expatriates fictionalising the war. An assiduous use of realism and first-person narration often made the texts of residents appear more like an effort to stringently hold-up a mirror and reflect their reality, their suffering. Sadly, the mirror held up to reality was often, perhaps unconsciously so, ethnically coloured. Subjective accounts of personal suffering and the politics this induces formed a large part of the narration also showing how discourse can affect those under its purview.1 While this may also be the case with expatriate writing, it is the objective, long-distant gaze that allows for articulation of causes other than politics and boundary-marking. (Salman Rushdie 1992: 9-21).

Extolling the virtues of expatriate writing, Bruce King describes diasporic authors from the former colonies as: "…the intermediary, the interpreter, of the new nations to the former colonial powers….commentators, reporters and translators of the new nations to the metropolitan centres" (King 1992:39).1 It is this very role of the expatriate writer, as "interpreter" of the "new nations" to the west which is of imminent concern to the resident voices and which they wish to censor. Yasmin Gooneratne, although an expatriate herself, expresses this sentiment as she enunciates this anxiety regarding the spate of writing on the Sri Lanka following the intensification of armed conflict in the eighties, when she says:

> Opinions may vary regarding the value of these activities. I must leave it to my readers to determine whether some of them are contributory to or destructive of, Sri Lankan national culture.
>
> (Gooneratne 1992:24)

Fiction on Sri Lanka then, as per Gooneratne's statement must conform to the parameters set out as per the "new nation", and its idea regarding "Sri Lankan national culture" (ibid). These dictates are in keeping with the discourse set in motion by the "sons of the soil" of the Seventy-One insurgency as discussed in Chapter One.

The rationale impelling this desire for censorship draws on the spatial and temporal distance between the expatriate and the homeland and this the cultural purists/nationalists posit as leading to faulty or flawed perceptions of the "national culture" by the expatriate writer (ibid).

This logic renders suspect any and every text written about the homeland by an expatriate. This rationale however is flawed in that it sees culture, national or otherwise, as essentially static and frozen in time. It is on this essentialism that the cultural purists demarcate boundaries determined on grounds of cultural purity and authenticity. This idea of culture however completely ignores the dynamism, evolution and change within cultures. Likewise, what is ignored is the fact that the writer as an individual too is subject to similar osmotic influences.

The charge commonly levied against Gunesekera, is that his texts present an image of the island as an exotic, tropical paradise.

As a cultural signifier the term "exotic" pertains to the effect of apartness and difference created by a text often when compared to modes and forms of representation about a culture or its varied aspects. The term has extensively been used to express the manner in which the former colonies of South Asia figured in writings by early colonisers, the style and content of which set the grounds for Orientalist ideology.1 Resident critics find strains of Orientalism in writings by the diaspora about the homeland and see this as a pandering to western consumerist markets. The former colonies of South Asia in this regard have often been stereotyped as 'exotic' cultures by the west. Graham Huggan extends the semiotics pertaining to the "exotic" a step further in his book entitled *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. While agreeing that this is congruent with the manner in which postcolonial writers are marketed within the western mainstream, he extends the argument to show that the addition of exotica in the text is more than yet another market ploy to ensure

sales. Rather, the "exotic", as Huggan states functions more in the manner of an effective control mechanism serving "different, even contrary political needs and ends." (Huggan, pg 13,14). While Huggan's "political needs and ends" could range from the politics of patriarchal and ethnic stereotypes, when applied to Sri Lanka it is the question of human suffering and tolerance on account of the unrelenting violence of the civil war that is brought into the fray.

The question to be addressed then is whether Gunesekera is presenting this third-world, post-colonial war as an exotic spectacle for the consumption of a first-world, former-imperial audience? To represent a war is to represent the causes that went into its making which in this case are often conflicting and varied ethnic viewpoints wherein each side is as much the perpetrator as the victim. It is a similar issue that Minoli Salgado addresses in her book *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place*, when she confirms that the semiotics associated with the term "exotic" when used to describe a text from Sri Lanka or about Sri Lanka acquire added dimensions. Salgado explains that "exotic" here is an indication not just of representational difference between the text in question and other mainstream texts from the region but an indicator of the writers distance and even alienation from his or her native land. Stressing the seriousness of this "alienation", Salgado explains that it works more like an allegation intended to render dubious the ethics of the author and suspect any viewpoint or diagnosis regarding the conflict situation which the text and thereby its author may stand to offer. As Salgado argues:

> To describe a text as exotic therefore is, particularly within the boundaries of evaluation set by Sri Lankan critics, a critical manoeuvre that works to disable the political registers, evacuate it of cultural import and relevance to the country being 'exoticised', and throw serious doubt on its ethical drives.
>
> (Salgado 2007: 147)

It is a similar charge that resident critic Gautam Kundu levies on Gunesekera - the charge of "mining" the resources of the island for his fiction and all this is conducted in the interests of personal self-acclaim. Kundu's accusation however holds applicable to all writing with Sri Lanka as the context, whether expatriate or resident, and may not be reserved singularly for Gunesekera. How then does one explain this discomfiture regarding Gunesekera's choice of fictive space as Sri Lanka? One of the

reasons for this is Gunesekera's presentation of the conflict. Thiru Kandiah opines that that the political stance regarding the war, as manifest through Gunesekera's fiction is not only "feeble" but a "gross distortion of …historical events", and this Kandiah further declares is the inevitable outcome of a sensibility that accrues from the author's subject position as an expatriate Sri Lankan which Kandiah unstintingly states as being: "distortingly stereotypical anglicized, middle class elite" (as cited in Salgado, 2007: 149). More specifically, Kandiah states that the *Reef* completely ignore those "pernicious" factors of "race and class", which as Kandiah reiterates have been the factors responsible for the human disaster transpiring on the island. A reading of *Reef* illustrates Gunesekera's concerns regarding race and class but in a different vein. Nili and Salgado's liaison is an attempt to connect across these constructed fault-lines and not see them as the insurmountable barriers that they appear to be in Kandiah's opinion. To deny this, as does Kandiah, is to deny the hybrid cosmopolitanism as existed on the island of Ceylon.

Gunesekera's texts are criticised then, as they go against the grain of the "Sri Lankan national culture", as cited by Yasmin Gooneratne and do not pay obeisance to the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion as demarcated by the cultural nationalism. It is not so much a question of resident verses expatriate as it is of which side of the cultural nationalism the writer places herself/himself on. It is for similar reasons that the fiction of resident writers such as Jean Arasanayagam and James Goonewardene too has been discredited as "inauthentic" and charged as being a cultural misrepresentation.

Gunesekera's novels portray the schism between the islands's past and present. The exotic, tropical haven of the Ceylon days has been transformed to the gun-totting, blood-letting land beset with armed conflict. In his perception, there are no hero's and no martyrs and if there is a villain, it is the war and the violence emanating from it. In *Heaven's Edge*, the narrator constantly juxtaposes both descriptions. The action is set on an unknown island which simultaneously is the island of "dreams", as much as it is the "forgotten, assaulted island", on account of the violence transpiring therein (Gunesekera 2002: 12, 7).

In light of Graham Huggan's "political needs and ends", as cited above and

in conjunction with the disabling of "political registers" as pointed out by Salgado, I purport to examine the efficacy of the critical opinions expressed regarding what has been referred to as perhaps the most controversial of Gunesekera's texts – *Heaven's Edge* (2002). *Heaven's Edge* is a text as much about peace as it is about armed conflict. The action is located on an unnamed tropical island which as the city-weary traveller and narrator Marc recalls, in retrospect, is:

> I arrived on *this island*, by boat, the night of the fullest moon I had ever seen in my life. The sky was clear and the sea phosphorescent; the coastline, from a distance, looked entrancing.
>
> (Gunesekera 2002: 3 [italics mine)

"this island", with its tea-estates, coconut plantations and the narrator's description of its flora/fauna is strikingly similar to Gunesekera's descriptions of Ceylon in his other texts. The island's past, as Uva, Marc's companion on the island details it, once again appears strikingly similar to Sri Lankan history: '"We have always had to fight for our freedom ….against waves and waves of your brass-balled colonisers"', (Gunesekera 2002: 26). After this clear-cut reference to the colonisation of the island by different European powers, Uva narrates the background to the civil war with which the island is presently engulfed. Her words are a literal mapping of the post-independence historical trajectory of the Sri Lanka:

> War here, like everywhere else, was once about land and identity. But after the death cloud in the south everything changed. You see, we were reshapedby gangsters into new collectives held together by conscription.….Not language, not religion, not any of those outmoded notions of nation.
>
> (Gunesekera 2002:37)

while the war for "land" could also be read allegorically as referring to the separatist struggle in the north, the war for "identity", as mentioned by Uva could likewise be a reference to the political movements in the southern Sri Lanka intent upon fashioning a Sinhala-Buddhist nation. The war on the (unnamed) "island", as Uva continues, has progressed beyond those reasons and the present situation, as she informs Marc entails the formation of "collectives" intent upon spreading terror and

decimating civil society to: "thugs for politicians and tyranny in every tribe. Killers everywhere". (Gunesekera 2002: 37). Strikingly similar to post-independent Sri Lankan history, the war on the "island" too began as Uva states, with the "death cloud in the south" (ibid). If one were to allegorise this beginning of war on the unnamed "island" as a reference to the first instance of armed violence in independent Ceylon, the student insurgency of Seventy-One is an apt coincidence. The effect of decades of violence as catalogued in the opening section entitled "Nuburn" entail villages razed to the ground, land leeched of minerals, death-squads/collectives that roam the land conscripting children into the collectives and communities reduced to seeking refugee from this all-pervasive violence. As Uva informs Marc: "After so many years of fighting, violence has become ingrained into our way of life." (Gunesekera 2002: 37). Executions are routinely performed on the beach, for the blood just drains away and the sand never stains. Uva shows Marc the charred remains of homes where families once lodged:

> 'I want you to see what they do to control us.' …. a charred shell of a house with the ground around it black and full of cinders. 'I knew the family that lived here,' she said. 'They were meant to grow only bitter gourd and radish for the market, but they had young children and got some sugarcane growing. It was against the rules. One day the military came and saw the boy eating sugarcane….
>
> (Gunesekera 2002:29)

This description is strikingly similar to descriptions of the war in Sri Lanka even though the island remains unnamed by the author as Sri Lanka remains unknown, and at best is the "island".

The textual markers regarding the time of action too are rendered obscure. The year 1998 appears on a digitised video recovered by Marc recording his father last days on this unknown island. Since Marc discovers this video nearly a decade after his father's death and leaves for the island shortly afterwards, the narrative can be estimated to have transpired around the year 2008. *Heaven's Edge* however was published in the year 2002!! The time-frame indicated on the video is significant for a narrative that otherwise appears fantastically marooned in futurist time and space since these were the years when the Sri Lankan armed forces were locked in mortal

conflict with the Tamil separatist forces in the north and the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna in the south. Sri Lanka was literally engulfed in civil war(s) as is this unidentified island of Gunesekera's narrative; a civil war which Marc's father, a pilot, had enlisted for.

This obfuscation of time and place shows the authors painstaking attempts to steer clear of any direct comparison of this text with Ceylon or Sri Lanka. Adding to this strategy, the dominant generic mode deployed by the narrative is fantasy. Once again, this enables Gunesekera to steer clear of any overt connection with the Sri Lankan real-politik. Apart from *Heaven's Edge* however, the Gunesekera oeuvre has been intimately connected with Sri Lanka, past and present. Minoli Salgado betrays this need to establish a connection betweenthe real and textual island when she questions Gunesekera's use of fantasy for the narrative of *Heaven's Edge*, stating that it: "generates a sense of interpretative indeterminacy that registers the possibility of dissent as everywhere and nowhere." (Salgado 2004: 162). She goes on to add that the fantasy is "escapist", in view of the fact that the text does not provide any: "knowable community", against which the war as resistance is being carried out (Salgado 2007: 162).

In this regard however, Rosemary Jackson's defence of the fantastic or fantasy in literary texts thereby rescuing them from reductive categorisations as vague or at best escapist literature may be applied to advantage here. The use of fantasy, in a literary text, as Jackson iterates is not always intended as escapist but is a mode of resistance intended to subvert the dominant order and the authoritarianism and prohibitions it upholds.1 It is for this reason that most children's literature resorts to the deployment of the fantastic. Referring to Rosemary Jackson's seminar study of fantasy in literary texts as indicating of the space of subversion; with *Heaven's Edge*, Salgado posits the question as to what is being subverted, since there is no definable or identifiable context that the text may viably subvert. This leads to Salgado's rather facile conclusion:

> Hense the displaced, strategic exoticism of Gunesekera's earlier texts here gives way to an exploration of the exotic that fails to assert anything outside its registers.
>
> (Salgado 2007:162)

> In Salgado's view, the fantasy in Heaven's Edge, on account of not been anchored onto an identifiable realpolitik serves no better purpose than being exotic.

In my view, the deliberate obfuscation of time, place and action by the author enables an avoidance of the barrage of criticism he'd encountered with his earlier novels, *Reef,* included as they were unambiguously set in Sri Lanka. His criticism of the politics on the island, particularly the violence this was promoting was turned upon him as an indicator of his distance from the Sinhala culture and also an indifference towards the suffering of his community. This allegation of 'indifference' was further seen as reflective of Gunesekera's elitism, accruing from his upper-class status and the privilege and insulation this accord. It also enables him to steer-clear of melodramatic western reviewers who focus not on the war and its effects but on the land:

> …Sri Lanka compels the leaving of it. Not for nothing is it 'tear-shaped', fecund and beautiful, it is the putative side of the Garden of Eden…. With its tainted, blood-stained past, stretching back beyond the British occupation and its unpredictable future… (Bindings 1998: 29)

Setting the action of *Heaven's Edge* on an unnamed island grants the author the freedom to disregard causes leading to the conflict, debate their legitimacy and be slandered by critical assessments dictated by the discourse of Sinhala nationalism. The aesthetics deployed by the author in *Heaven's Edge* enable him to deal with the brutalising effect of armed conflict on individuals and communities; the damage caused to the environmental on account of chemical warfare and the production of cash crops for global markets and the idea of peace which on account of repeated failure of peace talks was becoming an increasingly unattainable reality for the island-nation.

Peace, often implied as the absence of war, takes on a different meaning under the context of the Sri Lankan war. While in the text it is synonymous with healing after the annihilating experience of violence; the question of peace in Sri Lanka is intricately connected to the discourse of cultural nationalism. I address the issue with regard to the peace debate on the island as exemplified by Mark Jurgensmeyer, Peter Schalk and Gananath Obeysekera. I also show the influence of the Gandhian

philosophy of *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* as modes of resistance exemplified in the final section of the novel.

*Heaven's Edge*, takes up a theme familiar in Gunesekera's work, the desire to connect with a distant homeland and in this case, also a dead father. Marc, the narrator, born to a British mother and Sri Lankan father, returns to the island seeking answers regarding his father death: "somewhere in this jungle when I was still a child", and leaving behind a grieving mother who: "took her own life, far from home not long after" (Gunesekera 2002:1). With Eldon, his out of high-school, *Heaven's Edge* is a narrative about loss, and the grief that accompanies debilitating emotive loss. Marc's state-of-mind when he decides to move to *the island* exemplifies the trauma of death and loss – the psychological state induced by war and violence. Marc's move to the island has an edge of romance and adventure on account of the compelling tales of mystery and myth narrated to him by his grandfather Eldon.

The spatial mapping of the text can be divided into zones of conflict and zones of resistance to conflict. The city of Maravil is located in the conflict zone and is under constant surveillance by the militia and the state army. Fear prevails on account of death squads hired by both warring parties. The pockets of resistance to this dominant order of war are exemplified through the space of the jungle, with its untamed flora and fauna and the space of the cultivated garden. It is in the jungle adjoining the villages that the survivors live in make-shift refugee camps so as to avoid detection by the death squads, militants or the army. The garden as the space of healing is a pervasive metaphor running through the text. It typifies a sanctuary wherein solitude and conviviality are possibilities and also exemplifies life on the island before the war. The jungle and the garden are the spaces that offer refuge from the war and also hold the possibility of healing and transformation. The symbolic significance of the garden *Heaven's Edge* is conveyed through the language of myth and biblical symbolism that is used to describe it. Marc discovers its healing capabilities after his journey through the landscape rendered into a wasteland on account of the death, fear and destruction caused by war. The island however, has not always been a wasteland. Uva reminiscences about a time before the war when the island was resplendent in its tropical beauty of palm-fringed beaches as opposed to

the uninhabitable man-made contemporary disaster it has become on account of chemical warfare. It is she who tells Marc about the garden of Samandia:

> Near Samandia was the place, Uva said, where the first inhabitants of the island had been awakened by the butterflies splashing dew at the dawn of time. The dew formed a lake and their wings a floating stairway spiralling up to heaven. It was here that the first human drowned and ascended to become a god or, according to others, where the first couple – Adam and Eve – were expelled to become real lovers, descended on steps of mortal confetti; their loins swollen, veneration, it was forsaken after the neutering of the south-west, the devastation.
>
> (Gunesekera 2001: 93- 94)

To read this purely as exotica, indulged in solely for consumer benefit, would mean to miss out on an integral part of the authorial vision impelling this narrative. The Garden is the space antipodal to the war-blighted territory; it is as Marc and Uva refer to it time and again, the space of the ashram, the sanctuary and ultimately a refuge from the war. In this regard, the Garden symbolises the space of resistance which by typifying nurture and life presents an alternative to the dominant order of war, militarization and death as prevalent on the island. Marc has learnt his first lessons about life in his grandfather Eldon's garden by the Thames, as he watches Eldon: "prune his roses and water his delphiniums" (Gunesekera 2001: 6). Eldon's memories of the island are also inspired by the gardens amidst the family's coconut estate located in the low-country area of the island:

> sand garden with lantana shrubs and bougainvilleas. Hundred's of butterflies. And a breadfruit tree. I loved that place. My little Eden…
>
> (Gunesekera 2001:8)

The message of the text hinges around the metaphoric implications associated with the Garden which, as the above lines typify is symbolic of the self-sustaining fecundity of the Garden of Eden before the Fall. This aspect of *Heaven's Edge* may be interpreted as Gunesekera's answer to Perera's rejoinder that: "A writer who uses the metaphor of a fallen paradise to describe a country should provide some idea of paradise before the fall" (Perera 2000: 104). As per Gunesekera's narrative schema in *Heaven's Edge*, Gardens, indicative of the serendipity and healing powers of the island before the violence began, are the antidote for the inhuman brutalisation experienced in the conflict zones. The quest to recover or preserve these spaces is a mode of resistance as the militia seeks to control the territory on the island, to be used

mostly for cash crops for the global markets. It is in the Garden that the healing of the mind, body and spirit is possible after the life-sapping, dehumanising experiences of the war zones. It is in Samandia – the garden-estate which Uva and Marc resurrect in the final section of the novel entitled "The Garden" that the diverse strands of meaning associated with the Garden in *Heaven's Edge* are drawn together to typify the creative life-force as opposed to the destructive energy of war. Samandia is a self-sustaining garden-estate synonymous with nurture, refuge and healing. With its landscape of blue plumbgo shrubs, wild aubergines, scent of citrus and citronella, it is reminiscent of the sanctuaries and gardens of Eldon's recollections of the island. While these are suggestive of the island's past and of paradise before the Fall, Minoli Salgado expresses the view that since Gunesekera locates this 'paradise' in the distant past, it is inaccessible and forever irretrievable.

The symbolic functions of the garden are all the more poignant after witnessing the dominant order of life on the island as exemplified through the city – Maravil. Life here is controlled by the militia and their methods of inducing fear through constant surveillance and the performance of the death-spectacle. *Heaven's Edge* provides this insight into these operations of terror and the repercussions of this intense militarization of society by showing Maravil to be more of a ghost town populated with silent, spectres of a zombie-like populace. Conformity is the norm here but the unnaturalness of this is indicated trough an episode witnessed by Marc in the underground mall at Maravil:

> I was trying to get my bearings when I saw a woman break away from the crowd and nip into the alleyway opposite us. She had one of Jaz's bar bottles in her hand and was stuffing it with a piece of cloth…. I watched in a sort of paralysis as she set fire to the cloth and then, darting out, hurled it at the squad of soldiers in the centre. The bottle burst into flames. The soldiers scattered, firing in the direction from which the missile had been launched. 'Fire, fire, fire,' the woman chanted. Another volley of shots echoed in the mall….
> …. I couldn't work out if this was a spontaneous uprising or something planned.
>
> (Gunesekera 2002: 73, 74)

While the episode clearly indicates the oppressive reality of life in the war zone which is a series of losses and pain, it also enables the author to make a point regarding conflict and its documentation. Marc's befuddlement in this regard, illustrates this. Rather than focus on the authoritarianism and the psychological repression this

subversive action indicates, the attempt is to categorise it as either a "planned uprising" or a "spontaneous insurrection" (Gunesekera, 75).

The decimation of vegetation, avian and marine life, as Marc notices, bears testimony to the annihilation that stalks the land in the wake of the chemical warfare. Textual descriptions of the conflict reminded me strongly of T.S Eliot's description of the wasteland in the section of the *TheWasteland* entitled, "The Burial of the Dead", and I have included them here:

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water.
>
> (Eliot 1992:43)

Marc learns that Maravil, once an ancient city, was razed to the ground on account of artillery bombing. The buildings that stand in its place bear testimony to the new world order of terror and annihilation. The Victory monument, at the entrance to the city is literally and symbolically - a stone soldier. As Marc testifies:

> Most of Maravil had been built quickly after the older cities of the province had been destroyed. Therefore the main buildings were all formed out of identical cheap concrete blocks.… According to Uva, the market square and the underground mall, originally a tourist project, were all that remained of the old town ….
> ….the stink of the prawns simmering made me want to retch. The land ahead was bent into a finger that seemed to reach right into my throat.
>
> (Gunesekera 2001: 51, 53)

Completely bereft of the joy and creativity of the garden, life here is dominated by the spectacle of fear and death:

> On the way to the main road, I caught sight of two buffaloes. One was trying to mount the other. The cow stumbled and the two beasts crashed into the trees. Then, behind the animals, a troop of soldiers appeared, jeering. They fired a few shots into the huddle. The male keeled over and the cow bolted, ripping the skin of her belly….
> ….The soldiers fired again and went after the cow.

The comfort of community and companionship are supplanted by accounts of lives robbed of dignity or self-worth. Tantamount to living in a state of constant terror, is the near absence of communication among the inhabitants who go about

their lives either with surliness or a silence, born, as Marc realises more from conformity and fear than from ignorance.

Having shown the effect of war on civilization, *Heaven's Edge* makes a strong case for non-violent resistance, and it does so by being as much a meditation on the politics of peace as it is on the violence of war. Various aspects of the peace debate are presented through the stances adopted by Eldon, Lee and Uva. Advocating the anti-war stance, Eldon firmly believes that war, whatever its rationale, adds to the continuum of violence, and states: "we have yet to learn the true cost of a bomb; how it accrues over years." (Gunesekera 2002:99). Eldon decries the discourse that celebrates wars fought for the nation and the establishing of museums to glorify such events. Wars for Eldon typify: "the colossal stupidity of men", adding:

> The past choked with wars, disputes, borders as pointless as chalk lines in water. Ideology? Doctrines bloated with blood and bones, perverted by power.
>
> (Gunesekera 2002: 96, 102)

While for Eldon, celebrating war is as much a misnomer as is the idea of fighting to establish peace, his son Lee, a fighter pilot with the Royal Air Force, enlists his services with the peace-forces deputed to quell the conflict on the island. Lee sees his mission as one of mercy as it will protect the vulnerable and unarmed. He reminds Eldon that even the mythological Hydra needed to be vanquished through violence, adding: "sometimes doing nothing condemns you more" (Gunesekera 2002: 51). Eldon clinches the war/peace debate by positing the ultimate outcome of chemical warfare: "after everyone is destroyed, is that peace?" (Gunesekera 2002: 160).

It is on the island that Marc learns of an alternative to the contrary and equally compelling viewpoints of Eldon and Lee. It is the way of the eco-warrior, exemplified through Uva's way of life. She espouses a stance different from the non-committal peace of Eldon or Lee's, war-for-peace. Her stance exemplifies active non-violent resistance. She defies the militia but does this through protecting and nurturing all forms of life:

All I could do then was to go from town to town like a little hothouse

> breeder- the last of our line-carrying plants, small animals. Wild viruses to infect their whole regime.
>
> (Gunesekera 2002: 223)

Uva's mode of resistance proves to be the antidote for the annihilating violence. An "eco warrior", as Marc describes her, her very name is symbolic of fecundity, referring to a fertile territory in the Sri Lankan hill country (Gunesekera 2002: 30). Uva's secret retreat/hideout, which she refers to as her "ashram", is a sanctuary where she protects and nurtures animal and plant life preserving them from extinction on account of the chemical warfare. Marc's first memory of is of her releasing a pair of rare emerald doves into the environment. This act is symbolic of resistance and freedom. The decimation accruing from chemical warfare is of prime concern to the author here, as with his earlier novels.

The peace debate in Sri Lanka has drawn the attention of prominent thinkers of our times. In his study on this paradox of violence in a Buddhist state, Mark Jurgensmeyer in his essay *What the Bhikkhu Said: Reflections on the Rise of Militant Religious Nationalism*, seeks the views of influential Buddhist monks on this unusual and even subversive alignment of the monastic orders with politics, since: "orange-robed Buddhist monks" have been "swelling the ranks of anti-government Sinhalese rebels" (Jurgensmeyer 1990: 53). The assassination of Prime Minister S.W.R.D Bandaranaike in 1956 by Bhikku Talduwe Somarama Thero was later discovered to be part of a larger conspiracy masterminded one of the most powerful ascetics of his day, Mapitigama Buddharakkita Thero. It was on account of this religious sanction that the assassination acquired, as Jurgensmeyer points out, a moral and even "supramoral", justification whereby it was seen as an act necessary for protecting Sinhala-Buddhism on the island. The alignment with the monastic order appeared to grant social sanction for life-destroying violence amidst practitioners of Buddhism. This created the new breed of ascetics referred to as *political Bhikkhu's*. While the political bhikkhu's interviewed by Jurgensmeyer admitted that violence went against the teachings of the Buddha they were very clear that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala homeland and feared that government policy would decimate the fragile and vulnerable Sinhala-Buddhist society and culture by giving in to the demands of separatism as expressed

by the Jaffna Tamils. Quoting a senior monk, Jurgensmeyer notes: "It was increasingly evident as he made his comments that he thought Sinhalese-nationalism and Sinhalese-Buddhism were the same thing" (Jurgensmeyer 1990: 60).

Jurgensmeyer sees the current struggle in Sri Lanka as the result of political opposition to "western-style secular nationalism" (Jurgensmeyer 1990: 53) and concludes that: "religion in these parts of the world", by which he means the third-world or the former colonies of the west, "continues to have the potential for legitimising and providing a basis for national politics and challenging a notion of nationalism based on secular assumptions" (Jurgensmeyer, 60). The problem, Jurgensmeyer feels stems from western notion of secularism, iterating that these ideas were alien to these regions of the globe. Jurgensmeyer however, appears oblivious of the fact that the former island of Ceylon was home to different cultures and the Tamil regions of the Jaffna peninsula house not only the Tamil-Hindu but Christians, Muslim and Burghers among other ethnicities.

Focusing on the politics of peace in Sri Lanka, Peter Schalk in the essay '*Unity' and 'Sovereignty'. Key concepts of a Militant Buddhist Organisation in the Present conflict in Sri Lanka* indicates the politicisation of the term 'peace' by what he terms as "Sinhala peace", implying that the purpose of the war was to establish Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony on the island. The religious and cultural practices of other communities residing in Sri Lankan, such as the Muslims, Moors, Malays, Tamils and Burghers would be subservient to the Sinhala-Buddhist. Schalk states the paradox that traditionally, the *Sangha* typifies renunciation from worldly affairs, and this implies not just material wealth and comfort but politics as well. How then does the *Sangha* exercise power while strictly forbidding politics is the question that impels Schalk's study? The answer as Schalk deciphers lies with the multitudinous movements that throng post independent civil society in Sri Lanka; movements that are actively involved in opinion forming among the laity. This is accomplished through the organisation of mass rallies and distribution of political pamphlets. These activities are classified by the *Sangha* as necessary to: "nourish the fighting spirit" (Schalk 1992: 58). Schalk states that practically every *vihara* on the island is actively involved in opinion-generating movements and are affiliated with political parties.

The non-political organisations and movements actively involved in the public sphere, as per Schalk, are grouped around a concept popular in contemporary Sinhalese nationalist ideology, "sons of the soil" or *bhumiputra*,1 and these have been responsible for spurring: "an extensionist thinking aimed at spreading Buddhism from Dondo to Point Pedro" (Schalk,. 61). The essay focuses on one such militant Buddhist organisation - the MSV (*Mavhima surakime vyaparana*, which may be translated as "Campaign for the Protection of the Motherland". Schalk draws attention to the *ekachatta* tradition of the *Mahavamasa* which glorifies unification by defeating the significant ethnic other - the Tamils, and extending the present form of the Sinhala-Buddhist identity all over the island. The constitutions of 1972 and 1977, as Schalk affirms, were modelled along lines of the *ekachatta* concept. The words *dhammadipa, bhumiputra* and *ekachatta* are the grounds for conflict, and peace is equated with the establishment of these concepts on the island. This concept of a "Sinhala peace" as per Schalk's analysis leaves no space for plurality of religions, heterogeneity of cultures and spells the death-knell of secular practices on the island. Drawing upon the connection between power and discourse, Schalk draws attention to another Buddhist narrative, now eclipsed by the dominant and oft-quoted Mahavamasa tradition of King Dutthagamani, as the slayer of the Tamil King Elara and the perception Tamils as invading barbarians. Schalk, on the contrary, draws the reader's attention to another, now silenced narrative, that of King Vessanthra; a narrative that is conspicuous by its absence from contemporary historical interpretations and as Schalk shows it is a narrative closely aligned with the Buddhist concepts of accommodation, sacrifice and non-violence.

Significant in this discourse which positions the possibility of peace within the pressing concerns of cultural nationalism is Gananath Obeyesekera argument as propounded in his essay *Dutthagamani and the Buddhist Conscience* addresses similar concerns about interethnic violence in a predominantly Buddhist society. Like Schalk, Obeyesekera too harks back to the sixth century Pali chronicle the *Mahavamsa*. While agreeing that the chronicle was scripted by Buddhist monks and narrates the origins of Sinhala Buddhism on the island, Obeysekera points to variations in the Duttugamini myth by drawing attention to an earlier chronicle - the

*Dipavamasa.* Like the *Mahavamsaa* this chronicle recounts, the battle between Dutthagamani and Elara. The description however does not exceed more than a paragraph. This is in stark contrast to accounts of this epic-battle in later texts such as the *Sumangalav*i, (14th century century) and the *Rajavaliya* (17th century), which show a marked change in the vocabulary used to describe the vanquished Elara and his army of Tamil warriors. Obeysekera draws attention to the accretion of ethnic otherness through the use of terms such as "beasts" and "ravenous brutes" (Obeysekera, 146).

Gananath Obeysekera draws attention to the emphasis in the *Mahavamsa* on the troubled conscience of the king after battle. To allay his sleeplessness on account of his troubled conscience he is visited by eight *arhats* who assure him that he acted rightfully and even laudably:

> The *Mahavamsa* sees the destiny of the nation, of the Sinhalese and of the religion as inextricably linked. If so, then is the killing and violence for the sake of religion justified? The Mahavamsa says "yes": it is no accident that it is no ordinary monks who are made to say this, but eight arhats, true world renouncers and representatives of Buddhism as a universal ethical religion.
>
> (Obeysekera 2011:143)

The Dutthagamini legend has been the founding myth for Sinhala nationalism. Stereotypes of Tamils as aliens, foreigners and plunderer's of Buddhist monuments emanate from this myth. This discourse explains the political stalemate regarding peace and the cessation of war on the island. It is against this backdrop of the war/peace debate as played out on the Sri Lankan turf that Gunesekera's advocates the path of non-violent resistance in *Heaven's Edge,* as practiced by Uva and Marc in the garden-estate of Samandia.

Marc and Uva reach the garden-estate of Samandia after their gruelling and life-sapping experiences in the war zone. The effects of war are evident in the makeshift refugee camp which the trio Marc, Jaz - the transversite and Kris, Uva's estranged brother accidentally stumble upon it while escaping the death trap of Maravil. The camp comprises of women and children since the men folk are either dead or enlisted into the death squads. The camp is constantly on the move, shifting its location: "whenever smokeseed poisoned the air, or wailing", as these are signs of

impending death and the presence of marauders:

> The bigger children are stolen by the marauders. Six boys and four girls were taken last time. The rest, the weak are butchered, the women who are caught are raped….

Karuna, one of the young, white-haired mother's informs the visitors that although the marauders have not been seen for three seasons there is no doubt in the minds of the women that they will be back, for "they always come back". (Gunesekera 2002: 103,107).

The scars of war are evident in the psyche of the children, a seven or eight year old boy, on spotting the three strangers picks up a stick and mimes the shooting he has witnessed: ''Da-da-da-da-da-da, pschew, pschew, pschwe'" (Gunesekera 2002: 104). Another has witnessed his siblings: "hacked to death in their home by the village pond" (pg. 108), intones a folk rhyme he once learnt in the village school, about flowers floating in the pond. His voice as Jaz realises is: "more hurt than young" (Gunesekera 2002: 107). Eleven year old Pushpa, has lost her ability to speak after being pitched from bayonet to bayonet by the marauders: 'She has seen too much…. Her eyes have destroyed her tongue.'" (Gunesekera, 108). The zombie-like look in the eyes of the children which Marc at first mistook for fearlessness is a "deadening in the eyes" and the spirit (pg. 104). Despite their travails, the people at the refugee camp offer the trio, Marc, Jazz and Kris, hospitality in the form of shelter and fresh water – a rarity under the circumstances.

At the refugee camp the importance of cultivation is driven home to the reader, since food is rationed and distributed by the militia and thereby deployed as a weapon of control. It is for this reason that the fruit, eggs and freshly baked bread from Uva's farm are contraband as per the dictates of the regime. The villagers bury their preciously cultivated harvest in canisters underground while vegetables are cultivated under a "removable camouflage thatch with watchers on a timed-shift throughout the day, to let the sunshine in and warn of *cloudbursts*", referring to airplane bombing (italics-mine, Gunesekera 2002: 106). One of the mothers recites the name of the cultivated rice, as if it were a "benediction": "patchai – p2462/11" (pg, 106).

With his earlier novels, Gunesekera had been criticised by resident critics for not rendering the politics of his stance concerning the war, clear. *Heaven's Edge* leaves no doubt regarding the effects of exclusivist nationalisms or of the author's stance regarding them. For instance, the language spoken at the refugee camp is a strange unrecognisable mixture of dialects. Jaz, on account of his experience with the new recruits is familiar with it and calls it: "junghi-bhasha", or "jungle cocktails". This is a sharp reminding to the reader regarding the communicative purposes of language rather than the linguistic practices of cultural nationalism. (Gunesekera 2002: 102-103). Gunesekera's critique of cultural nationalism is embodied through the character of Kris. Uva's estranged brother, Kris shows the effects of the indoctrination programme which he has been forced to attend as a student. it led him to betray his parents but once his purpose had been served the revolutionaries sough to dispose him by similar means. Kris's subjectivity is more a product of ideology: he almost never communicates, is an expert with machines, fixing the airplane at Farindola, and remorselessly murdering the elderly couple, who once were deadly revolutionaries. Kris's indoctrination has served to sever him from community and bonding and as Jaz inadvertently expresses: "Like a machine, he just goes…. Why can't he communicate a little" (Gunesekera 2002:128).

The encounter with the militia at Farindola, leaves Jaz and Kris ricocheted with bullets and Marc, delirious and wounded stumbles onto the estate of Samandia. Fantasy and surrealism are paramount:

> Hours later my whole body seemed to rock with the flow of blood; a gentle movement allied to the rise and fall of soft sifted breath in deep flesh. Numbness had spread from one leg up to my shoulder into the lower part of my head. There was comfort in the heavy smell of warm water, the fecundity of low-lying leaves, steaming chlorophyll, and the hot moist air raddled with pollen…. I saw that the plane was floating on a lake filled with lotuses and water hyacinth. (171)

In this state of delirium, having lost all mooring with reality, Marc's thought lurch rapidly back and forth in time: between memories of the attack on the tea-estate of Farindola, to his childhood in England, and intense imaginary conversations with his father. While this enhances the element of the other-worldly, the narrative bears out this impression through the use of terms such as "promised land….hallucinogenic

island", sentences such as: "The house sat low, dappled in dream light", to describe the landscape of Samandia (Gunesekera 2002: 174, 175, 180).

Marooned on this uninhabited coconut estate, with a Crusoeque gesture, Marc embarks upon a regimen of cultivation and building, nursing the wounded monkey, setting up a water irrigation system and tilling the land for crop plantation, not killer mines:

> In the days that followed, I became obsessed: planting, replanting, transplanting. I cut an irrigation channel from the well so that even the runoff from my daily wash-bucket ended up watering the crops. I became an expert in recognising subtle variations in the podzolic soil. I uncovered a store of rock phosphate in a shed and worked out how to use coconut husks for moisture retension….(192).

As the Samandia section of the narrative proceeds, the striking similarities between Marc's existence here and the self-sustaining, non-violent values put into practice at the Sabarmati ashram by Mahatama Gandhi, such as daily labour on the ashram, dignity and respect for all forms of life and abiding by the creed of *ahimsa*, not in terms of a passive refrain from action but an active promotion of non-violence are foreground. The foundational ideology for this section is similar to the resistance posited by the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence encapsulated by the concepts of *Satyagraha* and of *Ahimsa*. Strengthening the linkages with the Sabarmati, Uva often referred to Samandia as an "ashram" (21). Establishing the etymology for the term she refutes Marc's modern day conception of an ashram as a space for city people to recuperate. "Ashram", as deployed by Uva and exemplified in the text is a refuge and a sanctuary, a space actively engaged with nature conservation and practicing active non-violence as a way of living.1

As a haven and refuge, Samandia provides Marc and Uva the much needed spiritual and physical healing following the deadening effects of violence. Uva's journey to Samandia had pulled her, against her will, into the vortex of violence surrounding her. Having escaped the death-trap at Maravil her movement through the jungle infested with mines, marauding soldiers and death squads leads her to taking over a platoon of children intended to be trained as future soldiers for one of the death squads. Uva, a staunch believer and practitioner of non-violence, in order to protect the children from conscription and herself from execution, slaughters their

commander, dons his uniform and takes over this position. She teaches this baby-brigade farming, cultivation, nurture and survival skills such as escaping detection by quick movement through the trees, not brutal violence and death.1 The brigade however is ultimately blasted to smithereens, leaving their commander Uva guilty for having failed to protect them from this massacre even though she had no active or conscious part to play in it. Uva healing at Samandia is slow and painful, as the passage illustrates:

> The third night she lay sleepless next to me…. 'I can't sleep. I know I must, but I can't. Every time I close my eyes I see…' Her voice receded.
> I tried to hold on to it. 'You see what?'
> Her breath stopped.
> 'Tell me. What do you see?'
> 'Them. In pieces all over. Lumps burning.
>
> (Gunesekera 2002:217)

Uva's transformation, however reluctant, from being a cultivator and nurturer to an annihilating clog in the war machine, followed by her recovery at Samandia, is the message which the text jolds for a land and people subjected to dehumanising violence and to which there appears no solution in sight.

Samandia, an agrarian idyll, is also utopian, particularly in an island inundated with violence, war and militarization. The vulnerability of this utopian idyll and the impossibility of its survival, surrounded on all sides with intense chemical warfare leads the novel to its logical conclusion. The text shows the fragility of the space of the Garden through Samandia and of non-violence as a mode of resistance through the tragic sadness that accompanies Uva's death and the destruction of Samandia. In the final reckoning, as Samandia is detected by the militia, both Marc and Uva decide to take up arms. As Uva instructs Marc:

> The only way to stop a killer is by killing her, or him first…. Sometimes you have to sacrifice your innocence to protect this world that you care so much for, that you believe in. Sometimes we have to risk going too far, otherwise we risk losing everything.
>
> (Gunesekera 2002: 228)

Seeking to protect themselves from the approaching death squad by launching a guerrilla attack Marc and Uva fan out in different directions, but even as Marc, a

novice with guns, opens a volley of gunfire aimed at annihilating the killer squad, a stray bullet hits Uva:

> I gripped the gun hard. Forgive, forget, I might once have said, flee if we must- but I squeezed the trigger instead and worked the bolt again and again. Gunfire stuttered in my hands killing the captain first and then two more before I saw a figure fly in the air, jerking, twisting and turning like a ribbon. She leapt on the last man with her butterfly knife opening in one hand and a sun-stained machete in the other, swinging low and unrelenting, between the hail of my bullets. She slew him as she fell. (234)

The ruthlessly and incisive rupture of the forces of annihilation onto Samandia, indicate its fragility in a world governed by power of chemical weaponry. The novel ends on the macabre note of violence indulged in for the purpose of spectacle by the militia:

> Their hands were red with the blood of the monkey they had butchered between them.
>
> They had stuck its head on a pole and set fire to its tail. (Gunesekera 2002, 234)

The narrative is unambiguous regarding the dehumanising effects of warfare, the ecological damage caused by the chemical war and the militarization of society. The politics of peace are also in terms of individual choices. The text ends on a note of annihilation as black ravens, portents of death, blacken the sky. The image is symbolic of the darkest years of this civil war, also the time when Gunesekera wrote *Hraven's Edge*, which in the final instance is undoubtedly a paean to anti-violence. The final message of non-violence is symbolised through Uva's double-blade, butterfly knife, which as Mark says: "Only by coming together can the blade be closed…. (Gunesekera 2002: 59)

On account of being located on an unnamed island, *Heaven's Edge* did escape the vituperative criticism encountered by Gunesekera's other novels but neither did the message of non-violent resistance as posited through the narrative receive due attention. Minoli Salgado's analysis for instance, focuses not so much the deep-rooted symbolic significance of the garden/sanctuary/ashram and the need to make this anti-war choice on an individual level as she dismisses the possibility of this ever even being a feasible mode of resistance: "…not so much postlapsarian as postapocalyptic, as forgotten underworlds, displaced sanctuaries and deferred Edens register the spatial

limits of resistance." (Salgado 2007: 161). For Salgado, if the garden and Samandia, typify resistance, not only is this mode of resistance constantly "deferred" as the garden is either in the past or it is constructed fantasy world and as a garden is anyways limited by its own boundaries, it is after all a cultivated space, recovered from the inexorable jungle. All this makes it, as per Salgado a questionable as a mode of resistance itself.

In this regard, I reiterate that the Samandia section typifying active, non-violent resistance is akin to the Gandhian concepts of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa*. In the text, these are posited as personal choices which the individual must practice regardless of the repercussions. It is when Uva and Marc descend to the path of violence, even as a mode of self-defence, death and destruction are imminent. Carrying her argument further, Salgado's argues that the fantasy element used to construct the idyll of Samandia disables intelligent political analysis or comparision: "The illegibility of the forces of violence thus serves to register a sense of existential angst, resisting rather than inviting political readings (Salgado, 161).

However Salgado's charge regarding the resistance of the text towards "inviting political readings", refers overtly to the Sri Lankan real-politik and clearly the author's intention with *Heaven's Edge* was to steer clear of interpretations which link the narrative to politics on the island. It is for this reason that the action of the narrative takes place on an unnamed island. Yet the text advocates resistance, only the resistance is of a non-violent nature and as for Salgado question as to what is being resisted, clearly, it is authoritarian and violent regimes that propagate militarised societies, such as Maravil. Salgado's charges then, of the violation of the unities of time, place and action which she pronounces as concomitant upon the author's exilic sensibility is integral to the politics that the text espouses - the politics of war and the politics of peace and closest to the author's heart, the question of environment protection. Salgado too despite her misgivings ascertains that it is through his enunciation of ecological concerns that Gunesekera addresses the "social and cultural disjunction" caused by armed conflict and militarization (Salgado 2007: 151).

Apart from the Sri Lankan real-politik, which the author endeavours to steer

clear of, *Heaven's Edge*, as this discussion has shown, is redolent with the politics of non-violent resistance and peace. I began this chapter with the charges of "inauthentic" and "exotic", as levied by the resident critic brigade onto the Gunesekera oeuvre at large. However, ironically, with *Heaven's Edge* obfuscating the signposts connecting it overtly to the Sri Lankan real-politik, critics like Minoli Salgado, for instance, rail against the absence of those very signposts. Critical analysis then tells us as much about the politics of the reader/critic and her/his stance regarding the dominant discourse of cultural nationalism being propagated on the island as it does about the politics of the author and the text. The discussion in this chapter has shown the influence of the discourse of Sinhala nationalism on literary analysis and the manner in which this establishes boundaries of authentic and inauthentic and acceptance and rejection. In the next chapter, I will consider the efficacy of these parameters on the lives of women through their articulation of the war situation.

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# CHAPTER III

## WOMEN'S VOICES FROM THE SRI LANKAN CONFLICT

> "Dear husband", said she, "your valour will bring you to Destruction; think on your infant son, and on my helpless self who ere long shall be your widow – for the Achaeans will set upon you in a body and kill you….I shall have nothing left to comfort me when you are gone, save only sorrow. I have neither mother nor father now. Achilles slew my father when he sacked Thebes….I has seven brothers in my father's home, but on the same day they all went within the house of Hades**….** Nay Hector – you who to me are father, mother, brother and dear husband – have mercy upon me; stay here upon this wall; make not your child fatherless, and your wife a widow.
>
> (*The Illiad*, 1999, 91)

With an armed conflict that lasted for over three decades, changes in the traditional family structures on the island and ideas of womanhood was not an untoward occurrence. The wars on the island moreover were fought not in the manner of conventional battles with demarcated battlefields and civilian areas. Guerrilla attacks, suicide bombings and hit-and-run cases were an integral part of the violence unleashed by this conflict. With the army engaged in a seemingly unending conflict to maintain control over the Jaffna peninsula and the loss of life therein necessitating an ever-increasing need for man-power to feed the war machinery, women-headed households became a common occurrence across Sri Lanka. Nor for that matter did this conflict comply with the conventional segregation of women and children from the men and soldiers. In this regard, the women's wing of the LTTE, the Illivar, and the child soldiers recruited by LTTE are well-established facts.

Traditionally men are associated with war and women with peace. The commonly held belief is that war, with its focus on the brave, valiant, male-hero ready to sacrifice his life for the country/community endorses traditional gender demarcations[1] and while the valour displayed by men on the battlefield becomes the subject of legends, ballads and epics, women are the silent suffers. This stereotype

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[1] The term "gender", as used in this chapter, implies the inculcation of roles as deemed appropriate for men and women, as per the society they inhabit. Rebecca Reilly Cooper defines gender as: "The process of socializing and inculcating individuals into it is what radical feminists mean by the word "gender". Aeon.co/essays/the-idea-that-gender-is-a-spectrum

had proven to be indomitable and practically unshakeable, (perhaps until the Gulf War (1990-91)), even though instances of female warriors, such as the Amazonians, Joan of Arc and the Rani of Jhansi are well-known historical figures. However, these were perhaps too few and far between to undo the gender stereotype. Well before the Gulf War however, Tamil women on the island had donned the battle fatigues and were wielding weapons with alacrity.

My concern in this chapter is with the manner in which women experienced this conflict. I will analyse this through poetry written by women during the war. How did women, (Sinhala and Tamil) articulate their altered circumstances? What views regarding femininity and womanhood did the women-fighters of Tamil-Eelam entertain? Did donning the LTTE uniform and sporting a gun empower them or was there a flip side to this seeming empowerment? Were articulations by mother's and wives of armed forces personnel similar to those of civilian mother's and wives? To what extent did the nationalist ideology conveyed through iconic figures such as Vihara Maha Devi affect the sentiments of real women? Did the social movements of protest enable them to speak in a voice of their own and did ethnic identity hold a similar relevance for women across the spectrum? I address these questions by drawing on poetry written by a wide cross-section of Sri Lankan women to show the manner in which they engaged with these changing times. While their words bear witness to their experience of the war they also demonstrate the power of protest as the ability to speak in troubled times. I will also be drawing on the poetry of the pre-eminent Sri Lankan poet, Jean Arasanayagam to show the different in aesthetics styles The diversity of voices that comprise this chapter show that the idea of women and womanhood cannot be homogenisation or categorised and while it is intersected by the politics of class and ethnicity, the common thread binding them together is not just the oppression of war but their ability to be able to articulate their protest and perhaps this moot point is best stated by the editors of the Trilingual Anthology:

> As women who write in different languages, belong to different ethnic groups, religious communities, regions and cultures, we are divided. Yet, we share the experiences of oppression that are rooted in the patriarchal norms that rigidly control and constrain our lives. It is this same-ness and this difference that make our coming together all the more complex, and rich.

So while on the one hand we have the voice of the valiant mother much like that of Queen Vihara Mahadevi ordering her son to battle for the Sinhala race and the motherland, on the other is the pain of the woman-as-mother lamenting the loss of her child to the violence of war. As a reproducer of the race, repository and transmitter of culture, the mother, as we have noted, is a figure of veneration in the Tamil and the Sinhala culture and this also makes her a key construct in the nationalism accruing from these cultures. However, it was the same veneration that enabled the space whereby mothers could protest and speak out against state atrocities. Women voices, as this discussion will show, are a compelling barometer of moments fraught with the political tension of armed conflict. Before we embark on a discussion of their poetry, I will discuss the nationalist and ethnic constructions of woman in post-independent Sri Lanka.

With the introduction of electoral democracy, the idea of ethnicity and ethnic affiliation acquires added significance. This is because as a collective the community can function as a power-bloc deploying its numbers as a bargaining tool which will enable the community to procure benefits and privileges, such as reservations of seats in educational institutes and government jobs on account of belonging to the community/collective. As this discourse of ethnicity gains power, women are called upon to produce future members whose affiliation into this collective would be unquestioned. Reproduction then, which has been viewed as the "natural" role of women and likewise accorded societal, patriarchal sanction acquires an added edge as notions of "pure" and "authentic" ethnic identities gain prominence.[2] These undoubtedly restrict the freedom of choice available to women who are perceived as belonging first and foremost to their community. Yuval-Davis in *Gender and Nation* emphasises this concept of "purity" as necessary for the construction of ethnic communities or collectives as it enables the marking of boundaries between different ethnic collectives:

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[2] Neloufer De Mel shows how this idea of "purity" was legitimized through the construction of the binaries of pure vs impure; chaste vs promiscuous and so forth. The latter half of this binary was attributed to the Burgher's and Burgher women. Refer to Neloufer de Mel's *Women and the Nation's Narrative*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2002.

> The central importance of women's reproductive roles in ethnic and national discourses becomes apparent when one considers that, given the central role that the myth (or reality) of 'common origins' plays in the construction of most national and ethnic collectivities, one usually joins the collectivity by being born into it.
>
> (Yuval-Davis 1997, 27)

This belief in ethnic uniqueness and apartness is further enhanced and reinforced by establishing differences in language, religion, rituals, social practices and culture norms between different ethnic communities that may reside in the region. Concepts of pure and hybrid and their binary opposition are fundamental to ethnic discourse.

Amrita Chhachhi, in *Forced Identities: The State, Communalism Fundamentalism and Women in India*, adds to Yuval-Davis's line of thought by pointing out how modes of behaviour and dress-codes, among other traditions are deemed culturally appropriate for "our" women as opposed to "their" women. With the nationalisation of Ceylon, the Kandyan style of the sari became the national-dress for women. These parameters enable the construction of an "ideal" woman figure, representative of the ethnic community to which she belongs. Such representations as Chhachhi points out acquire patriarchal legitimisation which in turn leads to stringent control regarding women and their bodies. As carriers of ethnic identities thus, women are made to embody the cultural apartness of their community which also symbolise the boundaries setting the community apart from other communities. (Chhachhi, 1991: 144, 175)

As primary care-givers, women are entrusted with the task of inculcating their offspring into the cultural norms of the ethnic community to which they by birth belong. Radhika Coomaraswamy in the 3rd Minority Rights Lecture[3] points out how these communal/nationalist/patriarchal ideologies are internalised from an early age and the role women play in this regard:

> It is the women through songs, stories, legends and folk-tales who keep alive the myths and are the first to transmit a sense of collective memory of success and suffering to children. Stories of great kings and the description of the 'other' people are often imbibed by children not from racist patriarchs but

[3] The **Third Minority Rights Lecture**, entitled "A question of Honor: Women, Ethnicity and Armed Conflict", was delivered on May 25th 1999 at Geneva by Radhika Coomaraswamy in her capacity as UN special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women.

> from the mother who distils this information and first creates an awareness of ethnic and national belonging. It is therefore not surprising that mothers and myths of mothers play an important role in ethnic and nationalist propaganda. The story of the Spartan mother who lost five sons in the war rushing to the temple triumphantly to give thanks for a Spartan victory is an example of this mythology. [4]

It is through similar affective norms that men too are bonded into the community/collective. In this regard, Spike Paterson in his article *Gendered Nationalism: Reproducing 'Us' Versus 'Them'* [5] iterates:

> shared images, rituals, myths and language play essential roles in the reproduction of social groups that are based on abstract bonds among men who are distanced from reproductive activities.
>
> (Paterson 1998, 41).

while Paterson points out that these symbols are elevated to levels of strategic importance for the group, they are treated as national/communal symbols, and in this manner become worth fighting and dying for, his analysis however does not include the fact that women are a significant part of this constellation to the extent that they are perceived as embodying the group/communities honour/shame. Notions of communal honour/shame; purity/defilement are symbolised through the bodies of women. They and the above mentioned symbols by Patterson, as "cultural metaphors" in this sense, literally become "weapons in the war" (Paterson 1998, 41).

Thus *Eelam*, the nation yet to be realised had nonetheless been completely conceptualised through its symbols such as the national flag, anthem, myths of brave warriors and so forth. However, yet to be constructed was an image that would represent the ideal woman for Tamil Eelam. This figure varied between traditionally accepted representations of the sari-clad, *thali* and *kumkum* sporting auspicious married woman or the new model for womanhood on the peninsula – the combat-trained, women-fighters for Tamil *Eelam*.

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[4] In her book entitled *Gender and Nation*, Yuval-Davis makes the connection between gender and nation. she argues that women play a major role in the construction and defence of ethnic and national identity. Their bodies and their controlled sexuality are instrumental in keeping the boundaries of the community free from pollution and infiltration.

[5] In Lorentzen, Lois Ann & Jennifer Turpin (Ed.) *The Women and War Reader*, New York University Press, pg 41.

Sinhala nationalism however did not suffer from similar such set-backs. In the post–independence Sinhala-Buddhist nation-state of Sri Lanka representations of the "ideal" Sinhala woman acquired prominent dissemination associated as the ywere with the figure of ViharaMaha Devi. Since, a founding narrative for Sinhala cultural nationalism is that of the legendary king Dutugemunu and his defeat of the Tamil king Elara. With the ethnic conflict, this myth gained iconic status as did the figure of Dutugemunu's mother, Queen Vihara Mahadevi. Her extolling Dutugemunu to battle in order to protect the Sinhala land and people from the Tamil barbarians came to be widely propagated during the ethnic conflict. This historical/mythical story relating the origins of the Sinhala race on the island became foundational towards establishing the legitimacy of the new nationalism. It facilitated the creation of a repository of cultural symbols, similar to those highlighted by Coomarswamy and Patterson as mentioned above, thereby solidifying the boundaries of Sinhala ethnic nationalist discourse. Constructions of the "pure" Sinhala woman were integral for this new nationalist discourse. The chastity and purity attributed to this ideal womanhood could be actualised when set against the alleged "impurity" of the women from the Burgher community.[6]

Tamil culture on the island however was not without its valorisations of the mother figure. Sitralega Maunagur draws attention to the anthology of Tamil heroic poetry from the 1st century A.D entitled *Puranaanuru* for the manner in which this ancient text waxes eloquent regarding the qualities that women, particularly mothers, must cultivate. With the onset of militancy, the subsequent militarization of society on the peninsula and the need for women as cadres, traits of passivity and tenderness hitherto deemed essential for women were certainly displaced but not obliterated. As Maunaguru points out, the LTTE literally created as iconic and exemplary the image of the dutiful woman, first as a mother and now a warrior for the motherland in the making. While mothers were needed to propagate the race, warriors were needed to

[6] See Neloufer de Mel 2001:57,102; Neluka Silva 2004:97, 137

wrest the imagined motherland, *Eelam* from the GoSL. Women were actively put to service for both causes. (Maunaguru 1995: 158,175) [7]

Apart from the presence of the women-fighters of Tamil Eelam – a phenomenal occurrence in a traditional and conservative society, three decades of conflict had resulted in wide-spread changes regarding the roles women were now called upon to perform. These demanded more from them than confinement within the private spaces of the family and the homestead as decreed by the earlier sexual demarcation of labour. As a mother she was now the decision-maker, the bread-winner and the bearer and nurturer of her children and many a time their protector from forced inscription into the ranks of the LTTE. To this was added another role; a role called upon on account of the conflict, that of the protestor, a protestor against repressive practices adopted by the GoSL in their bid to restore law and order. To register protest required immense courage given the terror of the times and it also meant transgressing the strictures of passivity and silence traditionally imposed on women. These changes were aided by women-centric movements of protest, such as the Mother's Front.

I will now provide a brief history of the Mother's Front, a movement of protest and resistance which enabled women to break their silence regarding the terror and injustice stalking their lives. My focus will be on the social impact this movement had on Sri Lankan society. The Mother's Front came into existence in Jaffna sometime in 1984 with women marching to the district commissioner's office demanding information regarding the whereabouts of their children, who, for all practical purposes had literally disappeared, while presumably while under government custody.[8] Confronted with repressive state practices deployed towards controlling terror, mothers in the North organised themselves into a political force that came to be referred to as the "Mother's Front".[9] In the South, the movement was formed, in 1990, out of similar concerns, following the round-up of youth allegedly

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7 In this regard, the murder/death of Ranjini Thirangama, a lecturer at Jaffna university and a strident voice speaking out against state and LTTE oppression, is a case in point.

8 Details procured from De Mel, 2001

9 Prior to this organisations such as "Mother's and Daughter's of Lanka"; "Women and Media Collective" and the "Women's Action Committee", had raised issues of human rights violations by the GoSL under special Acts such as 'Emergency Regulations' and 'Prevention of Terrorism Act'.

associated with (anti-state) JVP activities. Here however, as Nilofer de Mel points out, the movement was politicised from the start, and owed its inception to opposition parties with the agenda of holding the government accountable for youth-disappearances between the years 1087-89.[10] The mothers demanded information and compensation, from the UNP government of President Ranasinghe Premadasa for their kith and kin who had "disappeared" under judicial reprimand.[11]

The pivotal factor determining membership to the "Mother's Front" was of course the reproductive aspect which has also been perceived as the prime cause of patriarchal control.[12] Underlining the social importance of this phenomenon Krishnaraj Maithreyi acknowledges the fact that: "Motherhood is the central fact of human existence because it is the most authentically biological experience separating a man from a woman" (Krishnaraj 1995: 34).[13] Looking at the manner in which patriarchal control over the female body accrues from the female capacity to reproduce, Kamla Bhasin points out in *What is Patriarchy?*:

> The ideology of motherhood is central to the radical feminist analysis of women's situation. According to them women are subjugated mainly because the burden of mothering and nurturing is forced on them, *and only on them*, by patriarchal societies….

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10 The Guardian (Manchester) 9th January 1992 by Gabriella Gami; Reuters 5th October 1993, "Protests by Parents of Sri Lanka's Missing".

11 Chandrika Kumaratunga and Srimavo Bandaranaike were active members of the southern branch. And as per the inquiry conducted by 'The Presidential Commission into Involuntary Removal', instituted by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, 7239 cases of 'disappearances' were evidenced in the south alone. These findings focussed on the period of retaliatory crackdown initiated by the UNP government of President Ranasinghe Premadasa against the terror of JVP politics in the south. However, journalists and scholars have placed the figure at 40,000 (De Mel, 235). This factor of JVP terror is crucial, as it undercuts the entrenchment of the idea that Tamil separatism was the prime cause of terror on the island. In the North and the East, which again were theatres of war, the trauma of disappearances was compounded by factors of internal refugees and forced enlistment by the LTTE. The Mothers and Daughters of Lanka (MDL) issued an appeal addressed to the state for the JVP and LTTE to "stop all killings" (De Mel 2001: 238).

12 For more information regarding the Mothers' Front of Sri Lanka, consult Neloufer De Mel and Malati de Alwis. While De Mel provides a comprehensive history of the movement uptill its eventual politicization and dissolution, even mentioning that the rallies of the Front and even the logo was designed by the present President, Mahinda Rajapakse, then a party worker. Malati de Alwis on the other hand shows how this movement in the ultimate count reinforced stereotypes of womanhood. Moreover, the similarities with the Latin American Mothers' Fronts particularly the Plaza de Mayo of Argentina are striking.

13 Krishnaraj, Maithreyi. *Indian Women: Myth and Reality*, Ed. Bagchi, Jasodara, Hyderbad: Sangam Books, 1995.

> Further, patriarchy not only forces women to be mothers, it also determines the conditions of their motherhood. The ideology of motherhood is considered one of the basis of women's oppression because it creates feminine and masculine character types which perpetuate patriarchy; it creates and strengthens the divide between the private and public, it restricts women's mobility and growth and it reproduces male dominance. (Bhasin 1993: 7, 8)

While it is an established fact that patriarchal ideology "typically opposes women as sexual beings to women as mothers" (Bhasin 1993, 8), in war-torn Sri Lanka, women-as-mothers broke the stereotype of passivity associated with mothers and were successful in questioning, challenging and resisting the extremity of state machinery. The movement garnered media empathy in a manner that the JVP and LTTE utterly failed to do.

While the image of a mother lamenting the loss of her child is in-keeping with the ideas of self-sacrificial womanhood, it brought to the fore, the pain of "real" women as opposed to their iconic representations. While nationalist representations denied the humane aspect by appealing to an abstract concept of heroic and stoic motherhood and drew on examples of mythical women to legitimise their claims, "The Mother's Front" literally performed their grief in the public square. Their protests brought another fact to light, namely, the silence and suppression imposed on "real" mothers on account of constructed idealisation. The movement with its sharp focus on the figure of the grieving mother commanded a space of formidable respect. This enabled the women to stage protests at a time when extreme forms of terror, both state and anti-state, had paralysed civil society networks on the island. With the moral weight of motherhood behind them, the Front attracted tremendous mass support.

On the social front, the movement subverted the traditional injunction imposed on women regarding mourning. Grief was no longer a disabling condition circumscribing their lives and their pain was no longer rendered invisible by being confined to the four walls of the home. Rather, their loss was now transformed into an empowering act of collective and public protest against those who held the blame for the killing of their kin. By bringing the grieving mother out into the private, domestic realm to zones of visibility, not only did the Front deploy grief as a mode of resistance

but blurred the gendered dichotomy between the private and public. By doing this the movement redefined the practice of motherhood making it more of a communal experience whereby mothers assuaged their grief instead of keeping to the realm of the private (Schriver 1989: 185, 209).

The means of protest used by the members of the Front to express their grief and demand redress were customary cultural practices such as, heaping of curses, invoking of superstitions and folk-rituals of black magic, fasts undertaken at the temple of *Kaliamma* seeking divine vengeance as justice for their murdered kin. The movement was attacked by the state on this count - for not furthering the democratic process and encouraging the stereotypes of irrationality associated with women, such as hysteria, gullibility and superstition.[14] This, more than a comment on the members, is an indictment of the societal cultural conditioning.[15] The mother's were accused of politicisation of their grief by making it such a public affair.[16] As spokesperson for the state, the Defence Minister for the UNP, Ranjan Wijeratne, chastised the protesting mothers for: "having failed their duty by their children and the nation" (De Mel 2001:244). Politicising the movement even further, the UNP government, in the South, formed its own Mother's Front, in opposition to what they termed was the SLFP's Mother's Front. This politicisation led to the eventual dissolution of the movement. In the North, the movement ultimately dissipated under LTTE pressure.

While the mothers showed the effectiveness of localised modes of cultural resistance, the movement was unable to transcend the ethnic divide or achieve what De Mel refers to as "lateral cosmopoliteness" (De Mel, 2001, 247).[17] However, it must be acknowledged that in this climate of paranoia and mass murder the "Mother's Front" was one of the few organisations which could successfully appeal for a redress

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[14] Raka Ray in her study on protest movements by women has shown how women-centric movements often take shape from local problems and in this regard are heavily influenced by local cultures and traditions. The 'Mother's Front' in Sri Lanka was similar in this aspect being born out of a crisis of state. Moreover, when R. Premadasa met his end at the hands of a suicide bomber, the perception that folk-justice had taken recourse was a strongly prevalent sentiment. (Ray,1999; De Mel,2001)

[15] This shows how the paradigms of feminist resistance vary and cannot be homogenized by grand narratives of Radical Feminist movements initiated in the West but rather for feminist resistance to be effective, it must be localized.

[16] Also see, Mothers de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and in Guatemala.

[17] The Northern Mothers' Front was disbanded under pressure from the LTTE. (De Mel, 2001)

of their grievances. Pointing to the social effectiveness of the "Mother's Front", De Mel point out that on account of the war, single-mothers and female-headed households were on the rise as also was mistrust and fear within what had hitherto been close-knit island communities. The movement created the much needed empathetic space wherein women, often the silent suffers of war and the silenced bearers of its brutalising effects could reach out to one another, swap stories and expect to be understood and supported. The members of the Front, as Mel proudly points out, were: "as much in dialogue with each other as they were with the nation". (De Mel 2001,247; De Alwis, 1999).

While no overt links can be established between the movement and poetry selected for discussion, the bold and strident voices of the speakers and their use of realism to cite the instances of violence shows the liberating effect of the Mother's Front and its activities on women at large in this society. The text cited below for instance is a sharp socio-political critique of the war as the lines explicate the harrowing reality of living in the war zone. It is entitled *A Mother's Lament*, is by Sanmarga, (the pseudonym used by Sarvamangalam Kailasapathy) and is part of the anthology compiled by the *Women & Media Collective*. The speaker, a mother, is the head of her household. Her words show the material and psychic disempowerment engendered by war as her grief-stricken enunciation reveals the xenophobia of living under the shadow of the gun.

*A Mother Lament*

You lie on the road dust
Your body soaked in blood
I bend down to see your face
Yes son it is you
"why do you cry mother?"
The gathered crowd inquires
"do you know the boy"
Threatens the man with the gun
"No I don't." I shake my head
Denying you my first born

In Kurukshetra, when Karna falls Kunti runs and takes him in her arms
And cries" Oh my son"
I am a sinner to be born now for I cannot even claim you as my son

If only I had some strength

I will take you in the night
And cremate you in Chemmani
This hand which fed you rice
Two nights ago, would have courageously
Done this duty as well

You went away for six months
Unable to bear the oppression of Ravana
…. Why did you return my son?

If I claimed you as my son,
They will come home and take away
your brothers and set fire to my hut
will load my cow on their lorry
and drive away to Palaly

who is there to question them?
I am just a poor woman
….
…. My grief will one day destroy those
Who have been so cruel.
While those who advocate a separate state
On platforms endlessly
Are guests in neighbouring country safe and secure,
You who gave your life for the country
Are dead on the road-side

My heart breaks to leave you
On the road-side
I am a sinner who cannot even claim
My son as my own.

(*Women in Wartime* 2002: 24, 26).[18]

Poignant in the realist simplicity of its language, the mother's protest at being unable to accord her son a proper burial is registered through the grief and melancholia that shrouds her utterance, similar weapons as harnessed by the Mother's Front. While the text explicates her unique predicament as a mother, it reaches beyond the personal purview of the speaker to encompass and articulate the vulnerability of a majority of the civilian population on the peninsula - caught between the state and non-state forces and with no feasible end in sight to the war.

[18] Sanmarga's poems first began to appear in a magazine called 'Sollatha Seithihal' around 1986. The war in Jaffna between the separatists and the GoSL had rapidly escalated during this time. Her poetry articulates a sharp socio-political criticism.

The mother's words while drawing attention to the impermanence of human life, also draw attention to a significant aspect of this ethnic-conflict - the class factor. This fault line is often obfuscated by the attention commanded by the ethnic. The speaker's lament reveals the extent to which class structures more than ethnic denomination determine the existential angst of the individual. The mother attributes the helplessness of her situation as accruing from her class-based marginalisation; to the fact that she is: "just a poor woman". (ibid) her ethnicity finds no mention in this text. Her words rather, are an indictment of the class structures of her society and her duress as a mother is not on account of the ethnic group to which she and her family belong but rather on account of her self-alienation on having to undergo the unnatural act of denying the lifeless body of her child. Explicating this as the mother's dilemma of protecting her other children from the war machinery, she is clear however that her marginalisation accrues on account of her being located, as per her own admission, among the powerless in this society. Her ethnic identity finds no mention and appears immaterial throughout her speech. Nor for that matter does she refer to the iconic Vihara Maha Devi. Moreover, it is the tone deployed by "the man with the gun", that the mother perceives as threatening and not the fact that he may be either a member of the Sinhalese armed forces or for that matter, the Tamil-Tigers. This disregard of ethnic-consciousness or any identity for that matter apart from the sense of identity conferred onto her as a mother brings about a shift in focus from the politics of ethnic demarcations to the quotidian reality of a militarised society, where even grief is politicised.

The matter-of-fact tone of this realist text begins with the mother's numbing realisation that the carcass lying abandoned by the roadside is none other than that of her son.[19] The reference to "Palay" – the military base in Jaffna - enables recognition of the spatial location of the text as the peninsula but the spectacle of bodies unattended was a popular tactic deployed by both the LTTE and the JVP, as part of the tactics inducing fear and paranoia as effective modes of control. Clearly, it is the violence of war that is being indicted here and not ethnicity. For instance, was the boy

[19] The similarity to Sophocle's play *Antigone* is unmistakable but death as punishment and spectacle was part of the control mechanics in war-torn Sri Lanka. Refer to Narayan Swamy for more details.

shot dead by the armed forces or by the Tigers? And did the organisations enact this as the punishment meted out to deserters/traitors as per their ideology of justice or, alternatively, was this staged as a terrorist encounter by the armed forces acting under the protection of laws such as Prevention of Terrorist Activities ?[20] Neither case justifies the spectacle of cold-blooded murder, performed in broad daylight, in the marketplace? Clearly, the performative value of the act lies in the effect of fear that such spectacle is calculated to obtain.

As per the mother's lament, the son had "returned" to the peninsula. Had he then, moved out to resist forced enlistment and recruitment by the Tigers?[21] This murder then, shows the shrinking space for non-violence and democratic stances. Furthermore, is the mother's reference to "Ravana", the mythical demon-king of the epic the *Ramayana*, a reference to the head of the Tigers – Vellupillai Prabhakaran or the President of the elected party? On the other hand, she could be referring to the brutality she has witnessed enacted daily on civilians living in the peninsula by the soldiers of the state army and the militants alike. The message and power of the text are achieved through the effects foreground by the questions evoked by this realist text.

However, none of this displaced the stereotypical representations regarding Tamil womanhood. Speaking about the valorised position of women within Tamil culture at the World Tamil Movement held at Toronto in 2001, R. Cheran sought to explicate it thus:

> Mere words or poetry fall short of remotely expressing the place of women in Tamil culture. Women are regarded with the utmost respect and reverence, as they are the keepers of wisdom, the connection to the divine and the teachers of life.[22]

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[20] A 'deserter' refers to a soldier absconding from duty. However the situation then calls for the military procedure of a court-martial, wherein the soldier will be tried under the military court and law.

[21] The LTTE had a reputation for torture and cruelty in order to extract fear and therefore obedience from the cadres and civilian population. Refer to Narain Swamy for details.

[22] Cheran, R. *The Sixth Genre: Memory, History and Tamil Diaspora Imagination*. Colombo: Marga, 2001, (pg, 21).

Cheran's utterance takes recourse to stereotypically idealised notions of women which circulate despite the lived experience of real women on the peninsula. the belief in such idealisations shows the extent to which patriarchal modes are internalised wherein women are constructed as repositories of spiritual values and as teachers of cultural mainstays for their community, qualities essential towards maintaining the distinction and boundaries between ethnic identities. These ideas moreover acquired tremendous appeal during the ethnic conflict which needed to harness the reproductive capacities of women.[23] Unlike the rarefied and essentialist position accorded by Cheran's utterance, the mother lament as voiced by Sanmarga shows it as no more than romanticised notions used to propagate ethnic and patriarchal boundaries. Given the surfeit of nationalism on the island – the separatist Tamil and the Sinhala cultural nationalisms, Sanmarga's mother clearly has no use of either.

The grief of the mother however does not obliterate the valour with which she protects keep family despite the duress of war. She does this despite the awareness that her children may not be around to offer her succour when her body is old and infirm. The subversion of the normative order of ethnics manifest through the violation of kinship bonds such as having to disavow of the body of her son, now an abandoned carcass, lying in the dust by the roadside, spurs the reprehension for such a state of affairs.

Grief and melancholia, predominant in the poetry from the peninsula during this time, function as both a critique of the times and resistance to the dominant order of war. Resistance however, especially in texts by women often carries subversions of patriarchal norms and one such voice is that of the poet Avvai, as evidenced by the text *My Little Flower* which articulates her strident anti-war, anti-patriarchal stance:

> *My Little Flower*
>
> 'My motherhood
> Dreamed of being
> Proud to have a daughter.
> This dream

[23] The location of the conference is significant in this regard as it explains the need of the speaker to highlight aspects of Tamil womanhood to a western audience.

Lies in shock
Like a dragon-fly without wings
My motherhood has been shattered
By the inhuman cruelty of this world.'

(*Women in Wartime* 2002: 80)

The image of the "dragon-fly without wings" is the central metaphor around which the text is structured. Without its gossamer wings and robbed of its mobility, it is the vulnerability of the dragon-fly that is foreground. Metaphorically, vulnerability can refer to the position of women in patriarchal cultures, of humanity during wartime and the vulnerability regarding the ethnics of compassion and humanness during armed conflict. Likewise, the multi-valence of the metaphor, as uttered by a grieving mother, also correlates to the pain of the individual on sighting the corpse of her young daughter.

Usually, in traditional cultures, it is the birth of a male offspring that is deemed worthy of celebration. A son moreover is seen as a furthering the woman's sense of agency, particularly within agricultural communities.[24;25] Nationalist ideologies too glorify women for being the producer of sons who would be future soldiers and protectors of the motherland. The speaker of Avvai's poem consciously disregards such patriarchal mores by stating her desire to mother and her pride in having mothering a daughter. At no point does the text suggest that this pride accrues on account of producing a female soldier for the war machine or another female cadre for the LTTE. The speaker's grief and sense of loss, akin to the speaker of Sanmarga's poem, is ultimately symbolic of the general human condition during war-time. Once again, mention of ethnic specificity is absent from the text and were the reader unaware of Avvai's Tamil affiliations, this could well-be the articulation of a Sinhala mother sighting the corpse of her daughter, killed perhaps by the armed forces or by the death squads of the LTTE or the JVP.

The anti-war message of the next text hinges on the image of a mother nursing her newborn. The symbolism carried by this image of mother and child cuts across

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[24] The deified status of Queen Vihara Mahadevi, in Sinhala folklore, accrues from her position as king Duttugemunu's mother.

[25] This is particularly the case with labor intensive, agriculture economies of Asia and Africa. Refer to Jyotsana Agnihotri Gupta elaborates in *New Freedoms, New Dependencies*.

ethnic boundaries and is as much suggestive of the humanity that binds us as of the man-made divisions that divide us. The image suggests not only the nurture associated with a mother but the quality of compassion as a quality worth cultivating. The image acquires added symbolic force in times fraught with hatred and destruction. The text describes a mother nursing her infant in the midst of war with the din of battle surrounding them. The juxtapositioning of these images interrogates the very rationale impelling this armed conflict, or for that matter, any war. The ethnic affiliation of the mother nursing the infant is not indicated but the location is the Jaffna fort. The poet however is J. Sheila Wickremaratna - a Sinhalese and a journalist by profession. Having lost her son, a soldier in the army, to the war, Wickremaratna poems resonate with her an anti-war stance. The text entitled *On the walls of Jaffna Fort*, is exemplary for the manner in which it demonstrates how the poet, also a mother, has surmounted her sense of personal loss and grief to reach out with empathy towards the ethnic 'other', also victimised by the war.

*On the Walls of Jaffna Fort*

A child cries out in hunger,
Rejecting the dried out breast
That she thrusts into his mouth,
Knowing there is no milk to be had.
'I want rice'
The older one cries.
She stuffs a cloth in its mouth
For fear that their sound
Will bring the cruel bullets of
Inhuman men towards them.

(*Women in War Time* 2002: 37)

While the futility of war, its harvest of death, destruction and xenophobia are strikingly illustrated by Wickremaratna's text, Seetha Ranjanee's poem entitled *The Dream of the Mothers of the North,* draws attention to another aspect of war – its affective dimension or the subjective damage wrought by war. Apart from the visible material devastation, it is the subjective trauma induced by war, the emotive pain of loss evidenced by the pall of melancholy or the zombie-like atmosphere that pervades human settlements in the war zone. This and the erosion of trust and community are true indicators of the perversion entailed by decades of violence:

Easy to price these burnt out villages and lands,
Easy to build again these ruined houses,
For brick and mortar come cheaper than before.
Easy to buy and sell peace wholesale
For we have purchased it from many lands,
….but the lessons that are difficult to learn
Are those that tell of
How to end the sadness brought about by war.

Look carefully at these ruins,
Look at them brick by broken brick.
Here lies the debris of millions of human lives,
The lives of young children,
Clipped before the buds could come to bloom.

….

Who can console the minds and hearts
benumbed by war?
Who can reach the minds of our children,
Those who are with us now
And those who are yet to be born,
When they have been distorted
by the terror of war,

We have died, over and over again,
And been reborn.
We have wept and laughed
And wept again.
And now,
We don't need to weep together,
We want a world in which we may smile,
together.

(*Women in War Time* 2002: 46)

the speaker's appeal is not directed at any one community but to humanity at large. Her words are indicative of the fear psychosis prevalent on the island – an inevitable and damning off-shoot of terrorism.[26] The referencing to peace-brokering is significant within the context of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict as it refers to (failed) peace initiatives, such as the Thimpu Peace Talks, the attempts by the Norwegian state and also the Indian Peace Keeping Force among others.

[26] Michael Ondaatje's novel *Anil's Ghost* explicates this fear psychosis dominating life on the island during the eighties. Ondaatje's focus is on the zombie-like existence inducted by this emotion and not the politics that have led to it; nor does he play the blame game, indicting either the GoSL, the LTTE or the JVP for this state of affairs although the time-frame contextualizes this as the second JVP insurrection as also does the location of Colombo, as the site for the action.

In the texts discussed so far, we have witnessed the pain experienced by mothers on account of the war. The fact that they could speak out in this manner, even if through the measure of poetry, shows their resistance to the order of war and the mind-boggling terror and paranoia it entails. The enabling role played by resistance movements such as the Mother's Front, in this regard, must be acknowledged. In tandem with the resistance- to-terror ethnics espoused by the Mother's Front, this poetry too is unaffected by representations of iconic womanhood, as of the Vihara Maha Devi stereotype. Rather, it is the trials and tribulations posed by a life lived under the shadow of terror that is their concern. Likewise, texts such as by Avvai, also defy patriarchal norms. The nationalist agenda regarding womanhood whereby women are glorified for the services they can render to the motherland find no mention in the articulation of the grievances of the women-as-mother's. Rather, resistance is here typified by the very act of enunciation.

This nationalist agenda however is significantly present in texts by women related to armed forces personnel. I will now analyse a few selected texts wherein ideologies, such as propagated by representations of Queen Vihara Maha Devi as the selfless, mother bravely sacrificing her son for the cause of the welfare and protection of the Sinhala land and people have played a significant role in coercing women, particularly mothers regarding their *duty* towards the nation. Speaking about the inculcation of this idea of dutiful and ideal motherhood as propagated by nationalist ideology, Jyotsana Agnihotri Gupta in *New Freedoms, New Dependencies* states:

> The internalisation of this so-called ideal that nationalism put up for women simply reinforced the traditional notion that the fruition of women's lives lay in producing heroic sons. The nationalist ideology, therefore, simply appropriated this orthodox bind on women's lives by glorifying it. This renewed ideological legitimacy made it even more difficult for women to exercise their choice or autonomy in the matter. (Gupta 1996: 60)

While Agnihotri-Gupta's analysis does appear to be a sleigh of hand regarding the manner in which women experience nationalist ideology as the poetry I have discussed so far is illustrative of women who have resisted the force of such coercion. However, it remains to be stated that such enunciations were not the norm. Rather, by speaking out against the terror of their times, the poets were exercising: "their choice

or autonomy" (ibid) which as Agnihotri-Gupta has informed us, was often not the case. Although the poets who have figured so far in our discussion do not appear in the least to be coerced by the dominant ideology propagated by the nation-state regarding ideal motherhood, these stances are rare and motherhood, as is well-known has proven to be a powerful trope mobilising support for nationalist causes. Poetry written around this time in Sri Lankan, both Sinhalese and Tamil, often extolled the nationalist sentiment whereby veneration for the mother-figure in the household is extended to the nation as motherland, and protecting the motherland is then equated with the service rendered by a dutiful son towards his mother. One such text, exemplifying this nationalist sentiment, is entitled *To My Son on the Battlefield* is written by the mother of a soldier stationed on the front:

> *To my Son on the Battlefield*
>
> When her son Dutugemunu went to battle
> The venerable queen did not shed tears
> I cannot do likewise my son
> For warm tears are cascading down my face
> Even if you die in the battlefield, beloved son
> Lay not your rifle upon the earth, hand it over to another
> This is the way I know you are my eldest son for sure
> Tomorrow I'll send my heroic younger son to battle
>
> (De Alwis 1998, 262)

One can make a strong argument that the above verse extols war to the extent that the mother even seems to propagate its continuation by vowing to send her "younger son to battle" (ibid). Before we strongly condemn *such* mother's I take as reference point, once again, the *Illiad* – the epic that supposedly celebrates war!! Homer never indicts Achilles or Hector for repudiating the homestead or for actions that would appear barbaric if decontextualised while Paris, earns the scorn of all including Helen, for refraining from battle. Character, within the framework of war is judged differently. Likewise, within the framework of the *Illiad*, the goddess Athena is admirable and not Aphrodite. So then, such were the sentiments deemed as worthy utterances for Sinhala mothers particularly when the nation or Sinhala community was in a vulnerable position on account of the war crisis. The legend of king Dutugemunu, the founder of the Sinhala race and his mother Vihara Maha Devi as recounted in *The Mahavamasa* has been foundational for this post independence

phase of militant Sinhala nationalism. During the ethnic conflict the circulation of this myth of the young king's desire to wage war against the Tamils worked towards legitimising the boundaries of a national imaginary regarding a Sinhala-Buddhist land. Gananath Obeysekere in his study entitled *Dutthagamini and the Buddhist Conscience: Religious and Political Conflict in South Asia* presents his version of this dialogue between the queen and her son the young Dutugemnu:

> The queen came and caressing Gamini spoke thus: why dost thou not lie easily upon thy bed with limbs stretched out my son? The son replies "over there beyond the Gange (the river Mahaveli) are the Damilas (Tamils), here on this side is the Gotha (ocean), how can I lie with outstretched limbs?
>
> (Obeysekera 1993: 92)

The internalisation of this myth by Sinhala women is illustrated through the poetic utterance of the soldier's mother, as cited above. While she expresses her distraught state of mind over the possible annihilation that could await her son at no point does she question the legitimacy of the battle or imply that it is a waste of human life. It is the glory accorded to the warrior that will override the thought of his death in battle. While women/mother's with sentiments such as this were the need of the hour for Sinhala nationalism, they provide ample illustration of the Dutugemunu myth at work. This idealised form of sacrificial and stoic motherhood fits the image of the mother required by the nation-at-war. It acquires added importance as what the body politic of the state needs at this time are not only the reproductive capacities of the woman but also a mother who extols the right sentiments. While her role as the mother of a son who is a soldier is valorised, equally important is the verbal defence she renders as propagator of the national ideology.

The mother, while at one level acknowledges the pain which the possibility of loss entails, as the reference to the "warm tears…cascading down my face" illustrates, at the same time texts by similar such patriotic mothers generate acceptance and normalisation of the trauma that would accrue from the loss of a child/son. This nationalist ideology advocating a display of valour by mother's and sons lends itself

to the idea of martyrdom that was fast acquiring a stronghold in this war-torn land.[27] It is these "Moral Mothers" and their "Stalwart Sons", as indicated by the title of Malati's essay who show the effects of coercion and representation.[28]

While the brave mother's utterance is in tandem with the construction of a new national imaginary along the monolith lines of Sinhala nationalism, the emotive tone of the speaker and her recourse to heroic valour obfuscate the effects of militarization and the polarisation of society on the island. Moreover, such expressions of patriotism were granted societal sanction. They were seen as passed to the next generation by the mothers and the wide reach of this discourse of Sinhala nationalism can be ascertained from this text *For My Motherland* by Private P.G Perera which strongly demonstrates the re-imagining of state vocabulary:

> *For My Motherland*
>
> I went to the north this day
> To not surrender an inch
> Of my motherland to the enemy
> I will break rest till dawn
> And fight for my motherland
>
> My mother, who has transformed her blood to milk
> And fed me
> Shall see me a hero
> I will commit my life to protecting the motherland
> ….in this way
> I will pay tribute to my mother
> Who brought me up to be a hero[29]

Military glory in this case does not take precedence over familial bonding and is not a sacrifice performed solely for the self rather it is the love for the biological mother that spurs he young Private to protect the motherland. The fusing of the real mother with the abstract motherland disables the need to make a choice between them, as does Andromache when she pleads with Hector to choose her and his son

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27 The Martyr's graveyards and the observance of Martyr's day were practices institutionalized by the Tigers. The army, as is tradition, continued to venerate and honor soldiers who had lost their lives in the service of the motherland.

28 The title is also an ironic reference to the line-of-argument resorted to by the state whereby the members of the Mother's Front were upbraided by the state-representatives as "bad mother's" who had failed in their duty towards their family and towards the state and brought up children who were wayward and criminal..

29 *The White Hackle*, Volume 07, No 03. 25th issue. Colombo. Print Well, pg 28.

over the eternal glory to be earned on the battlefield. For Hector too, the glory he will win on the plains of Troy (as the fall of Troy has been prophesied), is for his father, King Priam. In wartime, it is the marital display of bravery that will earn glory and honour.

The emotive aspect of nationalism and the manner in which it draws on a connection with the mother and the motherland is clearly brought out in the young Private's poem published in the journal of the Sri Lankan Light infantry *The White Hackle*. While Private Perera's text explicates the emotive connection between the mother and the motherland, the act of killing, in a Buddhist nation, is legitimised only if one is fighting a "just" war, as did Dutugemunu. A "just" war is one that is fought to protect the motherland and as the times demand, the Tamil threat and the Indian threat rendered these wars with ample cause. In the text cited above, clearly, both mother and motherland are equally tangible realities for this young Private and it is their vulnerability regarding the danger of defilement and destruction that is stressed which makes both in urgent need of male protection. As part of the war machinery of the state, the Private tows the official line of the armed forces of stamping-out separatism which also, ironically, partook of the romanticised and emotive nationalist idiom. What however are not addressed by him are the reasons that have spurred this separatism; the marginalisation brought about by an electoral democracy pandering to the majority and the unfairness of demanding a monolith nation-state on a land inhabited by multiple races.

Noting the cultural import of images such as: " 'warm tears', 'blood turned to milk', and the dispatching of another son to take the place of the first", Malati de Alwis notes how these images became familiar tropes during the armed conflict and even found their way into popular forms of public discourse such as: "war songs, political speeches and statements to the press by bereaved parents …" (De Alwis, 262). She adds:

> The nation-state, i.e., the motherland conceptualises the citizen subject through a particular configuration of 'motherhood': nurturing and caring for her citizens in exchange for a similar reciprocity. In times of crisis such as war or an uprising such symbiotic relationships are especially highlighted: the heroism required of her male citizens fore grounded against the sacrifices of

> her female citizens. In addition, the female citizen is often perceived to embody the Motherland (they are both nurturant yet vulnerable); her rape or capture symbolizes the very desecration of the community/nation/land.
>
> (De Alwis 1998: 254)

According to this equation, while the man, as protector, is duty bound to defend the nation; the woman, as mother, must order her sons to battle and not mourn their martyrdom, if the case be.

In the texts discussed, while motherhood is the uniting factor, the diverse and individualistic ways in which one may articulate the sentiments mustered by this trope is illustrative not just of the diversity of motherhood but of the fault lines within the nation itself. The difference in the articulations by the women/speakers/poets accrues from their location within the wide social spectrum of this society. Whereas the speaker of Sanmarga's text is in all probability a single mother and the head of her household - another subversion of the normative order on account of the war, it is the manner in which her speech shows the vulnerability of her position, her marginalisation and subalternity which clearly is not an experience which the mother of the soldier is familiar with. For the Sanmarga mother, there is no political ideology apart from her personal situation which is providing for her family and protecting them. The war has rendered her vulnerable on both counts. In the case of the mother of the soldier, the fear of loss and the possibility of the death of her son are ever-present but her words show the suppression and sublimation of those very "real" sentiments by resorting, rather forcefully, to heroic abstractions such as the attainment of glory on the battlefield, of death as the achievement of martyrdom and the ethnics of bravery and valour. This deification of motherhood at the national level however, much like the mother-goddesses of the Indian pantheon did little to alter the lives of real women. Moreover, since this so-called power was exercised within the confines of and in the service of a nationalism which very clearly is patriarchal, it didn't do much to improve the gender in-equilibrium either within society as a whole, or individual households. It was only in the absence of the male head, which is not an uncommon occurrence for a conflict zone that women were in-charge of their household economies. In most cases, this ascendancy in the power hierarchy was not a matter of choice but an enforced reality and often voiced as a disempowerment.

This trope of valorised motherhood is predominant in texts by Tamil-Tigers as well and this also shows the cultural similarities between the two warring ethnicities despite their avowal of difference. Explaining the popular acceptance of this new phenomenon whereby the death of a loved one, on the battlefield is equated or elevated to the gifting one's life for the motherland – yet an intangible concept - the historian, R Cheran, in his book entitled *The Sixth Genre: Memory, History and the Tamil Diaspora* links it to an ancient Tamil practice called *Maanam*. He explains it thus:

> Another concept that receives wider articulation in the Dravidian-Chola-Tiger discourse is the concept of *Maanam*. The concept of *Maanam*, coupled with pride and valour constitutes a self-image of Tamils as proud and valiant people who would not tolerate any infringement of their honour and who would, if need be, redeem it by courting death. In the current dominant Tamil nationalist discourse, the Tigers are treated not only as a symbol of pride and honour but as the warriors, who reclaimed these qualities for the Tamil "race". It is not surprising then, that the motto of the Muzhakkum is *pulikalum innaal illaiyel elikathaan thinnum thamilarai* (if it were not for the Tigers the rats would have devoured the Tamils).
>
> (Cheran, 21)

Clearly, when communities take to arms, discourse must comply. In-fact discourse must be constructed in a manner so that rendering one's life for the community appears the most desirable option.

While the texts discussed so far have demonstrated that women's response to armed conflict is dependant on various factors, at the same time, their response can be classified as either pacifist or as supporting the discourse of militarization. However, it was with the formation of the "Women's Wing" of the LTTE that this gender binary associating men with armed combat and women with peace was written anew. While in the subcontinent images of the Goddesses Durga and Kali in their avatars as fierce warriors: riding a lion, wielding weapons and vanquishing demons are worshipped, "real" women in combatant roles is not really a commonplace occurrence. In this regard the 'Women's Wing' of the LTTE - the *Illivar*, broke new ground.[30]

[30] For more information on the women's wing of the LTTE, refer to Adele Balasingham's *Women Fighters of Tamil Eelam*

The following text *She, the Woman of Tamililam*, written by Captain Vanati, martyred at age twenty-seven, in the battle of Elephant Pass on 11/07/91, is explanatory regarding what it meant to be a woman-cadre with the *Illivar*. This battle-hardened force was expected to engage in combat with the Sri Lankan army and carry out suicide bombings as and when selected for the task. The training of the female-cadres of *Illivar* was commensurate with these pre-requisites. Performance of femininity as a female-cadre then was clearly at the other end of the spectrum from the description offered by Cheran as he waxed eloquent regarding the qualities deemed essential for Tamil womanhood. Captain Vanati's verse shows rather the subversion of all standards of femininity hitherto perceived as normative by the Cheran brigade. The experience of womanhood by the female cadres is very different:

> *She, the Woman of Tamililam*
>
> Her forehead shall be adorned not with kumkum but with red blood
> All that is seen in her eyes is not the sweetness of youth (but) the tombs
> of the dead
> Her lips shall utter not useless sentences but firm declarations of those
> Who have fallen down
> On her neck will lay no tali, but a Cyanide capsule!
> She has embraced not men but weapons!
> Her legs are going and searching,
> Not for searching a relationship with relatives
> But looking towards the liberation of
> the soil of Tamililam
>
> Her gun will fire shots
> No failure will cause the enemy to fall
> It will break the fetters of Tamiilam!!
> Then from our people's lips a national anthem will tone up!!
>
> (De Mel 2001, 207)

Focused determination towards the achievement of their goal of carving out a motherland defines the life of *Illivar* women. To say this path entails violence would be a misnomer as it is the determined courage and training of a warrior that is the need of the hour. It is on this count that Captain Vanathi explains herself by resorting to the traditional stereotypes against which women are defined and judged. If woman are praised for the softness of their temperament, the tenderness of their hearts, the nurturing, self-sacrificial and care-giving occupations of a mother, then as a woman-

fighters for Tamil Eelam, all these qualities are conspicuously subverted in Captain Vanati's verse. This subversion however is on account of exceptional circumstances - the oppression that her people have been enduring at the hands of the GoSL. The need of the hour, as Captain Vanathi's verse announces, is for re-definitions of womanhood. It is this new womanhood which the female cadres of the LTTE must embrace. The verse heralds, even celebrates the new Tamil women – the female militant- a front-line combatant, enlisted in the service of "Tamiilam" (ibid). Trained for combat in a manner similar to their male counterparts, the women cadres of the LTTE dressed in the same manner as the male cadres, belted trousers, loose shirts, rifle holster and a gun slung over the shoulder. This was a break from the earlier strictures put in place by the LTTE demanding Tamil women in Jaffna wear the Sari and not ride bicycles (De Mel 2001).

This disavowal of the traditional strictures regarding the role of women in society and their mode of dress and behavior however did not really lead to the forging anew of gender norms in the traditional Tamil society of Jaffna and was not undertaken with the express purpose of female liberation from patriarchy but devised strictly for the female cadres of the LTTE and on account of the decades of battle between the two, the depletion in the number of men was not surprising. At this time, the services of women were drawn up on both counts, as reproducers and now, as active warriors wielding weapons and defending the yet imaginary motherland – Eelam..

While it is a future without oppression that is the dream Captain Vanathi had set her sight on, the forsaking of the *kumkum* and the *tali*, traditional symbols indicating the auspiciousness and social respectability associated with married woman of the Tamil-Hindu culture are like sentinels reminding the women-cadres of the sacrifice they are being called upon to make. They have forsaken the warmth and protection of family to forge a new path and stalk new frontiers regarding sex and gender possibilities. The spurning of traditional conventions which have hitherto forged nay enshrined the very idea of the feminine for centuries in this society has been shaken and dislocated only at the altar of Tamil Eelam. Is *She* then, sacrificing her femininity on the altar of the greater good, the benefit of the collective – "our

people" (ibid)? This transmogrification of gender norms moreover is achieved on account of the reverence unquestioningly accorded to the idea of the nation-as-motherland. At no point moreover, does Capatain Vanathi's verse indicate her sense of empowerment or the freedom of choice but rather what makes her sacrifice of the *kumkum* and *tali* acceptable is: "then from our people's lips a national anthem will tone up" (ibid).

The lines attributed to Captain Vanati's moreover were issued by the cultural unit of the Tamil Tigers. This shows the strict monitoring regarding the movements of the Tigers. Also, authorship then is a a matter of conjecture. This explains the suffusion of romanticized patriotism and the deification accorded to the idea of the motherland, yet in the offing – Eelam. So then, the presence of this new woman whose break with the traditional life choices accorded to women has acquired social sanction of the orders of the LTTE – the organization that donned the mantle of procuring freedom for the Sri Lankan Tamil people. Studying these changes, De Mel sees this as an indicator of the intense militarization of civil society on the island and questions the very freedom it claimed to grant women, new or old. This view has also been iterated by feminists such as Francine D'Amico who have raised questions regarding the empowerment wrought by this change of normative gender norms during wartime. In her article entitled *Feminist Perspectives on Woman Warriors* D'Amico states:

> …the woman warrior image subjects women to greater manipulation by those controlling military institutions, thus allowing women to be militarized but not empowered….women's militarization provides no sustentative 'feminization' of the military as a social institution. Military institutions and their needs (not women's needs) determine women's role in the armed forces. Women's military participation reinforces rather than undermines the gender structures of the military and the broader society. (D'Amico, 120)

While the female LTTE cadres were trained in combat along lines similar to the male cadres, female sexuality was sternly monitored within the organization and ideas such as freedom of choice were debatable.[31] In the final count then, the movement was not

[31] For more on the female cadres of the LTTE, see Adele Balasingham's *Birds of Freedom*.

concerned with the emancipation of Tamil women from the clutches of patriarchy but with the production of soldiers to terrorise the GoSL.[32]

The poetry considered so far in this chapter has been first-person narratives by women enunciating their pain often on account of losing or facing the prospect of losing a loved one because of the war. I will now bring into this discussion the voice of the pre-eminent woman poet from Sri Lanka, Jean Arasanayagam. Documenting and narrating the war from a third-person point-of-view, Arasanayagam disavows the adage of the objective or dispassionate poet. Rather, after the anti-Tamil massacre, in her poem in *July 1983*, she states quite the contrary, as she affirms:

> Now I'm in it
> Its happening to me
> At last history has meaning
>
> (Arasanayagam, 2003:2)

A Dutch-Burgher by birth, it is by marriage that Arasanayagam is affiliated to the Tamil-Hindu culture on the island. While most of her poetry iterates her sense of being made to feel like an outsider by her Tamil mother-in law, it was her experience in the refugee camp set up in one of the high-schools in Kandy, where she lives with her family that bring forth this strangely paradoxical emotion. I use the term "paradoxical" because her expression of victimhood (on account of being a Tamil), is so vastly different from the texts we have considered so far; it is almost expressed in terms of a sense of relief for partaking of the history which she has so far borne witness to but now she is no longer being a bystander, even if it was with a ringside view. The paradox however is this very conscious disavowal of distance and her acute sense of awareness of this which betrays the objective stance of a poet viewing, in this case, herself partaking of history.

Speaking of Arasanayagam's war poetry Norman Simms describes it as:

> A poetry that neither cringes before politics and its extension into (civil) war nor deprives the victims of national catastrophe of their genuine groans and the silence of death; a poetry in other words, which uses the sensuous words and figures of art to make into the illusion of sensuous words the things that

[32] I am aware of the political incorrectness in my use of the term "terrorise", for the Tigers who

> otherwise belie the capacity of journalism, government reports, and fanatical propaganda to articulate.
>
> (Simms, 1991,vii)

As invaluable documentation, Arasanayagam's verses go beyond the wealth of "journalism, government reports and fanatical propaganda" (ibid) regarding the Sri Lankan war, as per Simms, on account of their affective value, and Arasanayagam's brilliant aesthetic/poetic rendering of the violence she's been witnessing. While the thematic dominating Arasanayagam's voluminous body of work is violence but it is not just the violence of armed conflict but also that of the refugee camp, of ethnic alienation – on account of her hybrid Dutch-Burgher-Tamil lineage, the violence of gender norms inflicted by cultures on bodies, of the re-writing of history and the violence of present-day identity concerns, all of which find articulation within the voluminous body of Arasanayagam's work. However, are Arasanayagam's poetic renderings of the war to be valued as another, perhaps more affective mode of (banal) documentation, however aesthetic, as suggested by Simms or is there a message that Arasanayagam's oeuvre holds for the war-torn island? And in what manner do her aesthetics suggest her politics?

I will answer to those questions at the outset, for the one factor we can state with certainty regarding Arasanayagam's poetry particularly her descriptions of post-independence Sri Lanka, is that she does not uphold the boundaries of ethnicity so sacred to the post-independence political discourse on the island, nor does she propagate the ideologies of war or of resistance, both of which are to be found in good measure on the island but rather, the inclusive plurality as existed on the island formerly Ceylon which is the persistent subtext running through Arasanayagam's writings. This moreover is not a nostalgic harking back to the colonial power regime of her ancestors but a wish for present-day coexistence and a more peaceful and purposeful life than the one wrought by the exclusivist nationalisms rampant in post-independence Sri Lanka. Going against the grain of Sinhala nationalism or Tamil nationalisms Arasanayagam's writing documents the horror of war that she sees unfolding before her but with the past as a sentinel; a past wherein memories of cohabitation are vivid and peaceful.

The volume entitled *Apocalypse '83*, is dedicated to the "event" of Black July - the Tamil genocide. This however is not a banal recounting of real-life incidents from the massacre or a mindlessly, pitying rumination over the humiliation meted out to a community but rather a fearless indictment of the perpetrators of this violence, as the texts discussed below demonstrate.

Black July was a turning point in the history of Sri Lanka. Following the state-funeral of thirteen (Sinhala) soldiers killed in Jaffna; on the 23rd of July 1983, riots erupted across the island with Colombo as the epicenter. The compliance of the elected party in this act of genocide provided the impetus for the Tamil separatist movement gathering unprecedented momentum on the Jaffna peninsula. After this, the idea of the Sri Lankan Tamil state, *Eelam*, was looked upon as a do-or-die-for cause for the young Tamil men and women who flocked the headquarters of the LTTE to join as cadres for the cause. The *Illivar* was formed after July 1983.

Arasanayagam's poems such as *Innocent Victim-Trincomalee*, *Eye Witness-Nawalapitiya*, *Nallur 1982* or *Death Carvers*, among others describe the subversion of humanity, the bestiality of the mass-murder transpiring on the island. Unlike the texts discussed so far, Arasanayagam does not narrate a personal experience, but attemps to affectively convey the unnaturalness of this moment of history. By way of illustration, I quote lines from one such text:

*Eye Witnesss- Nawalapitiya*

A young boy speaks of carnage
Eyewitness to death
From three streets he says
They converged upon this township
They were without mercy in their
Killings, hacked men as they ran
From their burning buildings
Flung into the fire gashed
With knives, great axe blades
flashed….

How can men walk through bloodstained streets
….

Flinging their weapons aside
See, how they return to hold their
Children, fondle them, embrace

Their women, hold in their hands
A plate of rice, bend their heads
And offer flowers at the temple

(Arasanayagam, 84:31)

The unnaturalness of the present moment is conveyed through the image of the "young boy" who has been an "eyewitness to death" (ibid). An underlying tone of pain and grief saturates the otherwise objective stance with which the poet bears witness to this raging madness. *Apocalypse '83* conveys a disenfranchised community's sense of sense of betrayal and despair even as Arasanayagam's verse attempts to accord dignity to voices muted and muffled on account of belonging to a community for which the new nation has no empathy. The paradox of how such heinous acts found social acceptance in a predominantly Buddhist nation has been a matter of academic and social concern. In *Ahimsa Sutra* Arasanayagam reiterates the injunctions to non-violence central to the teachings of the Buddha:

*Ahimsa Sutra*

Do not kill
Practice ahimsa
Do not kill
Leave off hinsawa
Learn loving kindness
Do not kill
Relinquish hatred
….
Do not kill, do not burn
Do not harm, do not destroy

….

You expiate your sins
In the fire's absolution
Your body now the pyre
That burns in public streets
Consumed in flames
The gutters now your burial urn
Scattered in wind your ashes
….

Great fires raged
But the conflagration of hatred was much greater
Close to a burnt out house
A new house rises boulders

And sand and brick pile up
….
These hands build while those
Of others broke so many walls
Hurled bombs and wielded rods and axes

All that we, now displaced, must learn
Is to live again
And so every enemy show forgiveness.

(Arasanayagam, 84:23)

who then, is the "enemy" (ibid)? Arasanayagam's poetry does not take sides or blame either one of the warring ethnicities. Rather, it is the anti-violence stance that is paramount in her texts. Be it the JVP violence of guerilla tactics in the south or the authoritarian state violence or the violence wrought by the LTTE in the north, all forms of violence are condemned in equal measure. For instance, in *His Family*, a visit to her husband's ancestral home in Jaffna prompts a rumination regarding the Tamil-Hindu culture of yester years - steeped in tradition. She compares the past with the present-day culture of violence as spawned by the LTTE on the peninsula:

*His Family*

Bridegrooms of Death
That await the final consummation
There's a fire in the streets
For the agni worshippers
They tread on ash
No sacred yaham's left
For them, garlanded, three times to circumambulate
The bullets chant the Vedas
And the bows of epic heroes
Arc in the curving hand
Of a flung grenade
The sons of this family
Do not ride the chariots to battle
In these new mythologies

(Simms, 1991: 53-54)

In another poem entitled *1958…'71…'77…'81…'83*, Arasanayagam traces the recurring history of ethnic strife on the island leading to the blood-bath of '83. While it is an act of courage to speak out against the violence and to resist not only the fear and xenophobia that civil society on the island was falling prey to but to also voice the

patriarchal agendas of post-independent Sinhala nationalism whereby the women of the Burgher community were constructed as immoral and licentious, is truly brave.

Unlike Arasanayagam's poetry on identity-issues explicating her fraught sense of identity on being categorized as a Burgher and then as a Burgher-Tamil woman, her later poetry, particularly the volume *Redenned Waters Flow Clear*, marks a clear shift in her poetic aesthetic which henceforth veers towards abstract symbolism. The reader is no longer provided with a clear context regarding the act of violence and the politics which has spawned it but rather it is such information that is completely decontextualised. This aesthetic leads to a foregrounding of the unnaturalness of the violence itself and not the causes or legitimacy of it all. Exemplary in this regard is *The Death Carvers*, the most abstract and in this regard perhaps the best citation regarding this new aesthetic to be found in Arasanayagam's later poetry:

> *The Death Carvers*
>
> We talk as if it is another country
> The harsh rock of flesh hacked with hatchets
> The secret men with masks who belong to the bloodnights
> The death carvers
> …
> On the face of the sky a grimace of stars
> The moonlight congeals like fat
> Splattered over the darkening gouts
> On bodies lifted with their wounds
> Vanishing into the forest
> Into night
>
> (Arasanayagam 1991: 62)

This poetic rendition of violence could refer to the performance of the act anytime and anyplace across the spectrum of human history. While this refusal to contextualize or to cite the exact instance of violence or indict the separatists, the nationalists or the state for barbarity unleashed onto civil society is akin to the aesthetic deployed by Gunesekera and Ondaatje regarding their Sri Lankan novels. It has incurred the censure of resident Sri Lankan writers and critics even those otherwise well-disposed towards Arasanayagam's work, such as Niloufer de Mel. Referring to *The Death Carvers*, De Mel states:

> they remain mere voices which are foremost, "strident", "clamouring" and "shattering" as they make their calls to violence, or hooded figures who sneak up into the night and melt away into the landscape…once their ghoulish deeds are done
>
> (De Mel 2001: 182).

It is with Arasanayagam's poetry then that we find a voice genuinely free of ethnic boundary-marking but in the process the violence is conveyed symbolically and abstracted to the point of being completely without context. In Arasanayagam's later poetry, as an act of witnessing even the fatalities are de-emphasized in the face of the faceless violence she describes. The text of her poetry is, as stated by Simms, the site where: "art and experience recreate each other, where agony and dignity meet, meld and generate the poems…. The body of suffering is the body of the poet's writing" (Simms, 84: xi)

In this chapter I have discussed writings by women and the manner in which these texts function as an act of witnessing and documenting the times. In this regard, the *Illiad* too, often reminds its readers of the temporality and ephemeral nature of the human body and the material constructions of this world thereby suggesting that human beings should try and live their lives as honorably as possible so that they will be remembered well. If the human body is but perishable clay as are the cities that men built, as illustrated by the fall of the invincible city of Troy, then perhaps words as recording their deeds can command a longer afterlife. The text of the *Illiad* attests to this notion.

The texts discussed here draw attention to the relentlessness of fate and the impermanence of human life even though they comprise of a wide heterogeneity of voices which include texts by Sinhala and Tamil women, civilian and armed forces personnel, a woman-fighter from the *Illivar* brigade and also the poet Jean Arasanayagam's. The poetry has been contextualized with resistance movement, such as the Mother's Front, on account of the social impact of this movement. While this movement enabled a breaking of the silence often imposed on women regarding their pain and grief, the documenting of this grief through verse enables a recovery of the

self even if it is at odds with the nationalist conceptions of womanhood. Another factor highlighted by the poetry is the manner in which it draws on images of everyday life. In fact, the pain is rendered all the more poignant by pitting it against the diverse facets of human experience which in turn provide a perspective on the war. Depicting normal life, as would have existed in peacetime, such as the *kumkum* and *tali* forsaken by Captain Vinathi in *She: The woman of Tamil Eelam*, or the mother nursing her infant or the motions of village life in Sanmarga's text implies that war constitutes only one aspect of human existence. This is best illustrated by the description of Achilles shield in Book XVIII of the *Illiad* which shows everyday life as equally noble and perhaps even preferable:

> Two cities radiant on the shield appear,
> The image one of peace, and one of war.
> Here sacred pomp and genial feast delight,
> And solemn dance, and hymeneal rite;
> Along the street the new-made brides are led,
> With torches flaming, to the nuptial bed:
> The youthful dancers in a circle bound
> To the soft flute, and cithern's silver sound…
> (https://www.poets.org)

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## TAMIL SEPARATISM: A. SIVANANDAN'S *WHEN MEMORY DIES*, SHYAM SELVADURAI'S NOVELS AND ERNEST MACINTYRE'S *RASANAYAGAM'S LAST RIOT*

> 'A *Sinhalese who speaks Tamil and a Tamil who speaks Sinhala.*
> *Excellent excellent, now we can make a nation*'.
>
> (*When Memory Dies*, 205)

As this thesis has demonstrated, works of literature, among other things, are an invaluable source of documentation for studies on conflict zones. This is mainly because of state-censorship of news related to the conflict. While authors of literary texts have not always escaped prosecution, as the issuing of a *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie for the *Satanic Verses* illustrated, they nonetheless have also managed to circumvent prosecution by evolved techniques such as magic realism by the Latin American writers, which have enabled them to write about the terror of dictatorship as experienced and witnessed. Sri Lankan writers however, and this includes the diaspora, have shown realism to be the preferred mode for literary writing about the conflict.[1] This study has also demonstrated that monolith versions of events such as insurgencies, riots and such like are inevitably constructions of power-discourses. It is on this count that the chapters of this thesis have conveyed the violence in Sri Lanka from varying perspectives – the Sinhalese, diaspora, women and in this chapter, the Tamil. This approach has also enabled a cognisance of the need for cultural diversity and tolerance in the face of nationalisms as they seek to freeze cultural and linguistic practices thereby obfuscating the osmosis whereby cultures partake of one another.

While forwarding this line of inquiry, the texts under consideration in this chapter recalibrate certain foundational myths regarding this conflict. One is the belief that the violence on the island-nation was entirely on account of the Tamil separatist movement

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[1] Apart from the element of fantasy, as used by Gunesekera (considered in chapter II), towards the end of *Heaven's Edge*, realism is the staple mode of narration in his novels. Michael Ondaatje, on the other hand, uses the form of magic realism to convey an atmosphere of violence and fragmentation in *The English Patient*; with *Anil's Ghost* and *Running in the Family* however, often referred to as his Sri Lankan novels, Ondaatje's style is realist, in a post-modernist, fragmented fashion.

and the other is the damaging alignment of Tamil nationalism/separatism/resistance solely with the fortunes of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). However, as the Introduction to this thesis has shown, the Tamil community in Sri Lanka is not a culturally homogeneous body/community, given the cultural apartness of the Colombo and Jaffna Tamils. How then does one validate the idea of a collective Tamil consciousness, its precipitation into armed conflict and the representation of this community by a militant organisation located on the Jaffna peninsula? These perceptions, it cannot be denied, are an off-shoot of the coverage accorded by the international media to the civil wars on the island and of-course, the censorship of news therein. Over the years (the conflict extended well over three decades), the idea that the LTTE was the chosen representative of the Sri Lankan Tamils – the community at the receiving edge of the discourse of Sinhala nationalism – gained credence. The literary texts under consideration here, tell a different story. In this chapter, I will consider works by Ambalavaner Sivanandan Shayam Selvadurai and Ernst Macintyre for their version of the ethnic debacle that happened on the island; a debacle that tore asunder communities that had co-habited for centuries and facilitated the creation of a significant player in this gory history – the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. Since the LTTE has been a defining factor in this struggle, I will begin with a brief history of this organisation on the island. This will include an analysis of its ethno-nationalist moorings, its propagation of terror intended as a means of liberation and the tremendous impact it had on Sri Lankan society.

Ironically, it was the terrorist activities of the LTTE that brought about a dissemination regarding the Tamil separatist movement which had begun with non-violent modes of resistance such as protest marches. Nothing however had prepared one for Narayan Swamy's statement that the LTTE, was one of the: "world's longest running insurgencies", to which he adds that it also bears the distinction of having: "torn apart Sri Lanka for over a quarter century." (Swamy 2010: xvii). While the havoc played for over three decade by war waged by the LTTE against the GoSL cannot be overestimated, it would not be amiss to say that the LTTE determined the fate of the Sri Lankan Tamils in a manner that no economic reform or parliamentary act passed by the GoSL could. The Indian nation-state was the first to outlaw the LTTE as a terrorist group and this followed the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv

Gandhi by an LTTE suicide bomber. In this regard, it also must be mentioned that since the LTTE's preferred method of dealing with disapproval or dissent was elimination,[2] the Prime Minister practically signed his death warrant when he expressed his disapproval of the LTTe's chosen method of functioning at a public speech at Pudukkattui, Tamil Nadu, where he stated:

> The LTTE represents no one but itself. It has not been ready to come into a democratic framework and it has been responsible for the killing of most of the militant Tamils who have been killed and many hundreds, thousands of innocent Tamils….
>
> (Swamy, 2010, lxvii)

Regarding the ethno-national factor, A.J Wilson, an academic then based at the University of Jaffna, protested against classifications of the Tamil resistance as an: "ethno nationalism", or "sub nationalism", as these terms reeked of imperialist understandings whereby the colonised were: "tribalistic, chauvinistic or a reversion to a totem pole mentality"; whereas Wilson felt that the demand for self-determination was more akin to the growth of "Tamil national consciousness". (Wilson 2000:8). This however was during the early stages of the movement. Wilson's theory is in keeping with the explanation perpetuated by the LTTE with reference to their position of armed resistance. Anton Balasingham, the political ideologue of the LTTE and also its spokesperson often emphasising the fact that the movement began as youth resistance:

> Tamil nationalism arose as a historical consequence of Sinhala chauvinist oppression….plunged into the depths of despair of unemployed existence, frustrated without the possibility of higher education, angered by the imposition of an alien language, the Tamil youth realised that the redemption to their plight lay in…. revolutionary armed struggle for the total independence of their nation.
>
> (Balasingham 1983: 16)

Balasingham however omits mention of the stages whereby this youth resistance came to be dominated by the LTTE. Consciousness of a Sri Lankan Tamil identity moreover did not begin with either the LTTE or youth resistance to political decisions

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[2] This includes President Premedasa, Tamil ministers with the Sri Lankan government, academics, such as Ranjini Thirangama from the University of Jaffna, a founder member of the Teachers for Human Rights apart from senior LTTE aides and leaders.

but may be traced to the Tamil-Hindu revivalist movement initiated by Arumuga Navalar in response to the activities of the British and American missionaries.[3] This sense of cultural consciousness took a decisive turn towards identity politics and separatist nationalism mainly as a reaction to the decisions taken by the GoSL under the aegis of Sri Lankan Freedom Party.[4] These decisions, which were exclusionary, may be broadly classified under the Citizenship Act of 1948 which barred the Plantation Tamils from the electoral process; the Official Language Act No 33 of 1956 – often referred to as the "Sinhala Only Act" and the Reservation Policies implemented in the education and employment sectors. These acts exemplified the exclusivist agendas of the government and its electoral policies which were designed to benefit the majority Sinhala community alone. The disenfranchisement of the Tamil community from institutions of higher education and government jobs proved to be a major economic blow as this community, considering the aridity of the peninsula, largely depended on government employment for their upkeep. This disenfranchisement was germane to the demand for a separate Tamil nation and was validated as such by the Tamil political parties attending the annual national convention held at Pannakam near Vaddukoddai on the 14th of May 1976. The Vaddukoddai Resolution charged the Sinhalese government with depriving the Sri Lankan Tamils of their:

> …territory, language, citizenship, eco life, opportunities of employment and education…"[5] and called for the formation of a "Free, Sovereign, Secular, Socialist State of Tamil Eelam".[6],[7]

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3 Refer to Hellmann-Rajanayagam, Dagmar's *Arumuka Navalar: Religious Reformer or National leader of Eelam*. Indian Economic Social history Review 26, pg 235-257.
Protestant missionary activities were particularly pronounced on the Jaffna peninsula and prominent among these was the imparting of an education based on an English curriculum enabled a familiarity with the colonial culture amidst the Tamils community. This opened avenues of employment with the colonial administration leading to the creation of an affluent Tamil community in and around the environs of the capital city of Colombo. After independence and the introduction of democratic governance however, this was the prime cause for Sinhala discontent and provided the impetus for the implementation of policies clearly favouring the Sinhala majority on the island regarding education and government employment.

4 These have been discussed in preceding chapters and also, albeit briefly in the introduction. Also refer to Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam's "The Politics of the Tamil Past" in Jonathan Spencer ed. *Sri Lanka: History and Roots of Conflict* for more information on the political trajectory of the Tamil movement.

5 For details, refer to B. Pfaffenberger's article *The Cultural Dimension of Tamil Separatism in Sri Lanka* in Asia Survey 21 (11): 1145-1157

At this stage however, the demand was for federalism and the autonomy conferred by this mode of governance. The call for self-determination however was answered by a spate of anti-Tamil riots - 1956, '58, and '61 and violent retaliations against the Tamil state representatives posted in different parts of the island. The peninsula was henceforth under siege by the GoSL following an increase in the show of state military in and around Jaffna. In light of this impasse, secession and the establishment of a new nation seemed the only manner by which to achieve self-determination. By 1975, the leading political party in the region, the "Tamil United Front" changed its name to the "Tamil United Liberation Front" (TULF), and the "Tamil New Tigers" (TNT), formed around the seventies renamed themselves to the "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam". Their emblem - the Tiger, was an adaptation of the insignia of the Chola Empire of south India under Raja Raja Chola 1 (985 – 1014 CE) but under the LTTE, it acquired an entirely new set of connotations.

While the LTTE began as a relatively unknown and even obscure group its propensity for violence was clear from the very moment of its inception (the historical trajectory marking the different stages of the LTTE's rise to power, maintaining its status-quo for over three decades and final extermination by the GoSL are well documented by Narain Swamy among others). During the seventies, various political (Tamil) parties appeared on the peninsula, such as the, TELO, PLOT, EPRLF and the EROS. These later, either merged with the LTTE or were decimated by the LTTE. Outright armed struggle however was yet the option, as the manifesto of the TULF at Vaddukoddai shows:

> The Tamil-speaking representatives…while being members of the National Assembly of Ceylon, will also form themselves into the 'National Assembly of Tamil Eelam' which will draft a constitution for the state of Tamil Eelam and thereby establish the independence of Tamil Eelam by bringing that constitution into operation either by peaceful means or by direct action or struggle.
>
> (Wilson 2000:114)

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[6] Prior to the Vaddukoddai Resolution, the Federal Party had lobbied for a unitary state wherein Tamil would be recognised as an official state language and considerable autonomy be granted to Tamil dominated areas.

[7] The Tamil word for Sri Lanka is *Ilankai* and as per the Tamil Sangam: "…ever since the late Mervyn de Silva with his characteristic journalistic flourish called the tiger-led combat struggle against the state as 'Eelam war', the term Eelam has gained an ominous significance to the Sinhala reader". www.sangam.org/tanaki 2nd April 2006.

The resistance was taken to another level by the consolidation of the LTTE, which eventually emerged as the supreme power on the peninsula. Vellupillai Prabhakaran, its head honcho has often been described as a man of few words and a penchant for action: "A school drop out with low intellect but with a passion for and a precision for violence."(Swamy XVII). Swamy's contention is that the LTTE emerged supreme on account of eliminating all rival contenders and parties but the watershed event leading to the transformation of this terrorist guerrilla outfit into a formidable terrorist/militant organisation with a standing army, air-force and well-defined administrative hierarchy and also including an anthem, currency and nation flag was Black July - the anti-Tamil genocide which began in Colombo and spread across the island, on July 1983. As history records, after '83, Tamil youth, both men and women flocked to join the ranks of the LTTE as cadres.

While the LTTE recalibrated relations between the Tamil relations with the Sinhalese and the GoSL, it had a major impact on society on the island. This can be ascertained by the changing ideas regarding death, rather the perception of death as martyrdom, that gained immense credence in Sri Lanka following the importance the LTTe attached to it. Tamils On the completion of their training, LTTE cadres, both men and women, are accorded a *nom de guerre*, and made to swear allegiance to their leader and the cause of Tamil Eelam. Concepts of death and martyrdom were redefined on the peninsula following the dissemination of the LTTE ideology regarding life and death. Cadres, at all times wore a cyanide capsule tied with a black string around their neck signifying the preference of death to surrender to the enemy, the Sinhala army. The battle-lines had clearly been drawn along the lines of ethno-nationalisms. The Black Tigers squad of the LTTE was especially delegated to carry out suicide bombings. Redefining the idea of death, as per the LTTE ideology, death was not: "*that-kolai* (suicide) but *that-kodai* (self-gift) (Wilson 2000:163). Observation of martyr's day and the martyr's graveyard were significant symbols indicating the ideological underpinnings of this movement/organisation. In his Martyr's Day message on November 1995, often broadcast across the nations of the globe, Prabhakaran reiterated the stance for Tamil self-determination but omitted mention of the tactics deployed:

> ….the mass exodus of half a million Tamils proclaims to the world that our people are determined to live as free beings with dignity and prepared to face any form of suffering to be independent rather than subjecting themselves to domination by the aggressor.
>
> (Wilson 2000:165)

Peace negotiations and talks with the LTTE were initiated by the GoSL and by third-party nations such as Norway but unfortunately often fell through. In this regard, the Indian nation too deployed the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to enable an end to the civil war. IPKF intervention resulted in the signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord (1987) and the enactment of the 13th amendment to the Constitution.[8] However, soon after the clearing out of the IPKF troops from the peninsula (1990), the LTTE assumed control over Jaffna establishing a de facto government, levying taxes, issuing loans, development plans and displaying all the trappings of a nation-state such as flag, anthem, currency, literature, national holidays, radio broadcasts. At the same time, disappearances, torture and execution of non-combatant and civilian Tamils became routine as did forced conscription into the ranks of the LTTE.

The LTTE claimed to be the sole representative of the Tamil people and Prabhakaran in his role as *Tha-lai-war* (leader), was literally the face of the LTTE.[9] This is contrary to popular opinion whereby Anton Balasingham, usually seen as the diplomatic face of the LTTE, has been assumed to be its spokesperson. Clarifying this stance to the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, Prabhakaran stated: " 'I do all the thinking and planning in the LTTE …. As I am bad in English, Balasingham articulates my views. He only articulates. He does not influence me.' " (Swamy, 2010: 66). As Narayan Swamy iterates, in this scenario any expression of dissent with the opinion of the leader was viewed as going against the interests of the Tamil people, theirs aims and aspirations. Dissenters were eliminated on account of being traitors to the cause of Tamil Eelam. Public executions of dissenters, on account of their capacity to elicit fear and obedience, were not an unusual spectacle in LTTE

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8 The 13th Amendment was a pact signed between the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi and the Sri Lankan President, J.R Jayawardene. The agreement was that the LTTE would surrender its arms, enter the democratic fray and meanwhile the Tamil dominated areas of the north and east were to be granted greater administrative autonomy by the GoSL.

9 For more on Prabhakaran see, M.R Narayan Swamy's *Inside an Elusive Mind Prabhakaran The First Profile of the World's most Ruthless Guerilla Leader*, Vijitha Yappa Publications, Sri Lanka, 2003.

controlled areas as also were hit-and-run cases and suicide bombings which were carried out with alacrity across the island.[10] Keeping the image of the LTTE intact, however, Prabhakaran till the very end insisted: "We are freedom fighters, not terrorists" (Swamy, 2003:150).

The GoSL meanwhile stationed their army in Jaffna and launched a ruthless and equally terrorising witch-hunt for 'Tamil terrorists'. The burning of the Jaffna bazaar/community centre and the Jaffna Public Library (1981) precipitated the civil war to the point of no return. The LTTe answered with the Eelam Wars launched against the GoSL and the army stationed at the Dutch fortress at Jaffna. With the erosion of trust and the hardening of attitudes, all attempts at peace came to naught; peace talks and ceasefire agreements (1985, 1987, 2001, 2003, 2006) were routinely violated by both the Tigers and the GoSL.

Can the LTTE however, in light of the terror it unleashed on the people of the peninsula including the Tamils be uncritically accepted as the representative voice of the Tamil people? Narain Swamy has documented the anti-LTTE wave on the peninsula towards the last phases of the movement: "it was as if the LTTE had declared war on the Tamil people" (Swamy 2010: xliv). Ideologically, the LTTE too upheld the narrow worldview propagated by the Sinhala ethno-nationalists that the Tamils and Sinhalese are historical enemies and furthermore refused to see the Sri Lankan Tamils as anything other than a people bound by a united collective ethnicity. It was not until 2004 that the faultlines, hitherto denied, amidst the Sri Lankan Tamil community broke through this façade maintained by the LTTE. The 2004 revolt within the ranks of the LTTE was prompted by regional differences; the General Karuna fraction which broke away from the LTTE consisted of cadres from the eastern territories of the peninsula. This splintering showed that regional loyalties

[10] For more on the LTTE see the following: Daya Somasundaram's *Scarred Minds*, New Delhi: Sage, 1998; Rajini Thiranagama, Rajan Hoole, Sritharam and Daya Somasundaram's *Broken Palymrah: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka, An Inside Account*, California: The Sri Lanka Studies Institute, 1990; M.R Narayan Swamy's *From Boys to Guerillas*, Delhi: Konark, 1994; Adele A. Balasingham's *Women Fighter's of Liberation Tigers*. London: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Secretariat, 1993; Tamara Herath's *Women in Terrorism: Case of the LTTE*, New Delhi:Sage, 2012.

could not be effaced under the garb of an ethno-nationalistically inspired unified and undivided Tamil identity.

In March 2009, the GoSL launched an all-out military operation to destroy the LTTE once and for all.[11] President Rajapakse resisted entreaties by Norway and other European countries for a ceasefire between both parties. By the 17th of May 2009, the Sri Lankan army had gained complete control of the LTTE's de facto capital, Kilonichchi and their military bases in the jungles of Mullaitavu and Vavuniya. Velupillai Prabhakaran was killed in armed battle and on the 19th of May 2009, the LTTE surrendered to the GoSL. President Rajapakse, on behalf of the government declared that "terrorism" had been rooted out from the land. (Sri Lanka News, Ministry of Defence Sri Lanka. *Defence.ik*; "Operation Liberation", *The Nation*, 19/05/2009)

Literature, particularly the texts selected for study in this chapter - A. Sivanandan, Shyam Selvadurai and Ernest Thalayasingam Macintyre - add to this oft-reiterated trajectory of physical violence by showing the institutionalisation of violence, on account of the ethnic polarisation caused in this society followed by its subsequent militarization and the effects of the Tamil demand for a new homeland on the lives of men and women for whom the island was the only homeland that knew. Since all of the three mentioned authors migrated from Sri Lankan on account of racial violence, Ambalavaner Sivanandan to England following the race-riots of 1958, Shyam Selvadurai to Canada following the Tamil genocide in Colombo in 1983, and Macintyre to Sydney soon after the '71 insurgency, the defining moment in the narratives is an instance of ethnic violence and its effect on lives otherwise characterised by inter-ethnic unions. With self-rule however, notions of hybridism and cosmopolitanism are being re-evaluated and re-addressed as per the parameters of the new power structures. Vijay, the youngest of Sivanandan's three narrators, is aghast when he, on a visit to Jaffna, hears this discourse:

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[11] It needs to be pointed out that the final decimation of the LTTE followed the 9/11 debacle; the event that led to President Bush's famous declaration of the "War on Terror", and the onset of global terrorisn (*The Guardian*, 21st September, 2001).

> All they would say over and over again, and in nightmarish unison, was that they were a separate people who had, for over five centuries, been mixed up like *anachcharu* (they laughed bleakly at the Sinhala word for pickle) by European colonialists and now wanted to be returned to their pristine separateness in their pristine homelands. And their historical and archaeological findings led them, like their counterparts in the Sinhalese universities, to the conclusion that they had worked for.
>
> (Sivanandan, 1997, 324)

This discourse has been facilitated by events, such as the riots, ’58, ’71, ’83, ’87-’89 and eventually do manage to construct boundaries between communities that had cohabited for centuries. With the authors having experienced this victimisation first-hand or having witnessing it - as was the case with Ernst Macintyre – personal experiences of marginalisation and economic disenfranchisement are often conveyed through the lives of the protagonists even as they continue to explore the (im)possibility of friendships and marriages across the ethnic divide.

Race[12] has been the defining factor in Sivanandan’s work, both fiction and non-fiction. Migration to England following the 1958 race-riots however did not however provide him with the expected panacea from bigotry as he faced racial alienation in equal measure, in England, on account of his Asian origins. This all-encompassing sweep of ethnic boundaries, the stereotypes they give rise to and the victimisation this engenders made Sivanandan decide to devote his life to generating societal awareness regarding racism/ethnicity, particularly their state-structured paradigms. As he states: “the only way I could fight was to write”.[13]

*When Memory Dies* spans three generations of a family’s history; a family with mixed Sinhala and Tamil lineage- as was not unusual in Ceylon. The subsequent

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[12] Sivanandan refers to the term “Race” implying the boundaries it creates between human being which makes it ideologically akin to “Ethnicity”, although he does not use the latter term. As social constructs that are prone to stereotyping and creating divisions between people, definitions of these two terms are often blurred, but by way of example, Caucasians, Hispanic/Latino, Native-American can be referred to as a races and the concept draws more on physical features; ethnicities on the other hand derive more from their local cultures, such as the Sinhalese, Tamil, French, Germans etc. It is possible for a person to partake of multiple ethnicities, depending on the time spent in different cultures. As social constructs, racial and ethnic identities are subject to stereotyping.

[13] (Tamilgenerations.rota.org.uk/ambalavaner-sivanandan). A. Sivanandan is regarded as one of the pre-eminent thinkers of our time regarding institutionalized racism, having experienced the run in the transformations of the island of Ceylon into Sri Lanka. He established the Institute of Race Relations and edits the high impact journal, *Race and Class*.

sea-change in ethnic relations between these two communities is presented through the lives of Sahadevan, Rajan and Vijay, also thereby indicating the linear timeframe of this narrative. The engagement of the text with the idea of history and the writing of the past is indicated at the outset, as the narrator describes the landing of the Portuguese fleet on the shores of the island:

> when the fidalgo Don Laurenco do Almeido, resplendent in gold braid and epaulettes and hat plumed with birds of paradise landed on our shores and broke us from our history….
>
> (Sivanandan, 1997, 5)

while "broke us from our history" (ibid) indicates a distinct pre-colonial past, it also sets the tone for the rest of the narrative. It is the gaze of the colonised that is being trained onto the erstwhile coloniser who in turn is shown as exotic. Clearly then, this is not another re-telling of orientalist historiography but rather, as the quote suggests the prerogative for the writing of history rests with the victors or the emergent power structures. The epical sweep of the first section encompasses wide swats of defining moments in the island's history ranging from the influx of British and American missionaries to the beginnings of the labour movements under colonial rule and the provision of free-education introduced under self-governance. As the text indicates, the old order is changing but then the new does not auger well.

With the change in governance, from imperialism to self-rule, ethnic relations are viewed differently. The unease in the public sphere regarding Tamil hierarchy in governance is indicated through oft-heard statements, such as: "only a tenth of the population….are almost half the administration" (WMD, 202). Analysis such as this, pave the way for acts such as the Language Act which makes Sinhalese as the medium for competitive examination. The economic disenfranchisement of the Tamil community is doubly compounded, on account of the aridity of the peninsula which rendered it uncultivable and also explained the reliance of the Tamil community on education and government employment.

The new nationalism has no place for the earlier syncretism rather its death knell is sealed by the signing of the new language Act. Sivanandan indicates the effects of this act symbolically through the news of the demise of Rajan's mother,

who is described as a person well-versed in both Tamil and Sinhala etiquette: "As my mother's cortege left the house, the prime minister was laying a wreath on the pact" (WMD, 223). Legitimised thus, ethnic nationalism, as the new power discourse, finds expression in waves of anti-Tamil violence enacted across the length and breath of the island. The riots at Polannaruwa to drive out coolie Tamils are documented as spontaneous outbursts by "Sinhala patriots", but rumour traces these "patriots" to be none other than the local hoodlums paid to enact violence. Repeated incidents of ethnic violence lead to an unofficial demographic realignment of territory creating the present state of the island as we know it – the divisive boundaries between the north and the south, almost as if they were two separate nations. Henceforth, the north and east become 'Tamil country' with riot-victims by the trainload being transported to the peninsula. Rumours abound, news is often suppressed or misrepresented and with each community maligning the other, Rajan despairs: "….a fresh batch of rumours brought by each new refugee. I could no longer tell fact from fiction (WMD, 228). This new patriotism breeds hate and death. Fuelling the ethnic fire, propaganda is spewed from the government-controlled radio broadcast, as news reportage of the riots is interrupted with further ethnic instigation:

> Come on you sons and daughters of the Lion Race. Now is our time to wipe out the *Dhemmalas*. We have killed over a thousand *dhemmalas* already and burnt their homes and shops in seven cities and now it's your turn to do something for the nation. they are on the run. Drive them out or kill them but get rid of them. Lanka is for Lankans
>
> (Sivanandan, 1997, 382)

the text records the racial bigotry spawned by the Sinhala Only Act across the social spectrum as Sinhala street hawkers in the busy market place of Pettah accost Tamil policemen with racial slurs such as: "*Mo dhemmalu*" (WMD, 204). It is commonplace for Sinhalese peons to disregard Tamil clerks who by way of appeasement are offered early retirement.

The Tamils on their part prove to be no better. An erudite Tamil poet - a friend of Rajan's father - despite the awareness that Rajan's wife Lali and her son are Sinhalese, refers to them as: "*Cheenepulis*", arrogantly continuing: "they are not civilized. They have no culture. What can you expect from them? Where are their

poets, their Valmikis and Barathis…." (WMD, 205). Bewildered by this turn of events, Rajan is apprehensive about the future:

> It had never happened before, not in 2000 years of history, not like this, the Sinhalese were my friends, I had married one, my son was a Sinhalese…
>
> (Sivanandan, 1997, 228)

The segregation of the races is symbolised through the stress on Rajan and Lali's marriage. In this regard, the violation of Lali by the rioters followed by her murder symbolises the future of ethnic conviviality on the island. Ethnic nationalism demands racial purity and interethnic unions are frowned upon. Ironically, it is Rajan's wife Lali who is mistaken for a Tamil and brutally raped and murdered by the rioters as they fall upon Rajan challenging him to recite the *gatha*:

> '*Namo, Namo gothama chandimaya. Namo namo Sakya nan…nan*…' I couldn't remember the words, '*Bathmindha, devindha, narindha rajang*…' I could not go on. Carolis kicked me in the groin again and I yelled out from the searing pain…
>
> …'Oh Rajan, what have they done to you?' She asked trying to stem the bleeding from my nose…
>
> …'Rajan, Rajan, did you hear that? Rajan? Weasel-faced screamed in triumph. 'A *dhemmala*. What did I tell you, he is a *dhemmala*.'…
>
> …. And one by one they raped her. I lost consciousness.
>
> (Sivanandan, 1997, 234)

While these acts of genocide show the gradual unravelling of civil society on the island, at the same time, the barbarity needs to be justified by harking back to the past which makes imperative the re-writing of history. A new history must be invented; one that justifies the hatred, alienation and apartness spawned by the power structure engendered by the new nationalism. Vijay is appalled on witnessing this complete erase of the island's hybrid past, as he reads the history text books taught by his wife Manel. As prescribed by the state, the history text books proclaim the truth of the apartness of the races and the legitimacy of the Sinhala race above all others, on the island:

> 'The history of Lanka,'" he began to read aloud in slow amazement, "' is the history of the Sinhala race. The Land nourishes the Race, the Race civilizes the Land. Buddhism is the golden thread running through the history of the Race and the Land. Learn to honour the Land, the Race and the Faith.' ….
>
> (Sivanandan, 1997, 308)

In order to validate the above claim, the history of the other races on the island must be erased. The burning of the Jaffna Public Library (1981) indicates this animosity towards any documentation indicating a distinct Sri Lankan Tamil identity formulated on the basis of this community's contribution to the island's economy and culture.[14]

On the Tamil front the story is no different. Similarly constructed stereotypes and myths regarding Sinhala cruelty add to the bigotry and xenophobia. With all attempts at self-determination brought to naught, the Tamil demand for a separate homeland takes a violent turn as organised crime on the peninsula is now performed on the altar of the nation – the imagined Eelam. The text explicates the stages whereby the movement for self-determination developed into outright war. In this regard, the text shows Tamil nationalism as encompassing the LTTE and not the other way around. Beginning as a grass-roots movement, the genuineness of Tamil grievances cannot be denied.

The Tamil movement, in the seventies, is determined by the "Boys" - ideologically driven young men from the peninsula that plot out their guerrilla attacks on Sinhala representatives and institutes, in their makeshift forest hideout.[15] They have been denied university entrance on account of the language Act and with no future hope of securing employment have taken to arms with the hope to change the injustice meted out by this new system.. "The Boys" chosen mode of conducting guerrilla attacks on the Sinhala army is in keeping with the terrain available on the peninsula - the thick palmyra

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[14] The Jaffna Public Library housed over 97,000 books and manuscripts pertaining to Tamils culture and origins on the island. For more information, refer to Nancy Murray's "Sri Lanka: Racism and the Authoritarian State", issue no., *Race and Class* vol.26, 1984.

[15] The final battle of the LTTE against the GoSL was conducted in the jungles of Mullaituvu and Killinochi.

fences, tamarind forests and winding lanes render guerrilla the ideal mode of warfare.

One of the "Boys" is Yogi, the Nadesan's son, a dark, gangly lad of about seventeen who introduces Vijay to Ravi and his other friends at their forest hideout. Vijay soon realises that he is with "The Boys". In sharp contrast to the jaded cynicism of the professors at Jaffna University, the openness, willingness to trust and curiosity about the world makes the idealism of the Boys infectious. These are young lads, eager to enact change as per their vision of society. A barrage of questions is directed at Vijay; concern for the economy, the mode of governance best suited for their country are uppermost on their minds and not the rival historical claims staked by historians of both the Tamils and the Sinhalese:

> Why socialism had failed in the South, why had it collapsed so cravenly before the advance of Sinhala nationalism? How could Vijay help the Tamil cause?
>
> (Sivanandan, 1997, 326).

As Vijay discerns, these are not self-serving individuals driven by greed or power but rather their movement is their way of seeking a solution to the government impasse regarding their future. The genocide however is carried by other methods apart from direct combat. Not content with robbing them of college education and employment opportunities, the government has cut off the southern markets for Jaffna grown chillies and onions. With this economic blow, militarism appeared to be the sole solution.

The text is clearly explicates that the idea of a separate Sri Lankan Tamil consciousness and ethnic identity was nurtured and sharpened on the anvil of the Sinhala nationalism. As Devi, Ravi's mother despairs:

> 'They' had taken their land, their markets, their jobs, their children's education but they were still Tamils – would die Tamils and that 'they' could not take from them.
>
> (Sivanandan, 1997, 332-333)

This sense of a collective Sri Lankan Tamil identity however is bifurcated by regional and cultural differences, as Devi is keenly aware. The Jaffna lads, unlike the Colombo-Tamils, cannot look to western shores for an education nor can they in the manner of the Town-Tamils procure jobs in the Middle-East. Clearly, it is the Jaffna-Tamils who bore the brunt of government polity and so, the movement for Eelam takes root with this lot. The other two categories of Sri Lankan Tamils moreover had but cursory connections with their ancestral villages in Tamil country. The call for *Eelam*, until Black-July, was supported entirely by the Boys from the peninsula.

Vijay senses the pride of the people in their youth. During his stay on the peninsula, the bank at Manipay is robbed. The feat, it is known across the town, has been accomplished by the Boys, and on their bicycles, on account of the government endorsed petrol-embargo. The village, including the elderly, swell with pride at this daring feat. Conflict engenders a completely different set of ethics and morality. The "Boys" and their (mis)deeds are perceived with pride as they restore a modicum of dignity to the battered Sri Lankan Tamil psyche. This communal pride is further ratified following the march of the guerrilla warriors through the town after the Battle of Elephant Pass.[16] The cadres, marching through the town, include young women as well. The text in this regard re-writes the historical belief that women joined the LTTE only after Black-July.

*When Memory Dies* presents this lesser known version of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism; a version that is oft-ignored on account of the attention accorded to its most violent and final phase, LTTE terrorism. The narrative, through Vijay, is deeply critical about this phase and renders explicit the difference between the early and later phases of the movement. This change is evidenced through the change in the psyche of "the Boys". Routine interrogation by the Sinhalese authorities, forced incarceration, physical

[16] The First Battle of Elephant Pass, July 1991, was fought for control of Elephant Pass from the military, as this connected the Wanni mainland with Jaffna. With the second battle in 2000, the LTTE gained complete control over Elephant Pass and retained it till its final defeat by the army in 2009.

torture by the state forces and "disappearances" leads to an escalation of their resistance and distrust. Signs of a society dominated by violence and militarization are visible everywhere, maimed fighters dot the front portals of houses doubling up as beggars and also as spies, as the need be. "The Boys" are now hardened killers, their early enthusiasm replaced with a yearning to extract vengeance and meet state violence with extreme forms of violence: "the terror had begun" (Sivanandan, 377)

> There was so much killing around that Vijay had forgotten why the war was being fought. The Boys themselves had forgotten. The gun, as Nadesan said, had taken over; the means had become the end… (ibid)

With the formation of the LTTE, ideas of resistance are re-defined and the violence taken to another level. The invention of the "cyanide capsule" and the suicide bombers are a clear indication of the means used by this terrorist outfit. The peninsula is inundated with grief, but grief in such circumstances, when death, of their younger generation is all pervasive is transformed and presented as enabling, death is now martyrdom, the utmost honour attainable in human life and to be enshrined forever in communal memory. Vijay, as the observer/witness records this subversion thus:

> …Vijay had never understood the suicide pill. It was such a symbol of waste, of no-hope, of death as a way of life. It had such a finality about it. Maybe it was all right at the beginning when it symbolised a heroic refusal to inform, at least it implied choice; but now that it has been raised to dogma, belief, ideology, it symbolised the end of choice. And the end of choice was the beginning of terror.
>
> (Sivanandan, 403)

this new-found version of existential reality is all the more painful on account of past memories of co-habitation when the rhythms of everyday life in the northern village of Sandipilay – a place known as much for its bareness as for the generosity of its people – extended across the island of Ceylon/Serendip. The inter-ethnic conviviality that existed therein made ethnic-unions to be more a matter of choice. The narrator's grandfather Sahadevan, a clerk in the imperial office in Colombo had lived with a Sinhalese family in an atmosphere of familial warmth and hospitality. The

history and contribution of the Tamil community on the island is recorded thus:

> The government service was full of them, men who had left their wives and children back in some remote village in the north….opening up roads and railways and post offices
>
> (Sivanandan, 19)

But it is for similar reasons that the community is pilloried after independence. The words of the Sinhalese minister pronounce the verdict:

> ….but the Tamils, it had to be said (and Banda was saying it, he laughed), had had it too good for too long. Now it was the time of the Sinhalese, and unless their party the United National Party, did something about it, Banda's Sri Lanka Freedom Party was going to get into power.
>
> (Sivanandan, 177).

The new nationalism/patriotism seeks to root out memories of cultural hybridity and co-existence on the island. The strength of the text is the manner in which it explains this change, for to fight or even resist racism one has to first understand its imbrications into the social fabric. Para, Sahadevan, Lal, Rajan and his son Vijay cherish and seek to protect the inclusive past of their society but it is a losing battle. Apart from the communal history gaining predominance, the text draws attention to these silenced histories, apart from the communal histories of the Tamils or the Sinhalese, there is the underprivileged world of the Coolie Tamils and their contribution to the island's economy. *When Memory Dies* also traces the history of Sri Lanka through the unsung history of its working class, the proletarian. Old man Pandayan, in Jaffna is a farmer and so is Vijay's foster-grandfather Pathirana in Anuradhapura while SW is a selfless worker for the trade union movement and the upright Para, a railway worker. Then there are the intelligentia, Sahadevan, Lal and Tissa succeeded by a second generation, Dhanapala, Sarath and Vijay of the third. All spring from the working class not the elite. For Vijay it is imperative to:

> …recover for his people the history they had lost? Put them back on course, help them change the history inflicted on them? (Sivanandan, 291)

It is this lost world that is encapsulated in Rajan's letter from England to his foster son Vijay expressing the tragedy of the tectonic shift between the Sri Lankan past and present:

> 'I thought I lived in a world where there was no communal hatred or conflict, where we didn't kill each other just because we spoke different languages. It is not even that we had so much in common, Sinhalese and Tamils, Buddhists and Hindus, or that we derived from the same racial branch of the tree of man. We were one people. We sang each other's songs as our own, ate each other's food, talked each other's talk, worshipped each other's Gods. Even when we lived our particular lives, they always touched on those around us, and theirs on ours.
> …'But now this, this rewriting of history, for the sake of power, greed…'
>
> (Sivanandan, 282-3)

The infusion of racism onto society as typified by the island of Ceylon was decried by a handful of individuals, James Goonewardene being one of them. Goonewardene, in his stridently vociferous style declared racism as the "dynamite" that would blow asunder the social fabric of this society:

> There's a bit of dynamite we've not yet used. We first prepare the ground, and we then throw it in….It's being used in other countries…. just think what starting a race struggle could do – throw the dynamite into the rotten, corrupt machinery – just a little bit is all you need. … the elections have to come first – a sweeping victory for the capitalist.
>
> (Goonewardene,1985,236)

*When Memory Dies* was published in 1997 – a time when the island was fast spiralling into a vortex of unrelenting violence. At first, Sivanandan ended *When Memory Dies* text on the fatalistic note of the hero Vijay's death and his fiancé Meena, a Coolie Tamil's prophetic curse on the land and its people: "You have killed the only decent thing left in this land. We'll never be whole again.'" (*When Memory Dies*, 411). While this ending proved prophetically true, as with the army action of 2009, Tamil resistance and even Tamil presence on the island was rendered into varying shades of memory, it was changed to one of optimism. Yogi, signifying the syncretism upheld by Vijay throughout the text, negates the further use of violence to make a new beginning:

> Ravi reached for his pistol. Yogi knocked it out of his hand. 'That's enough,' he said. 'I'm taking over.'
>
> (Sivanandan, 411)

This re-working of the pessimistic endings of political novels became a common feature with texts written around this time. Rajiva Wijesinha too changed the ending of his novel, *Acts of Faith*, written around the same time, wherein he at first ends the text with a vision of the future as a time of peace while Goonewardene ended *An Asian Gambit* not by prophesying dystopic or for that matter utopian dreams of peace and togetherness but with his protagonist Deva retreating into a haven of reclusion which he makes clear is not a symbolic death: "You have Aruni and your work" (*An Asian Gambit*, 240). In this regard, *When Memory Dies* begins with the hope of healing; healing for the island ridden with the effects of its violent conflicts. Written nearly two decades after Sivanandan migrated to England, the text opens with the narrator's memory of rain: "My memory begins, as always, with the rain" (*When Memory Dies*, 1). An oft-used metaphor for spiritual healing, "rain" is what is needed on account of the historical disjunction brought about by violence. The narrative ends with the rain: "My roots need rain", but when the people have had their roots/history taken from them, then: "what use is the rain?" (Sivanandan, 231)

Engagement with the island's history and violent post-independent trajectory has been a staple feature of Shyam Selvadurai's oeuvre. It is the homeward gaze and pull of the land of his birth that determines Selvadurai, a naturalised Canadian citizen's recurrent choice of Sri Lanka for his fictive endeavours. Selvadurai was eighteen when the family migrated to Canada, following the 1983 anti-Tamil riots in Colombo. Sri Lanka however, has continued to be a dominant presence, as is illustrated through Selvadurai's narratives. As he states:

> …I find that the homewards pull inhabits my creative mind that it is the capturing of the world left behind that captures my imagination. Yet without isolation from that world, without the act of migration, I wonder if *Funny Boy* would ever have been written.[17]

The narrative structure of *Funny Boy* is woven around the anti-Tamil riots of '83. This shameful event in the history of the island-nation is presented through the perspective of the upper-class, cosmopolitan and English-educated world of the Colombo-Tamils – the world which for Selvadurai symbolised Sri Lanka and which continued to inhabit the recesses of his memory long after it had shut its doors to him.

[17] Refer to the Selvadurai home page.

The events of Black-July, which were the turning point in Selvadurai's life, are narrated through the perspective of a seven year old Colombo-Tamil lad, Arjie who, as characteristic of the world he inhabits, is blissfully unaware of the politics of separatism or ethnicity even as these creep closer to lives, such as Arjie's, insulated by class-privilege and ancestral wealth.

The movement for Tamil self determination, as history records and as Sivanandan shows in *When Memory Dies*, was spear-headed by the Jaffna boys. The Colombo-Tamils on account of the cosmopolitanism of their life in Colombo were largely ignorant of the traumatic reality of the conflict zone up-north or for that matter the increasing alienation experienced by the Tamil community on the island. Marginalisation on account of being-Tamil is not an experience they have yet encountered and their engagement with ethnicity when not limited to a census figure is acquired from news reportage, and this, as discussed in this thesis, is often a misnomer. Ethnicity is a practically non-existent issue in Arjie's life as is also any awareness regarding the fragility of this upper-crust world. As Arjie recounts, while his grandparent's *Ammachi* and *Appachi* were Tamil, his mother is a Sinhalese, as is also Janki the maid – an important figure in the lives of the children. Likewise, most of friends of the family are Sinhalese. Arjie attends a school where the medium of instruction is English and students are not segregated into Tamil and Sinhala class rooms. The Language Act of 1956 does not seem highly relevant to these lives apart from occasional journalist reportage. The cosmopolitanism of the family is time and again emphasised as is the fact that apart from their family-name, Chelvaratnam, nothing aligns them with a distinct Tamil culture. The rites of passage in this regard however involve a painful cognisance of the changing political reality of Sri Lanka.

While ethnicity has been an inconsequential term in upper class Colombo society, the '83 riots shattered this conviviality bringing it face to face with its insulation. Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy* concludes with the narrator Arjie uncertain about his future as a migrant in Canada although made painfully aware that he can no continue to consider the island and its institutionalised racism, as home. Placing his destiny in the complex vicissitudes of foreign lands and cultures, the uncertainty of his future as an unwanted refuge, in a foreign land appals him:

> Today, I received my passport. As I looked at it, I finally realised that we were finally leaving Sri Lanka, that in two days we will be in a strange country. I thought about how when we were young, Diggy, Sonali, and I would sometimes imagine what foreign countries were like…. I don't think that we ever imagined we would go abroad under these circumstances, as penniless refugees. We are only allowed five hundred pounds each. The thought of being poor scares me.
> …Today I watched a beggar woman running from car to car at the traffic lights, her hand held out, and I wondered if this would be our plight in Canada.
>
> (Selvadurai, 1994, 308-9)

The text engages with the idea of boundaries at multiple levels. As a category, the Colombo-Tamil is indicative more of a class rather than an ethnic boundary. This factor had been iterated by Lali's brother, Lal, as he unmasked the opportunism concealed by ethnic politics: "you are confusing race and class, like your whole bloody party, so that you can keep your class while shouting race" (*When Memory Dies*, 202). With Black-July however, this changed and the message is clear - there was no room for Tamils in the new nation, irrespective of class. Another stringently drawn boundary is that of gender and as Arjie learns, this is closely bound with codes of morality and family honour. Instinctively drawn to the world of women, it is this boundary that Arjie has encountered early in life.

Gender and ethnicity in this regard are the defining parameters of Selvadurai's work, ranging from his first novel *Funny Boy* (1994) – a coming-of-age novel, to *Cinnamon Garden* (1998 and *Hungry Ghosts* (2013) – a novel that takes into account his immigrant experience. Each of these works shows Selvadurai's deep engagement, at various levels, with the land of his birth and its xenophobic post-independent history. Migration to Canada is significant, as it illustrated beyond doubt, the cultural relativity of constructions, ethnic and gender which in Sri Lanka were being treated as a matter of life or death.

While "Black July" is marked as a turning point in the history of Sinhala-Tamil relations on the island, race riots were not an unprecedented occurrence. It is, as the young Arjie learns, the reason for *Ammachi's* steadfast and unwavering adherence to her Tamilness and the reason for her steadfast refusal to relent to Radha's marriage to the Sinhalese boy, Anil. Arjie had hitherto shrugged off

Ammachi's attitude as inexplicable adult behaviour until Janaki informs him about the death of Ammachi's father at the hands of a Sinhala mob hired to attack the Tamils protesting against the imposition of Sinhala, even in Tamil dominated areas, following the "Sinhala Only" Language Act. The afterlife of this act of violence disjunction is evidenced in the formidable presence of great-grandfather's portrait hanging in the hallway and the hushed whispers of the adults hovering around:

> As I walked down the corridor, I was suddenly brought up short by the photograph of my great-grandfather on the wall. I stared at it for a moment and then the gravity of the looming crisis sank in. I shivered involuntarily as I recalled what my father had said about the fights between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in the fifties and how many Tamils had been killed. Was it happening all over again? Would we suffer a similar fate to that of my great-grandfather.
>
> (Selvadurai, 1994, 85)

"Black July" however, is different. It is not another instance of sporadic racial violence but as *Funny Boy* demonstrates it is the culmination of the pogrom intended to cleanse the country of Tamils or as A. Sivanandan in *When Memory Dies* showed, to ghettoise them into Jaffna. As Narayan Swamy notes, it was after July '83 that Tamil youth, men and women included, joined the LTTE in large numbers (the sole outlet for militancy) as a move towards seeking justice and redressing the humiliation meted out to them.[18] This act of ethnic chauvinism however was, as Kumari Jayawardene points out, backed by an economic agenda:

> …the Sinhala bourgeoisie found its expansion constrained in various areas….as they had to vie with Burghers and Tamils for state and private employment. Workers at their own level found themselves confronted with migrant workers from Kerala and Tamil Nadu as well as workers of indigenous minority groups.
>
> (Jayawardene, 2001, 134)

while Jayawardene is speaking about the economic scenario on the island following independence, Tamil ascendancy had set in during the colonial period itself. On account of the stress on missionary education on the peninsula, the Tamils were better versed in the language and culture of the coloniser. This ensured a larger number of Tamils in administrative posts and also facilitated the rise of a section of people who

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[18] Refer to Narayan Swamy, as cited in Foot Note 9.

came to be called the Colombo- Tamil. It is significant that the family bungalow of the Chelvaratnam family dates from the colonial era and is therefore redolent as much of colonial power as it is of also of colonial mimicry - both of which are clearly redundant as far as the new nationalism is concerned. Symbolically, the final reduction of the house and its owners, to ashes indicates the beginning of a new phase of history as much as it does the pogrom of ethnic cleansing.

The sprawling colonial bungalow presided over by Ammachi, and the idyllic world it engenders is symbolic of a bygone era. The fragility of this world is deftly illustrated through a single sentence: "Then one evening, while Amma was at a party, we heard on the radio that trouble had broken out in Jaffna." (FB, 118). For Arjie and his family, Tamil separatism, is a term that is synonymous with the LTTE and its terrorist leanings. It is the blatant intrusion of ethnic nationalism into this world of urbane cosmopolitanism that forms the crux of the *Funny Boy* narrative as it maps the descent of the Chelvaratnam family into brutally unremitting racial hatred and violence. The text moves from the idyllic cadences of childhood, explicated in the "Spend-The-Days" section to gender and ethnic dilemmas in the section entitled "Pigs Can't Fly" leading to the harrowing reality depicted in the epilogue – "Riot Journal".

Riots however are not the sole means of carrying out ethnic cleansing, as the Chelvaratnam family gradually realises. *Funny Boy* shows the dissemination of racial hatred within a people who have co-habited for centuries. Intolerance for the Tamil community is indicated at first through small gestures, such as the avoidance of the use of Tamil in public places by the Tamils themselves or the hate-mail that appears periodically in Mr Chelvaratnam's office and which he chooses to ignore: "These days, every Tamil is a Tiger until proven otherwise" (FB, 278). The Chelvaratnam family is convinced that that once the government disarms/defeats the LTTE and brings the situation in Jaffna under control, matters will improve. They have no empathy with the separatist cause or emotive connection with the imaginary Tamil homeland, Eelam. Being-Tamil, has a completely different set of meanings for the Chelvaratnam family, as the text clearly illustrates. This is exemplified by their refusal to acknowledge government atrocities in Jaffna. Nalini, Arjie's mother is quick to dismiss this is idle rumour spread by those with a penchant for spectacle.

This denial however is short-lived. With the arrival of Daryl, a Sri Lankan Burgher, the reader is reminded that this is not the first act of ethnic cleansing. The exodus of the Burgher community, following 1956, was in effect a bloodless cleansing. Nalini however introduces Daryl, a white-skinned foreigner to Arjie and his siblings as: "a Sri Lankan, just like us", thereby also revealing the composite nature of the races and ethnicities as had existed on the island (Selvadurai, 1994, 104).

Daryl's return to the island after a hiatus of fifteen years is to investigate the human rights violations in the form of disappearances and extra-judicial killings reported to be transpiring on the Jaffna peninsula. These however, as Nalini affirms are completely absent from the national news coverage and in Colombo circles are dismissed as hearsay. Daryl's eventual disappearance and the discovery of his tortured body, actions clearly in connivance of the bodies of law and the judiciary leave Nalini in little doubt regarding the future course of events. The road is being paved for Black-July. The use of electoral list to identify Tamil homes and businesses in Colombo for this act of genocide is narrated by the text as such. It is as if the events are eternally etched in Arjie's memory:

> 6:00 A.M. Two hours ago the phone rang in the hall, waking us all….all the Tamil houses near the Kanaththa Cemetery had been burnt….Appa explained that it was because of the thirteen soldiers who were killed by the Tigers two days ago. The funeral was held last night and the mob at the cemetery went on a rampage….
>
> The radio broadcasts were beginning again. We have listened to the broadcasts at 6.00, 7.30, and 8.45, but there is still no mention of the trouble….
>
> 1:00 P.M the government has now declared curfew. Anyone caught on the road without a curfew pass will be shot on sight.
>
> ….3:00 P.M. The announcement of the curfew has not stopped the riots, and in fact the fighting has got worse…
>
> …. The police and the army just stood by, watching, and some of them even cheered the mobs and joined in the looting and burning…
>
> …. There was a car in the middle of the road with a family inside it. The car was surrounded by thugs….and pouring the petrol on the car….the family in the car was simply staring out at the thugs as if they didn't realise what was going on. Now one of the thugs began to ask around for a match.
>
> (Selvadurai, 1994, 282-85)

The news that Ammachi and Appachi have been burnt alive is compounded by Sena uncle, Arjie's father's Sinhala business partner's offer to watch over their bodies protecting them from marauding street dogs. He adds that he and Chitra, hi wife, have been receiving threatening phone calls from the '"patriots"', abusing him as "traitor" for "sheltering Tamils" (FB, 292-3).

The text draws attention to the manner in which this mode of racial alienation gradually became normative for society in Colombo. As Arjie realises, the politically well-connected Mr Lokubandara - the vice-principal of the English school he attends, a man with a benign and even benevolent exterior, is actually a '"snake in the grass"', who seeks to alter the school along lines of Buddhist teachings and only to be attended by Sinhala Buddhist students (FB, 214). The episodes described prior to "Black July", such as the Radha and Anil episode in the section entitled "Radha Aunty" demonstrates the manner in which a fundamentalist atmosphere can change even a person as liberal and open-minded as Radha. Ethnic boundaries in the new nation mean business, as she is made to realise by the mob attacking the train from Jaffna. Assaulted on account of being a Tamil: "by two men, one carrying a stick the other a belt…", Radha having borne the brunt of a racial attack can no longer be immune to the communal politics surrounding her (FB, 87). She now begins to perceive Anil - her beau – as a Sinhalese and a part of the "other" community.

The text however is not parochially Tamil but rather presents the myopia displayed by both sides. In the section entitled "Small Choices", it is the LTTE authoritarianism and oppression that is singled out for attention. Jegan, a young lad from Jaffna, moves to Colombo seeking respite from LTTE terror. A former LTTE cadre, Jegan takes a stand against the Tigers, exposing the brutality that exists within the organisation: "you cannot question anything they do. Recently they killed a social worker because he disagreed with their opinions" (Selvadurai, 176). Through Jegan, the narrative draws on an important issue – the rehabilitation of former LTTE cadres. In this regard, the novel presents a bleak picture as Jegan is hounded out of the workplace by the Sinhala workers and accused of being a Tamil-traitor by the Tigers, who are quick to track him down to Colombo. Finally, he is forced to return to Jaffna, a choice that is akin to the signing of a death warrant. *Funny Boy* shows how authoritarianisms and fundamentalisms erode and destroy lives.

With his second novel *Cinnamon Gardens*, Selvadurai delves into the historical past looking for answers or even reasons for the carnage of July '83. With a title that refers to the colonial past Selvadurai remarked about the novel:

> I think of *Cinnamon Garden's* not as a historical novel, but more as a metaphor for the present. A novel that in fact looks to the future.[19]

The text harks back to polemics of government policy going as far back as the reforms initiated by the Donoughmore Commission to show the early etchings of the ethnic divide and intolerance on the island. While the title refers to an elite Colombo suburb, it is reminiscent of the fragrant lure of cinnamon and the seduction this held for the colonisers – one of the prime reasons for the multiple colonisations of the island.

It is in suburb of Cinnamon Gardens that the Mudaliyar's mansion, the "Brighton Pavilions" is located. This Sri Lankan mansion is replete with signs and signifiers of an English way of life - Steinway pianos, Waterford crystal and so forth but what is literally stifling is the unshakeable dogmatism of the Mudaliyar's ideas and his unflinching imposition of what he considers 'authentic' Tamil-Hindu traditions, on his family. As exemplified from a book he has penned on the subject, entitled "The Splendours of the Glorious Tamil Tradition", the narrative illustrates the chauvinistic stranglehold of such ideas and the divisive and communal overtones they encompass. For the Mudaliyar, tradition is all the more sacred as it entails unquestioned obedience to the patriarchal authority he metes out.

*Cinnamon Gardens* is set during the final years of the colonial period. This time-frame enables Selvadurai to re-address the belief that the concepts of tolerance and liberal-humanism were brought/taught to the colonial subjects by the imperialists. As Mr Jayaweera, in the mission school draws Annulakshmi, the Mudiliya's neice's attention to the marginalised lives of the Sinhalese villagers he also comments as to how the British imperiously clubbed as superstitious everything about the indigenous culture that was incomprehensible to the English imagination. Annalukshmi is further disillusioned when she realises the deep-rooted prejudice against non-Christians

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[19] Shyam Selvadurai, Home Page

masked by her mentor Mrs Lawton, despite her otherwise rather liberal and non-superstitious attitude.

Set in the nineteen thirties, it is the events around the Donoughmore Commission that form the crux of this narrative particularly the manner in which the negotiations regarding the transfer of power to the neo-colonial elite, such as the Mudaliyar, were conducted.[20] The idea of focusing around this act of governance is to trace the development of the ethnic faultline way before self-governance. This is also the time when the power struggle between the Ceylon Tamil Association and the Ceylon National Congress was first made manifest, as the text states, as also were the Labour movements and the raging debate on the island regarding the introduction of universal Adult Suffrage.

These monumental acts determining the future course of governance on the island are narrated through the impact they have on the lives of ordinary folk such as, the spirited Analukshmi (daughter of the Mudaliyar's widowed sister) and Balendran (his son, a homosexual and as per the Mudaliyar, a deviant). Through the imperious figure of the Mudaliyar, we get a fair idea what Anil, Radha's beau's father in *Funny Boy* had implied when he had curtly admonished the naïve Radha regarding the unbearable arrogance of the upper-class Tamils, a trait inculcated on account of being the race favoured by the erstwhile colonisers: '"Be careful. We Sinhalese are losing patience with you Tamils and your arrogance"' (*Funny Boy*, 65). It was this intolerance, which Kumari Jayawardene has also identified as a sense of economic disenfranchisement that eventually develop into ethnic fault lines which would sunder the nation in the decades to follow.

As a spokesperson for his community, with the gesture of the Mudaliyar throwing in his lot with the Ceylon Tamil Association, it is clear that henceforth, politics and part formation will be determined by ethnicity and not ideology. The

[20] This committee was commissioned by the British towards the creation of the Donoughmore Constitution (1921-47). This constitution was formulated keeping in mind the protection of Tamil interests on the island and was marked with a strong Tamil representation, clearly out of proportion with the population of the country which approximately was, 12% Ceylonese Tamils, 12% Indian Tamils (coolies), 65% Sinhalese and 3% Moors. The Donoughmore Constitution was later replaced by the Soulbury Constitution. For more information see J.Russel *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution*, Tissa Prakasakayo, Colombo, 1982.

Mudaliyar's words to his son Balendran express the underlying fear of the Tamil community on the island in the wake of the democratisation to follow: "…otherwise we will replace a British Raj with a Sinhala Raj and then we Tamils will be doomed". (Selvadurai, 1998, 30). The parochialism of this stance however meant drawing exclusivist boundaries and for all purposes, it would appear, between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. What however is actually being protected are the economic interests of the upper classes as the majoritarian Sinhala Congress party declared itself to be in favour of a centralised form of governance as opposed to the federated system demanded by the Tamils. Yet both parties are unanimous concerning the opposition they put up with regard to the introduction of universal adult franchise as proposed by the dignitaries of the Donoughmore Commission.

As a member of the Legislative council, the Mudaliyar speaks not on behalf of ethnicity as he expounds: "it would put the vote in the hands of the servants in our kitchen, labourers, the beggars on the street…it would lead to mob rule" (Selvadurai, 1998, 70). Another member of the council adds to this by pointing out the latent fear of sharing power with the other caste's and class divisions within this society: "…upcountry Sinhalese verses low-country Sinhalese, Karva caste versus Goyigama caste, Malays, Christians, Tamils, Hindus, Buddhists and so on and so on" (Selvadurai, 68). Clearly, in the scramble for power, the space for plurality is fast disappearing.

With universal adult franchise ushering in the system of one person, one vote; the neo-colonial elite is all the more intent upon securing their vote bank and the easiest means of accomplishing this is by rallying up ethnic sentiments. There is no talk of a building a unified, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic nation, as the Ceylon they had hitherto cherished. Balendran, the Mudaliyar's son, aware of discrimination and marginalisation on account of his sexual difference can foresee the future of the parochial politics at work. About the future of the island, he says: "…already is in a thousand pieces…like an Arabian mosaic. Take out one tile and you might ruin the entire design" (CG, 69).

This ethnic revivalist tendency regarding communal and ethnic origins spelt the death knell for the cultural syncretism as it had existed on the island of Ceylon. The future, post-independent nation of Sri Lanka would strive to restrict this hybrid and pluralistic mode to co-existence to the annals of an imperial history. The past would be re-written to prove the Sinhala Buddhist antecedents to the land and narratives from the ancient Sinhala epic the *Mahavamasa* would be drawn upon to prove the truth of the discourse that the Tamils were barbaric conquerors defiling the purity of this land meant for the practice of Sinhala Buddhism. Patriotism, within this discourse, would mean, protecting the Sinhala race from the defilement of the past, to which the colonial history of the island had borne witness, and striving to return it, with violence if necessary, to a state of pristine ethnic purity. This discourse of patriotism equated with cultural authenticity and ethnic purity would effectively blanket the crass need for maintaining the power balance within democratic politics.

The future struggle for power on the island would be between these two ideologies – the one seeking to affirm a Sinhala Buddhist nation and the other harking back to a Sri Lankan Tamil heritage; and both sought self-legitimisation, through terror and violence, enacted either through ethnic cleansing or ethnic separatism, both of which meant a denial of the multi-ethnic culture of the island. With *Cinnamon Gardens*, Selvadurai traces the "ethnic conflict" to its very inception - in constitutional polity.

Unlike *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*, written within a span of three years, Selvadurai's third novel *The Hungry Ghosts* took thirteen years in the making. In many ways the novel is a sequel to *Funny Boy* which ended with Arjie's apprehension regarding his future in Canada. With *The Hungry Ghosts* Selvadurai's gaze turns once again to his estranged homeland and its beleaguered history, the trajectory of which began with depictions of a serene childhood idyllic:

> …those 'spend the days', the remembered innocence of childhood are now coloured in the hues of a twilight sky. It was a picture made even more sentimental by the loss of all that was associated with them. By all of us having to leave Sri Lanka years later and forge a new home for ourselves in Canada.
>
> (Selvadurai,1994,5)

and ends with the creation through violence, of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora.

As is typical of Selvadurai's narratives, this too involves a family of mixed Sinhala and Tamil lineage who also are inhabitants of the "Cinnamon Gardens" world. Selvadurai is once again within a milieu that he was familiar with but it is the shifting time-frame of the narratives that shows the manner in which violence has gnawed on all that was good in this society. With *The Hungry Ghosts*, violence has become so commonplace that it is now a normative state of existence. Narrated through the perspective of Shivan Rasiah, abjection is the dominant feeling explicated by this narrative: Shivan's abjection on account of his homosexuality, the family's realisation that the new power-elite intends to expunge them from their homeland and then the abjection faced by the asylum seekers in the new land, Canada. Character's, such as the matriarch Daya, Shivan's grandmother and Chandralal, her henchman who, by the end of the novel is a politician of mettle, are modelled along lines of predominant political figures. The text literally darts between the timeframes of Shivan's memories obfuscating thereby any attempts at linearity. Shivan's mixed Tamil and Sinhala parentage places him at the cusp of the new discourse pouting racial purity and decrying hybridity. As in *Funny Boy* and *Cinnamon Gardens*, Selvadurai shows the prejudice and intolerance underlining attitudes of ethnic chauvinism in a predominantly homophobic society.

The year is 1988 and violence on the island has escalated to unspeakable degrees. The effects of the ethnic-conflict are indicated not just by the colossal destruction of life and property but the quantum of hatred generated on account of this discourse of otherness and difference and the manner in which it pits humanity, one against the other. The Indian Peace Keeping Force is battling the LTTE up north following their violation of the ceasefire agreement and the JVP too has re-entered the fray with deadlier forms of violence and guerrilla attacks which render them even more lethal and invincible. The party is referred to as: "the Government of the Night or the Little Government"; after having staged (failed) coups and assassination attempts on party heads such as the Prime Minister and President, the JVP was responsible for the murder of Vijaya Kumaratunga, "because he was sympathetic to the Tamils" (*The Hungry Ghosts*, 139). The Rasiah family however had managed to secure migration to

Canada following the ’83 bloodbath and their awareness of these crimes against humanity accrue from Canadian news coverage and intermittent phone calls made to the yet surviving matriarch, Daya. Despite the spatial and cultural distance afforded by their new life in Canada, it is a “Cinnamon Garden’s” perspective that Shivan’s mother is able to offer when asked by Shivan about the first JVP insurrection of 1970:

> “I suppose you are too young to remember the JVP rebellion in the early 1970s. Thank God it failed, otherwise all of us Cinnamon Garden types would have been murdered and you children sent to labour camps for re-education”
>
> ….Shivan, they are murdering people all the time in the south. When they call for a work stoppage no one dares to go out. Between them and the Tigers, not to mention the Indians, you will have to deal with curfews, blackouts and bombs and God only knows what else.”
>
> (Selvadurai,2013,139)

Violence however, is not just of a physical nature, nor is it restricted to the battlefield up-north, the guerrilla attacks of the JVP or the intermittent stabbing and random killings of Tamils on the island but as Shivan, on his visit to Sri Lanka witnesses, hatred and xenophobia have become a palpable part of daily existence here. The past, is not the past, it is very much a part of the present as the graffiti sprayed on the walls of *Wellawatte*, (Tamil ghetto) in Colombo, reminding the community (in Sinhalese) that they are: “Tamil pariahs,” “Tamil dogs,” “Rape a Tamil woman for Lanka” (Sivanandan, 2013, 159).

If the matriarch Daya has never forgiven her daughter for marrying a Tamil, as a homosexual, Sivan, Daya’s grandson and heir has taken this act of transgression a step further. The blame for Sivan’s homosexuality however, as the revered discourse of ethnic purity decries, lies with his partner, Mili Jayasinghe, who is of Burgher lineage. The association of hybridity with corruption and the Burgher race is needed to construct a pure, unsullied and unalloyed Sinhalese culture. The policing of sexual choices therefore, are a matter of imminent concern for the purity intended for the new Sinhala-Buddhist society. Tudor Jayasinghe, Mili’s father is forced to realise this as he is made to abandon Mili’s mother and take-on a Sinhalese mistress by the guardians of culture and purity. Clearly even desire must be conditioned by discourse. It is the same discourse of purity that ratifies the murder of Mili by Chandralal’s

henchmen, as a putting an end to the "corruption" wrought by hybridity and the Burghers.

With *Hungry Ghosts* Sevladurai addresses the paradoxes and contradictions of a society which is by now as firmly entrenched in violence as it is in Sinhala Buddhism. This paradox is exemplified by the subjectivity of Shivan's maternal grandmother, Daya, a self-made, matriarch who spouts Buddhist wisdom but feels no compassion, nor does she hesitate to augment the suffering of fellow human being if it means achieving her ends. The eviction of the recently widowed Siriyawathy and her children from her Pettah property on account of non-payment of dues is promptly handed over to Chandralal. The matriarch takes possession thus:

> When we arrived at the Pettah property, Chandralal was waiting astride his scooter, back erect, arms extended to clutch the handlebars as if he were riding a horse. Clustered around him were three men in sarongs, their naked upper bodies brawny and matted with hair, their eyes drug-reddened….
> ….Furniture was packed on one end of the verandah, the cracked open arms and legs revealing the whiteness of the wood under the dark stain….
> ….the house was bare, yet there were the remnants of the life that had been lived here….i noticed a few broken toys that had belonged to the son, a woman's comb lying on the bathroom sink, its middle teeth missing. Later I saw on the living room floor the shattered photograph of a man who must have been Siriyawathy's dead husband judging from the faded garland of flowers around the frame.
> My grandmother stepped over the photograph as if she had not even noticed it….
>
> (Selvadurai,2013,11)

At the root of Daya's heartlessness however, as the text makes clear, are the shaming techniques of patriarchal attitudes as encountered by the once young and vulnerable Daya.

Speaking of the long-running civil war on the island and how it figures in his novel, Selvadurai iterated: "I never expected the war to end in my lifetime". In fact, *The Hungry Ghost*, which he began in 1999, was partly his attempt to come to terms with what appeared to be ever-escalating violence, the violence of the LTTE, the JVP, the IPKF and the state. The island seemed to be spiralling into a quagmire of unending violence. Selvadurai wished to write a book that would deal with the way one might be able to move forward in a situation where the war appears never-ending,

a situation of "perpetual conflict.[21] The war between the Tigers and the GoSL however ended in May 2011, two years before *The Hungry Ghosts* was published. When asked to comment on this Selvadurai replied:

> "the war has ended but the conflict hasn't"…. adding that it had been: "a war of erasure. There's an attempt to erase the culture of the Tamil people, and also to create a very didactic, autocratic state."[22]

This new "very didactic, autocratic state" (ibid) needs henchmen to carry out its dirty jobs. In this regard, the text illustrates not only the meteoric rise of Chandralal but his acquisition of social respectability as well. In the final instance, when the aged and infirm Daya visits Chandralal in his mansion, we are reminded of the Mudaliyar's mansion in *Cinnamon Gardens*, and while it certainly matches the latter in style and opulence, it is not the culture of the white-sahibs that is being mimicked here but rather the trappings of power of the erstwhile Brown Sahibs, the Mudaliyars which Chandralal hopes to convey through what is yet again a mimicry. Chandralal's ruthless acquisition of material wealth accrues from a motivation to transcend to transcend the humiliations he has faced on account of the class divide. Speaking about class persecution he tells Shivan of what he ahs endured from the Cinnamon Garden types:

> "You know baba, my father was a mere gardener in a Cinnamon Garden's house. He was there through two generations, and all the family, even the young children referred to him as *oomba*. He raised his eyebrows, and I nodded to say I understood the casual insult of that feudal term. "They didn't mean anything bad, baba, it was just the way they spoke. That's how we were to them. Little better than animals….."They used to call me 'moon-face.'" I frowned, not sure I had heard the English words correctly. "Yes baba, 'moon face.' Of course I didn't speak English at the time and it took me a while to realise they were talking of my pockmarked skin." "After that I swore my children would never witness their father being humiliated. And no Cinnamon Gardens person would humiliate my girls."
>
> (Selvadurai,2013,186)

It is Chandralal who is the new-age elite occupying Cinnamon Garden's. The class-based persecution he has so violently overcome has nothing to do with ethnicity yet signifiers of ethnic intolerance plague the city. Likewise, Daya's contempt for her

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[21] *Shyam Selvadurai: Both Here and There* by Mark Medley in the National Post, news.nationalpost.com/arts/books/shyamselvadurai. April 12th 2013.

[22] ibid

daughter's Tamil marital alliance is on account of losing face within society. Even her practice of Buddhism is the means to an end – social respectability. Her generous donations towards the repair and maintenance of the *viharas* and the upkeep of the monks for prayers to ancestors are carefully calculated moves ensuring her social position within a fundamentally Buddhist society and ensure the support of the clergy. Through Daya, Selvadurai underscores the difference between responding to Buddhism as a philosophy or a politicised discourse. The text is liberally interspersed with sutras and wisdom of the jatakas. Like the insatiable appetite of the "hungry ghosts" populating Buddhist folklore and from which the novel derives its title, Daya's sense of power stems from her insatiable appetite for wealth and the acquisition of property. Material wealth is the signifier of respectability. The calculated callousness with which she purchases properties from Tamils fleeing the country is indicative of the manner in which the marginalisation of a few accounts for the respectability of others.

The text draws attention to another dimension of conflict, the peaceniks. Peace as we have discussed in Chapter II, was a much debated matter in conflict-ridden Sri Lanka. The ambiguity of this position is illustrated through the human rights activist Sriyani Karunaratne and her organisation Kantha. Ostensibly, this is a non-government-organisation that investigates human rights violations by government departments of law and order but when one of her co-workers, Ranjini, a Special Task worker, is close to unearthing details of crucial importance she is brutally murdered:

> Ranjini's bruised and bloated face was like one of those lacquered exorcism masks, eyes bulging, mouth grotesquely misaligned because of a broken jaw, hair a snarl of river snakes"
>
> (Selvadurai, 2013, 203)

Sriyanis however is strangely undisturbed. Nor does she oppose the false incarceration of Ranjini's partner, a Tamil, falsely charged for her murder under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. With the Ranjini incident and the manner in which ethnicity is made to cover up another violation shows how the façade of ethnicity functions within this scenario. Why does Sriyani - the liberal humanist and worker for human rights concede to such as biased and clearly false explanation for Ranjini's

deposition? Is she bowing to government pressure or is she working under-cover for the power-brokers themselves? Indicating the hypocrisy veneered by a patriarchal and chauvinist society and their injunctions of chastity as a womanly virtue, Ranjini's death is equated as the cost of sexual and ethnic transgression. It is this that clogs newspaper reports regarding her murder and not her fearless work she accomplished in the arena of human rights.

With Mili's murder however Sriyani shaken to the core; she moves with alacrity and as she declares, it is to protect the "innocent and vulnerable" (THG, 240). Years later, invited, by the Amnesty International and the University of Toronto to deliver a lecture regarding the civil war raging across the island-nation, Sivan realises that her talk barely skims the surface of the reality of life in post-independence Sri Lanka:

> At first Sriyani's talk described nothing so different from what I had already heard discussed … - abuses by the Special Task Force, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the atrocities committed by the Tigers. But then she mentioned a new development …. The conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the Indian Peace Keeping Force….Neither the Tamils nor the Sinhalese wanted this force that acted increasingly like an occupying army.
> Sriyani spent the latter part of the lecture talking about the growing violence in the south, where the JVP were tightening their stranglehold. …the government had also increased its attempts to stifle dissent through censorship of the press and threats to human rights groups.
>
> (Selvadurai,2013,276-77)

Audience response is as staid as Sriyani brief on the political history of Sri Lanka post independence. As expected, she is vociferously accused by the Jaffna-Tamils for maligning their "freedom fighters" and by the Sinhalese for being "sympathetic to the JVP" (HG, 277). Sivan finds it ironic that as a human rights activist she empathises with the grievances of the JVP as "real", but fails to find similar empathy with the cause of the Tamil civilians (THG, 277). One is reminded of the truth of Vijay's realisation in *When Memory Dies*: "the malaise had gone deep into society and corrupted its every living organism till only violence remained" (*When Memory Dies*, 352)

*The Hungry Ghosts* serves to remind us yet again of the invaluable contribution made by works of literature regarding representations of the conflict zone

particularly the nuanced existential complexity of the Sri Lankan ethnic-conflict. Perhaps it also serves to explain Selvadurai's dilemma as a Sri Lankan-Tamil with vivid memories of the island as a haven bereft of violence and hatred and forced to come to terms with its present reality. As he stated: "in this country that I still consider my home, I could never be at home".[23]

The time-frame of *Rasanayagam's Last Riot* is around 1983 which means that this text by Ernst Macintyre is spatially and culturally closer to Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*. I have included it in this discussion, not for enabling a comparison between the two texts but for the manner in which Macintyre shows the angst caused by issues of identity and ethnic politics for Sita, a Tamil married to the Sinhalese, Philip Fernando.[24] It was around this time that the anti-Tamil wave on the island had irrevocably turned towards violence. During these times, riot followed by curfew, Sita and Philip are visited by Philip's Tamil friend and college room-mate, Rasanayagam. This enables us to view the crises from three different vantage points, Philip, for whom it is a matter of inexplicable inconvenience; Rasanayagam, for whom events such as these are leading to a sharpened awareness of his Tamilness and Sita, an academic at the university of Colombo, who is beginning to realise that she now has to take sides in this identity battle. Sita's dilemma also signals the waning away of cosmopolitan attitudes fostered in times when ethnic and religious identities were private affairs. We see how the changing times affect Sita's sense of self, as an individual, a wife and a Tamil.

As a Tamil married to a Sinhalese, Sita is now forced to choose between one of the two cultures. It is her sense of ethnic loyalty which is thrown into crisis as she becomes aware of the parochial dynamics of the ethnic struggle and the manner in which it has implicated her. In this atmosphere Sita becomes increasingly conscious of her "Tamilness", a factor hitherto so latent that it had been of minimal significance in her life. Her ensuing confusion is produced from suddenly having to reconcile the meaning of her ethnicity with her other "selves", wife, academic and Tamil-woman. These boundaries are no longer as insulated and water-tight as before, rather with the

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[23] http://www.glbtq.com/literature/selvadurai_shyam.html

[24] The marriage of sita and Philip alludes to the cohabitation of Sinhala and Tamil communities on the island, beginning as peaceful cohabitation followed by ethnic differences.

tenor of current politics she is being forced be re-negotiate and redefine these parameters. At the same time she begins to understand the privileges of her class position, and also becomes aware of how this sets her apart from the alienation meted out to the rest of her community.

In this regard, *Rasanayagam's Last Riot* captures shades of the fast disappearing cosmopolitanism on the island. In upper-class Colombo, it is the language and culture of the erstwhile imperial rulers that still holds sway. Ethnicity, so far, has not been a boundary either Sita or Philip have had to reckon with. With *Rasanayagam's Last Riot* Macintyre shows the ethnic conflict as it seeps into and erodes inter-personal relationships, between friends and spouses. With this, the ethnic faultline has moved well beyond the battlefield and even the most intimate of relationships cannot escape being scathed. The action of the play takes place in the thick of the ethnic riots of 1983 with Sita and Philip Fernando attempting to make Rasanayagam comfortable in their home, where he seeks shelter from the anti-Tamil violence rapidly fanning out across Colombo.

News of the violence reaches them time and again. After a few days of this protected insulation in the Fernando household, Rasanayagam decides to move to one of the refugee camp set up in the city where other Tamils who have lost all, have now been herded into by the government. Rasanayagam sense of guilt of staying safe, during this time of communal duress compels him to show solidarity with the rest of his community, humiliated, marginalised and disenfranchised. On his way to the camp, Rasanayagam encounters a Sinhalese mob demanding that he pronounce, with phonetic accuracy, the word "Baldiya". Rasanayagam meets his death at the hands of the mob even as he asserts nay proclaims his "Tamilness".

The sub-plot of the play focuses on the effects of the ethnic tension on Sita, a Tamil married to a Sinhalese. Her identities as a wife and as a Colombo-Tamil are thrown into crisis as she becomes aware of the dynamics of the ethnic struggle and its implications for her fellow Tamils. Her earlier indifference regarding her ethnicity is now replaced by a strong feeling of injustice at their persecution. In his Introduction to the play MacIntyre points out:

> This Tamil married to a Sinhalese, gradually opens out to those around her, about her innermost thoughts and feelings on how July' 83 came about…For soon after the riots, Colombo's mixed society of westernised Tamils and Sinhalese tacitly settled on an arrangement that would enable it to continue functioning. (xi)

Following the pogrom, Sita the Anglophile has becomes increasingly conscious of her "Tamilness", but as the text makes clear, this is not the homecoming of the prodigal enacted by the self but an awareness wrought on account of political actions. She feels the tension of having to reconcile the meaning of her hitherto latent Tamil ethnicity with her other 'selves' – her status as an English-educated woman, her position as a university lecturer in the English Literature department, and her marriage to a Sinhalese man of her choosing. She now begins to perceive these actions as acts of betrayal. External factors are forcing her to reconsider these diverse identities which have hitherto shaped her sense of self.

Sita's subjectivity, her name reminiscent of the dutiful wife of Lord Ram of the Ramayana, is not an unusual example of the multiple, and even ambivalent and interchangeable, selves/identities that constantly work towards undermining any one, unitary and fixed sense of the subject-formation, as "I". This complexity of identity has been theorised among others by Daphne Marlatt who she speaks about the "I" as being composed of "contradictory images struggling to speak the difference we sense through rigid assumptions of sameness and 'identity'". (Marlatt, 183)[25] In Sita's case, the contradictions of class, race and language force her to mediate, though not always consciously or for that matter successfully, the multiplicities and the fluidities of the core formation comprising her, "I". These multiple identities also collide with predetermined notion of womanhood, as typified by her name, which have been inscribed through her social and cultural role as a wife. Regarding identity constructions, Phillipa Rothfield has remarked that identities are constantly in a state of production and redefinition according to changing social contexts and forms of dominant cultural/social practices (Rothfield, 109 -11).[26] Rothfield's theory typifies the case of Sita wherein the change in external circumstances forces a change in her

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[25] In her essay "Difference (em)brasing" Marlatt discusses the need to recognize: "the real difference of life experience, privilege and accessibility to the centre". (Marlatt, 184)

[26] Phillipa Rothfield. "Feminism, Subjectivity and Sexual Experience" in *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge*

sense of self or the forms of identification she has hitherto taken for granted. This emphasis on the multivalent nature of identity and its fluidity is significant for a war that is being enacted on grounds of (ethnic) identity.

For most of her life, Sita has identified with her husbands upper middle-class, English educated background and this is clearly a space wherein she her ethnic identity as a Tamil or his as a Sinhalese, has never been a point of tension or contestation. Through this Macintyre signals a factor also highlighted earlier in this essay by Sivanandan and Selvadurai which is the significance of the class factor. More often than not, it is assumed that Sita too is Sinhalese. This is also a question which MacIntyre raises during the course of the play but does not attempt to provide definitive answers to – why has Sita been so cut-off from her Tamil roots? Is it because she has got accustomed to behaving in this manner on account of her marriage which has in fact blurred the cultural aspects of her Tamil background to an extent that it is unrecognisable or because it provides her a protective cover when confronted with violence of belong to the Tamil community? The question remains unanswered and at best we can assert that she considers herself as straddling both ethnicities, one on account of birth and the other on account of marriage, or perhaps she feels that as a teacher of English, she feels she ahs transcended the faultline. However, given the political atmosphere preceding the 1983 riots, this is an issue that is constantly being foreground in Sita's consciousness and she can no longer continue to evade the implications of her Tamil upbringing and background, despite the cosmopolitanism of her westernised lifestyle and its valorisation of western culture and literature.

Clearly, with Sita and her husband Philip, Macintyre was creating representative figures of a class which most of his audience would instantly identify with, and which could easily signify the communities at large. Distanced from the sporadic violence transpiring across the island, on account of their wealth and privilege, the imposition of curfew is more a matter of logistics rather than ethnic disparity, as this dialogue between the couple indicates:

> Philip: Why such a lot of things?
> Sita: This time, looks like we wouldn't be able to get out of the house

> for a very long time
> Philip: What is that now, as if we haven't got used to these things?
>
> (Macintyre,1)

At the same time the dialogue resonates with the indifferent and complacent attitude of this class towards the suffering of the majority of people on the island. The flippant manner in which Philip responds to mob violence would undoubtedly leave most of the people in the audience disturbed and more probably because it would mean recognising their callousness and insensitivity in such matters. While for Philip, at one level, it is a matter of economics and figures, counting the number of Tamil shops burnt on the Galle Face Green in Colombo, it is also an indicator of their helplessness in the face of this tidal wave sweeping across the nation.[27] The reactions of the couple indicate this distance between them and the rest of the country, as Sita sheepishly admits to her charade of having joined a churlish mob: "abusing Tamils, to keep suspicion off her house." (Macintyre, 1993, 2).

However, matters regarding ethnicity have taken a turn for the worse: "the communal thing has deepened so horribly", and now all Tamil, including Sita are at risk (RLR, 7). This turn for the worse, as mentioned above, transpired after the burning of the Jaffna Public Library in 1983 by the Sinhalese armed forces – a watershed in Tamil-Sinhala politics. However, having flippantly shrugged off her ethnic identity, as an inconsequential matter all these years of her married life, Sita now feels guilty of this insulation as she sees fellow human being persecuted for exactly the same reasons that protect her from that persecution:

> like all Colombo Tamil friends and relatives, she cannot identify with the other Tamils, because her class creates another barrier between them
>
> (Macintyre,1993,7)

Moreover, in exclusively Tamil gatherings, Sita experiences the humiliating rejection of herself by the others of her community. Confiding to her husband, after one such

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[27] The scene also indicates the driving purpose of the playwright was not to entertain but evoke societal consciousness regarding the racism which was fast becoming a prominent feature in independent Sri Lanka. He undertakes here the complexities of depicting a contemporary reality regarding the intrusion of racism within the private space of the family, an issue which would in all probability touch a personal cord with most of the audience.

meeting with Tamil women she admits: “I felt terribly rejected…unfairly excluded.” (RSR,8).

The experience of being brought face-to-face with issues of ethnicity unsettles her as it forces her to acknowledge the fragmentation she experiences on account of her class and her dual ethnicity. Sita’s angst at this turn of events goes to show that refashioning another identity, may not be as easy a transition as it appears, rather, it opens the door to endless dilemma and even trauma. Sita’s dilemma here is not that of a post-colonial subject who must come to terms with the pre colonial mores of her culture but rather the hegemonic turn taken by an ethnically conscious Sinhala nation. One would imagine Sita insulated on account of her wealth and class, which hitherto, she and Philip have been, but in this post-independence scenario that proves to be a double bind as her class is associated now with the injustices and exploitation wrought by the colonisers. The exclusion imposed on her by her class-position also draws into the fore the openness of her class identity which prompts her to question violence on account of ethnic constructions and the need for dialogue at every level, from the personal to the political. As Sita rationalises:

> …if it can’t be discussed openly, at a personal level between such old friends, in a recurring dramatic situation like this, what hope is there of a settlement at the national level”
>
> (Macintyre,1993,6)

At her level, she is willing to acknowledge the complicity of the upper classes in contributing to the escalating ethnic divide at the cost of protecting their economic interests. At the same time, she points to the exclusionary attitude of the majority community in national matters and the need to challenge this.

It is through the character of Sita that MacIntyre satirises the upper-class Colombo milieu, particularly their refusal to engage with the political reality raging across the island and faced by the masses on an everyday level. This refusal, as Sita realises, also stems from the lack of fluency of this class regarding the native languages - whether Sinhala or Tamil. Their indifference is illustrated by the “curfew parties”, held during national curfews. Sita’s husband Philip, is not willing to engage in a discussion regarding this class factor and dismisses her concern with a bombastic:

"No individual resolution can ever have an impact on a general situation…." (RLR, 15). This also precludes her unfamiliarity with the Tamil language, cultural mores and therefore the Tamil's in Jaffna.

Following Philip's refusal to enter into a conversation, Sita discusses the logistics of ethnic class divisions with Professor Kurukulasooriya, a Sinhalese colleague at the university: "…and so I thought I'll send the Sinhala intake to his class, and let Mrs Fernando have the Tamils…", to which Kurukulasooriya sarcastically adds: "not that you'll have to use any Tamil, but I think that in emergencies, when you get stuck in using the Direct Method, it can be useful." (RLR, 9). At this point Sita is aware that she uses her mother tongue only while instructing: "rickshaw men and lavatory coolies" (RLR, 9). Her class and English-education are fast becoming the cultural and linguistic barriers preventing her from actively engaging with the concerns of her fellow Tamils.

The politics of language however was not a sudden reversal of discourse in the nation but has been brewing since independence. In Act I, MacIntyre shows how the Sinhalese identify a Tamil. It depends upon an accurate pronunciation of the Sinhala word *baldiya* (bucket). This nugget of ethnic wisdom comes from Rasanayagam, as he recalls being taught the pronunciation, while in the university, by Philip:

> From that moment I began practicing that pronunciation *baldiya*, as you all know, we don't have a 'Bayanna' in our alphabet….and over the three years in Peradeniya, I finally got it…. TODAY a mob stopped me and showed me a bucket and asked me what it was…. I shouted '*BALDIYA!BALDIYA!BALDIYA*!'…. They cheered me patriotically and saw me on my way.
>
> (Macintyre,1993,24)

The dissemination of ethnic otherness in a social scenario has clearly brought this sense of racist chauvinism to the fore. The episode exposes the violence inherent in a national discourse espousing fundamentalism and xenophobia.

Unlike Sita, Rasanayagam refuses to be identified with the Sinhalese: "every grievance and discrimination that the Tamils are claiming I subscribe to" (RLS,34). It is this sense of solidarity which he feels with his community that prompts him,

towards the end of the play, to move with his fellow Tamils, into the refugee camp and partake their suffering. His perception regarding Sita's position is accurate. He forgives her desertion of her Tamil identity on account of her duty as a wife. Her ethnic identity as a Tamil is subsumed by her position in a marriage of mixed ethnicity. She is "Mrs Fernando" – the wife of a Sinhala man and her own individuality is largely subsumed by this patriarchal culture governing marital relations. However, she loathes herself for adding to the xenophobia, after having loudly proclaims in the marketplace, as a mode of self-protection: "anybody who keeps a Tamil is a traitor" (Macintyre,3).

Rasanayagam moreover, despite the shelter offered to him by the Fernando household, makes no attempt to include Sita in conversations regarding national and class politics. A separate homeland, Rasanayagam holds, will have no meaning for Sita. As far as the Tamil national question is concerned, Sita's opinion and voice do not figure. However, as the text shows, it is Sita who urges Philip to speak about matters regarding ethnicity - she refuses to take a passive stance in this matter of national importance. Towards the end of the play, we may even assume that Sita is considering opting out of the marriage, as she reminds Rasanayagam that in the past there have been divorces, thereby showing the extent to which she is personally affected by the political turn of events and what she now perceives as her complacency in the discrimination meted out to her community. A symbolic reading implies the parting of ways of the two communities; but as the political situation on the island indicated, this parting of ways was enacted on the patriarchal terms meted out by the Sinhala nation and the other partner had literally been driven out of the home (land). In this regard, Macintyre's metaphor of a marriage forces us to re-assess the politics of separatist nationalism.

My endeavour in this chapter has been to show the war for secessionism in Sri Lanka through lenses apart from the terrorist. For this I have drawn on texts written by eminent Sri Lankan Tamil and Burgher writers, A. Sivanandan, Shyam Selvadurai and Ernst Macintyre. Their work shows the diversity of Tamil heritage on the island and the discrepancies of class and culture, between the Jaffna, Colombo and Coolie Tamils as factors which disrupt the homogenising label accorded to Sri Lankan

Tamils. The writers and their texts also choose to focus on the violence resulting from the transformation wrought by the new nationalism on this once culturally composite island. Unlike the media reportage, once again it is not just the physical damage to life and property that has been the focus of the texts discussed in this chapter but the invisible dimensions of the violence, its psychological aspects that are of concern.

None of the writers discussed in this chapter live in Sri Lanka any longer but as their work reveals, the gaze is focussed on to the homeland and the reasons for this are diverse. While Sivanandan's epic narrative tells the story of the island from the point of view of the Jaffna Tamils, the text moves in linear fashion from the moment of colonisation to the darkest phase of the civil war, Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* focuses on a slice of that very same history narrated through the subjectivity of a seven year old Colombo-Tamil lad, Arjie. This de-contextualisation leads to focus on a singular event, Black July, following which the Tamil community was subjected to systemic and institutionalised alienation. With *Cinnamon Garden's* Selvadurai delved into colonial history just prior to decolonisation seeking answers for the ethnic divide in formulations of government policy. Selvadurai's third novel *The Hungry Ghosts*, shows the final stage in this tragic drama, the creation of a Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. The internalisation of violence is seen in the discrimination and apartheid which have become habitual behaviour as exemplified through Daya, Shivan's grandmother. The symbolic significance of this character is easily ascertainable. This symbolic referencing is also deployed by Earnest Macintyre to depict the ethnic impasse. *Rasanayagam's Last Riot* exemplifies a Sinhalese and Tamil marriage which clearly is a metaphor for the now uneasy cohabitation of the warring communities and indicative of the macrocosmic change in ethnic relations on the island.[28]

The different manner in which the characters in the texts discussed come to terms with their ethnicity shows the different ways in which one could be Tamil. Likewise, there would be different ways in which one could be Sinhalese. This goes

[28] It need to be clarified that while ethnicity was not encountered as a problem by the colonial powers, this is not meant to indicate a leveling of discriminatory ideas by the imperial governance but to show that indigenous hierarchies were substituted by a different system of power hierarchies based on the language and culture of the colonizer.

against the grain of the discourse which seeks to freeze cultures, languages and ethnicities by classifying them as authentic and pure. Identity moreover, as all of the three writers have shown in their different ways, is far too fluid and multiple. Ethnicity, in this regard, is one of the infinite factors that go towards comprising a subjective sense of identity. The texts then, are a conscious effort towards interrupting the ethnic polarisation at work on account of the new nationalism. A significant factor enabling this disruption is the highlighting of the erasure of a past wherein tolerance and peaceful co-existence was the norm. In this regard, Vijay's articulation of the fact that his: "country had not one but several histories", is crucial (*Sivanandan*,1997, 345)

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# CHAPTER FIVE

## REFUGEES AND THREE SHORT STORIES FROM SRI LANKA

> *Ever they fought on; walls, towers. Battlements were blood-besprent, Wherever Trojans slain by arrows of the stalwart Greeks Yet these not scatheless themselves; many of them dyed the earth red, Aye waxed the house of death as friends and foes were stricken, O'er the strife shouted glee Enyo, sister of war*
>
> Fall of Troy, Book VIII [1]

The above lines describe the fall of the city of Troy, razed to the ground by the Achaeans, its citizens massacred, its riches plundered and its buildings burnt to cinders. All of the Trojan men, as the verses bear testimony, were killed in this ambush except for a small group led by Aeneas, and the women were sold to slavery. It is these devastating after-effects of war that live on in social memory long after the event.

In this last and final chapter of my thesis, I will consider similar such the repercussions of the Sri Lankan conflict. While death, destruction and the pain and sorrow caused by war remains largely unchanged, a new category now embellishes this litany, that of the Refugee. This term is concomitant upon the administrative regimes set up by nation-states and their punctilious maintenance of boundaries and borders. In this chapter I will be discussing three short-stories, Dear Vichy (2000) by Neil Fernandopulle, The Journey (1995) by Jean Arasanayagam and My Motherland (2004) by S. Paneerselvam[2], for the manner in which they address the ethnic-conflict from the point-of-view of the refugees generated by this war. These three texts show the traumatic violence that may accrue as majorities acquire state power while highlighting at the same time that it is this very same factor that creates the need to seem assurance and safety from the ethnic collective.

However, before we embark on a discussion of the texts a brief assessment of the semiotics of the term "'refugee'" would help. By the term, refugee, we generally imply a person or a group of people compelled to seek asylum in foreign lands

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1 E-text: Quintus Smyrnaeus; www.theoi.com

2 While the first two short stories are in English, the third by S. Pannerselvam has been translated from the Tamil by M.S Annaraj - one of the two editor of the volume *Dreamboats: Stories from the Sri Lankan Plantations.*

because of the inhabitable conditions in their homeland or a person or a group of people not domiciled in the region but granted rights of residence. A refugee then may be defined as a person:

> in search of an escape from perceived injustice or fundamental incompatibility with her/his home state. S/he distrusts the authorities who have rendered her continued residence in the country of her origin either impossible or intolerable and desires the opportunity to build a new life abroad.
>
> (Chimni, 12)

To seek refuge then would mean placing oneself out of the imminent danger of the war-zone, but it also holds the harrowing prospect of facing debilitating degrees of alienation which refugees will face, possibly for the remainder of their lives. This dimension of armed conflict, apart from statistical data determining economic devastation and civilian casualties, has drawn considerable attention in our times, i.e the time of nation-states and democracies. Since it is the ethnic conflict that is responsible for generating refugees from the island-nation, it is the connection between this phenomenon and national self-fashioning of the new nation-state which is of concern here as also the fact that when applied to Sri Lanka a lot of the people seeking to leave the island during the civil wars often did not qualify for asylum or fulfil the norms required for cross-country migration as the norms determining these are set in place by international bodies, such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

The establishment of institutions such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) bear testimony not only to the unfortunate re-occurrence of this phenomenon across nations of the globe but sadly, also to the paranoia caused by the presence of the asylum seekers within the societies that have so graciously offered refuge. Paranoia serves to bolster ethnic constructions leaving scant room for bridging these faultlines through empathy and compassion, feelings that form the very bedrock of our very humanity. First, the creation of refugees and then their treatment are a measure of our civilization, or lack of it, and of the societies we have constructed.

With a separatist war raging for over three decades on the Jaffna peninsula and ethnic tensions finding expression through riots, pogroms and suicide bombing witnessed

across the nation-state of Sri Lanka, it was not a matter of surprise that Sri Lankan Tamils would seek refuge in foreign lands. As stated by A.J Wilson:

> With the 'holocaust and pogromisation' of Tamils in 1983, more than 100,000 Tamils fled to India and several thousand others sought refuge in the west"
>
> (Wilson 2000: 125).

However, as the civil war has demonstrated, the term "refugee", otherwise indicative of a state of material dispossession and cultural alienation caused by having to re-locate to a foreign land, when applied to Sri Lanka also refers to persons and communities that have not attempted to seek asylum on foreign shores but within the nation itself. This was the case with civilians living in villages and towns on the Jaffna peninsula who faced the brunt of the military offensive and witch-hunt for terrorists launched by the GoSL against the separatist/terrorist organisation, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This meant the forced and even permanent relocating of entire communities and even villages into areas demarcated by the state as refugee camps. This form of forced internal displacement amounted to incarceration and reduced citizens to the status of internally displaced persons (IDP).[3] As IDP's, citizenship rights are held in abeyance. Living conditions on the camps moreover, provided scant scope for the observation of rites hitherto deemed sacrosanct as per their caste or community. This existential reality has been expressed by Dagmar Hellmann-Rajnayagam as:

> Our houses become our graves…our villages become cremation grounds. The Sinhalese racist demons slowly taking over our ancient land. On our own soil, where we were born and have lived since time immemorial, our people are turning into refugees, into slaves; they are being destroyed.
>
> (Hellmann-Rajnayagam 1994: 43)

While the purpose of the texts selected for study in this chapter is to accord an insight into this existential reality and to draw attention to the underlying causes facilitating the transformation of citizens into refugees, it also needs to be acknowledged at the

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[3] As per a study conducted by the University of Bangalore (2009), during the final phase of the state offensive against the LTTE, the number of Internally Displaced Persons in Jaffna amounted to 300,000. The figure refers to civilian population re-located to welfare/refugee camps. Citizenship and legal rights for people displaced thus are in abeyance. Refer to *The Saga of Agony in Sri Lanka* Ed. M. G Krishnan, Prakash Louis, Paul Newman, Kusul Perera, E. Deenadayalan (Bangalore UP, 2009).

outset that the compelling presence of refugees in and from various nations of the globe has rendered this debilitating human occurrence to the level of a phenomenon of global significance today and certainly not one that is unique to the post independent nation state of Sri Lanka. The directives issued by organisations such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) indicate the imminence of the refugee question for nations across the globe today and clearly the refugee question warrants greater import than a doffing acknowledgment of statistical figures.

The theoretical premise for this chapter draws on questions of humanitarian significance which pertain to the ethics of hospitality within cultures and to the precariousness of lives within democratic republics. The creation of refugee's draws these issues to the fore particularly since refugee movement across international borders takes the conflict beyond the confines of a national territory and into spaces and cultures which in all probability have had no links with the war apart from its intermittent news coverage.[4] The presence of refugees in a foreign land conveys the truth that conflict/war/genocide, in any part of the globe, concerns each and every one of us and lead us to question the emotive logic of nationalisms which succeed in creating unease and paranoia between human beings on account of superficial differences. Furthermore, the frequent occurrence of words such as "'Refugee'", "'Asylum-seeker'" ,"'Migrant'" and "'Internally Displaced Person'"[5] among others, has made these terms such a normative part of quotidian lives across the globe that we tend to ignore the fact that such categories are tell-tale signs of a civilization fast succumbing to ethnic and racial profiling. Nor for that matter have most theoretical treatises on refugee situations done much to bring home to readers the very personal

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4 The creation of Diasporas across the globe, particularly the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in Toronto, and its involvement in the separatist nationalism on the island is a telling example.

5 While I acknowledge that in bureaucratic parlance there are technical difference between these categories, I will not dwell on that facet in this essay but since the "Internally Displaced Person" (IDP) is particularly pertinent for our discussion, it merits an explanation. IDP's usually refers to people located from their homes and villages, for indefinite periods of time, even permanently, and placed into camps manned and policed by the state. This amounts to persecution on account of the surveillance policies practiced at the camps and the deprivation of citizenship and human rights. Not having traversed international borders the relocated are refugees but within their nation boundaries.

The military offensive in the Jaffna peninsula for instance, led to the relocation of Tamils from their villages to state aided refugee camps, referred to as welfare camps. This action was undertaken as part of the state operations to wipe out the Tamil separatist insurgency.

and subjective experience of alienation and loss among those uprooted from familiar surroundings – or generated the sort of empathy and tolerance that such crises calls for. This, despite the fact that it is often unresolved tensions between nation-states and/or chauvinistic majoritarianism therein which are responsible for the creation of any or even all of those categories mentioned above. While this goes to show how politically laden these categories are, it does not refute the fact that indeed, many of those who see themselves as refugees and asylum-seekers also feel that they have fallen between two stools. On the one hand, it is majoritarian policies of home governments that have caused their disempowerment and migration. On the other hand, they are treated with suspicion, and their presence perceived as disruptive of cultural mores in the countries where they have been granted asylum. In fact, they are further stigmatised as economic burdens and parasites on the social amenities available in the host countries. This chapter also addresses the bureaucratic red-tape involved in procuring a refugee status while hoping to re-address public opinion on maters pertaining to refugees.

The idea of refugees is not something new for the subcontinent rather it has been a perennial occurrence in this part of the globe following the introduction of the idea of the nation-state. The northern region of the Indian subcontinent for instance, which is where this researcher is located, is an area that has witnessed an active influx of refugees on account of the multiple partitions following decolonisation and the more recent politically contested territories, such as the Tibet plateau. The partitioning of India into the nation states of India and Pakistan in 1947 was followed by the partitioning of East Pakistan into Bangladesh in 1971.[6] In India, this was followed by the partitioning of administrative states between 1960 and 1999, and agitations for new nation-states from the 1970s onwards. These territorial partitions, enforced in order to uphold religious and linguistic homogenisations ensured an easy-going cognisance and familiarity with the term "refugee". However, this also set the trend

6 The estimated figures of this flow of population during Partitions in the subcontinent justified on grounds of ethnicity and language has been estimated as nearly fourteen million. Needless to say the effects of the Partitions of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh reverberated across the subcontinent. For further research details refer to Ritu Menon's "Birth of Social Security Commitments: What Happened in the West" in Ranbir Samaddar's *Refugees and the State: Practices of Asylum and Care in India, 1947-2000*, New Delhi: Sage, 2003.

for contemporary politics which continue to be dictated and dominated by affiliations based on communal identities. The latest addition to this discourse has been the rich, highly evocative, and (to the 'other' identity group) tendentious sets of narratives that have emerged in the last quarter century based on the inter-twining of separate nationalist sentiment with Islamic radicalisation in the valley of Kashmir. The resulting the exodus of the Pundit community from the valley has led to the creation of a Kashmiri-pundit diaspora scattered all across India and foreign shores. Refugees from the territory of Tibet too have been offered asylum in various parts of Northern India following the Chinese occupation of the Tibetan plateau. Given these waves of Partitions, it is no surprise that the Indian subcontinent is replete with memories of brutal ethnic violence. These memories however are also deeply interlaced with heart-rending nostalgia for the forsaken homelands. Living in northern India thereof has meant imbibing personal narratives of nostalgia as older family members often recount memories of the lost homeland and also of betrayal for the manner in which the freshly demarcated territorial and ethnic boundaries were negotiated. At the same time it has also meant being acutely aware of the fragility of citizenship-rights and identities conferred by national and/or state-belonging.

Sri Lanka, which is the focus of this chapter, was an erstwhile colony of the Portuguese, Dutch and British. Ceylon - as the island was then known - was celebrated for its exemplary cosmopolitanism exhibited in the racial multiplicity and hybrid cultures that flourished therein. With the setting in of electoral democracy revivalist trends veering towards ethnic and racial purity lent succour to the idea demanding the declaration of Sinhala, as the official language and Buddhism, as the national religion of Sri Lanka. The collateral damage of this monochromatic nationalism has been amply manifest in the civil wars that beset the island for over three decades, led to the assassination of three heads of state[7] and the jettisoning of

[7] The three heads of state referred to are: Prime Minister S.W.R.D Bandaranaike, assassinated by a Buddhist monk in 1959; Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, assassinated by a Sri Lankan suicide bomber in 1991; President Ranasinghe Premadasa, assasinated by a suicide bomber in 1993.

minorities as refugees from the island-nation[8]. It was this trend that led to the mass exodus of the Burgher community from Sri Lanka in 1956 following the passing in Parliament of the Official Language Act[9], also referred to as the "'Sinhala Only"' Act. The insurgencies of '71 and '87-'89 were a manifestation of this majoritarian ethnic trend[10] while on the other hand the Tamil separatist movement showed their resistance to this marginalisation and even exclusion. Refugees from Sri Lanka therefore inevitably belong to communities marginalised by the post-independence drive to reclaim an indigenous Sinhalese identity. This meant transforming the essentially hybrid island of Ceylon into the Sinhala-Buddhist nation of Sri Lanka.[11] Refugees from the island then, either as asylum-seekers or internally displaced, are persons seeking to escape persecution by either the separatists or the government. Their narratives bear testimony to the sense of exclusion and violence which state policies aimed at promoting ethnic homogenisation entail. With the accretion in the number of Sri Lankan Tamils seeking asylum on (hopefully) more tolerant shores, the assessment by the *US Committee for Refugees, World Refugee Survey* 1997 referring to Sri Lanka as: "an island of refugees", merits an investigation (Suryanarayan 2003: 322).

In this chapter I will analyse texts narrating the experience of persons and groups from Sri Lanka who have been compelled to leave their homes on account of ethnic persecution and conflict. I will do so by exploring three stories which evoke the very painful traumas of displacement among the Tamil community of Sri Lanka. A particularly poignant facet of their experience which these stories bring to light is that

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8 The island has been in a state of war soon after independence in 1948 till 2009. May 2009 is marked as the day that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were finally vanquished by the Sri Lankan armed forces.

9 The Sri Lankan Burghers are a community that arose on account of intermarriages between the Portuguese and Dutch colonizers and the indigenous people of the island. Essentially an English speaking people, the Burgher exodus began with the passing in Parliament of the "Sinhala Only" Act by the Bandaranaike government. This act declared Sinhala as the national language and would henceforth be used, in place of the earlier English, for all official and educative purposes.

10 These were the insurgencies conducted by the pro-Sinhala group, the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* or the JVP. After the '71 insurgency this party was proscribed. The second JVP insurgency, between the years '87-'89 is often referred to as the period of terror in Sri Lanka and was conducted more as guerilla attacks on those considered anti-national by the Sinhala nationalists.

11 For further reading on Internally Displaced People in Sri Lanka, refer to Joke Schrijvers's essay *Internal Refugees in Sri Lanka: The Interplay of Ethnicity and Gender* in Nevedini, Vol 6, Colombo:Women's Education and Research Centre, 1998.

the subjects of displacement often find that they are not even recognized as refugees. This recognition is a matter of imminent concern for it determines, as B.S Chimni, distinguished scholar of refugee law points out: "the difference between life and death for an individual seeking asylum" Chimni 2000:1). In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that the criteria for the recognition of a person as a refugee or as being qualified for asylum are generally drawn up by international organizations, such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, on the basis of approval by their member states.

The stipulations regarding the grant of asylum have time and again been revisited and drafted anew to keep abreast of the changing political scenarios. For instance, the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees was drafted to meet the influx of refugees from Russia and Eastern Europe on account of the Cold War. However, since this pertained to refugees generated by a particular political situation, it was later supplemented by the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa which was subsequently followed by the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. Equally significant were the Bangkok Principles adopted by the Asian African Legal Consultative Committee in 1966 and the Arab Convention of 1992.[12]

While nations of the subcontinent are officially not signatories[13] of the above-mentioned international stipulations regarding refugee-care they are undoubtedly influenced by these stipulations. This however makes the refugee policy in these territories more a matter of administrative decisions taken at the state level. It is with reference to this ambivalence that Ranabir Samaddar in his book *Refugees and the State: Practices of Asylum and Care in India 1947-2000* points out that the refugee policy in the countries of the subcontinent despite being "the most observed", continues to be: "the least comprehended political conduct of our times". This is a matter of concern given the active flow of population between these territories. In the absence of a clearly outlined regime for asylum however, a refugee is perceived not as:

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12 B.S Chimni, Ed. *International Refugee Law, A Reader,* (New Delhi, Sage, 2000): 2 and 9.

13 Ranbir Samaddar, *Practices of Asylum and Care in India 1947-2000* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003): 52.

> a legal entity or a concept with rights and boundaries but an 'alien' who can be there as the shadow but who must not become a part of the self in its own right.
>
> (Samaddar 2003:52).

It is this alienating manner of treatment of humanity clubbed as refugees particularly their absence of legal rights that prompted Jacques Derrida to express similar concerns in his essay *On Cosmopolitanism and on Forgiveness*.[14] The texts selected for discussion afford insight into this aspect of state jurisprudence and civil society. This chapter deals with the narratives of persons who have been displaced in this manner - by majoritarian violence, faced economic deprivation, social disentitlement and political marginalization, by governments, whether or not they qualify technically as refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons or any other related juridical or official category.

The northern district of Mannar which forms the backdrop for Neil Fernandopulle's short story *Dear Vichy*, has been a site of violent conflict between the Tamil-Tigers and the Government of Sri Lanka.[15] The narrator of this story is a British passport holder, and also a student of sociology who has volunteered to help with the refugee camp set-up in the war-zone of Mannar so as to provide care to those dispossessed by the war. The location of the camp - in a four hundred and fifty year old church, constructed by the Portuguese, as apparent from the architectural design, - draws attention to the colonial past of Sri Lanka and perhaps in tune with the present-day violence, serves to remind the reader of another time of violence, conquest and ethnic upheaval and survival despite all that. Yet again, it is also a reminder of the cultural hybridism, ethnic tolerance and peaceful cohabitation that sprung up thereafter. That past of cohabitation now stands sharply juxtaposed against the deadly ethnic politics transpiring within this postcolonial, nationalised space.

The focus of the story, structured in the form of an epistolary communication between a narrator who remains unnamed throughout, and her friend Vichy, is a woman who

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[14] Refer to Jacques Derrida's essay *On Cosmopolitanism and On Forgiveness* Trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001):16. Derrida speaks about the abysmal change in contemporary societies across the western world regarding hospitality. Rather than practice this as a basic human virtue, societies today prefer adhering to elaborately drawn-out code of ethics.

[15] The district of Mannar was re-captured by the Sri Lankan armed forces in 2009.

with her son is now an inmate of this refugee camp. The horrific and even stultifying effect of armed violence on individual sensibilities is conveyed through the figure of this traumatised refugee. As camp volunteer, the narrator's attention is taken-up with her particular case more than others, as she appears different from the others who appear to belong to the region and find themselves settling into the mores of camp life. Perhaps her difference accrues from her education and the sensibility this has induced in her or perhaps it is the completely unwarranted trauma of loss, the narrator, cannot be sure! She lives without complaint though, in a cramped public space partitioned with the help of disposed cardboard boxes:

> …one day I met a woman who came up to me and spoke in English, in good crisp English. I made it a point to speak with her again later. She had a son of about seven or eight…
> … Her husband, who was an engineer or something, had died, killed by the terrorists or the Army, she wasn't quite sure. For that matter, she wasn't sure of anything. She didn't seem to have any other family or friends, just the boy.
>
> ( Fernandopulle, 111, 112)

It is the presence of this woman, her quiet dignity and courage in the face of this traumatic existential reality that compels the narrator to rethink the modalities of academic endeavours, (we are reminded that she is a student of sociology and is studying the war-zone as an academic project undertaken during the summer), and the insight which the rationality and objectivity of dispassionate study would afford into the human condition, particularly conditions such as this which defy and resist our normative understandings. Furthermore, it is the realisation of the narrator regarding the anomaly involved in reducing individual beings to inert statistical figures which tell us nothing about the uniqueness of each individual. While this would rationally appear far-fetched but since trauma is the common factor defining subjective experiences in a war zone, the factors inducing the trauma of the individual need to be addressed. Statistical figures are not enough!! The self-reflexivity this dilemma induces within the narrator leads her to question imbibed modes of academic learning and knowledge dissemination which are based on collective groupings and the theories postulated thereby towards addressing universals and obscuring the individual[16] Memory lapse and the inability to focus on details are, among others, clear signs of trauma. The woman, as the narrator notices, is oblivious of her surroundings as she listlessly sits around the

[16] This refers to knowledge systems prior to the post-structuralist and post-modernist methods of methods of academic endeavor.

porch of the church: "'taking her two suitcases wherever she went'" (112). The narrator's inability to disregard this woman largely stems from the affinity she senses between herself and this woman-refugee - an affinity in terms of their similarity in educational background and the sensibility induced thereby, regardless of superficial differences of skin-colour, race or ethnicity:

> ….I with my Sociology, and Classics and English, trying to study her, who might have read the same books that I have read
>
> (Fernandopulle,112-113)

This induces in the narrator the urge to disregard the boundaries of objective and impersonal research demanded by her role as researcher and seek answers to questions otherwise deemed personal and redundant for formulation of universal academic theories:

> …what she felt about her education and her present state. I wanted to ask her if there is anything in Plato's "Rebublic" which resembles the dreams she is dreaming on the steps of the church, or did she see anything similar to her predicament in Euripedes' plays or maybe Sophocles. I wanted to talk to her, because she was so different. She was so different from all of us. She was living her education. I wanted to get her to talk, but I couldn't approach her. I felt scared. Vichy, I really felt terribly scared.
>
> (Fernandopulle,113)

The woman's recollection of the cause of her dispossession, as cited above, dissipates any faith one may have reposed regarding notions of justifiable or the legitimate use of violence – a theory often postulated by state jurisprudence. Clearly the woman as refugee is not interested in pinning the blame for her husband's death on any one of the warring groups, either the GoSL or the LTTE. She attributes the violence perpetrated on her, in equal measure, to both, the insurgents and the state army. In her reckoning, the polarisation of the two warring parties is invalidated as is also any investment in the idea of the former a terrorist organisation and the latter as the protective state apparatus. Since the collateral damage and death-count caused by the state-army is similar to that unleashed by the insurgents, they are no longer Manichean opposites for the woman. Her husband could have been killed by either of these forces unleashing violence, chaos and death – "'she wasn't quite sure"'. It is the all pervasiveness of the violence that she registers; violence as a continuum.

As the narrator grows accustomed to living in the war-zone of Munnar she begins to reassess her hitherto unquestioned assumptions regarding labels such as those of lawful and unlawful or terrorists as opposed to protectors:

> I was working in a place called Madhu (I was in Mannar only for about two months), and the terrorists attacked with mortars, oops, I'm, not supposed to use the word terrorists – I mean "Tigers" attacked – all this bloody diplomatic jargon.
>
> (Fernandopulle, 111)

Equally disturbing and revelatory are the appalling humanitarian anomalies transpiring on this tiny island, often completely obliterated by the government censorship of news coverage regarding the war on the peninsula. The narrator learning about the war zone further entails the slow cognisance of the normative subversions transpiring therein. She is taken aback with the realisation that despite the violence, trauma, displacement and dispossession, age-old forms of domination, such as gender and caste continue to persist. The caste system for instance is assiduously followed, even amidst the refugees. As the narrator notes:

> They say that the caste system does not operate in Sri Lanka, at least not as badly as in India, but you could see the whole bloody caste system before your eyes in the camps. If I was a high caste person, I wouldn't shit in the same lavatory which was used by a low caste, even if I had to shit on the road or under some tree, that's how it is. And they've got the most outrageous castes out here.
>
> (Fernandopulle, 110)

The caste system, as Ranabir Samaddar has noted is one of the pertinent factors obstructing the formulation of an "'effective'" refugee or internally displaced person policy in the nation-states of South Asia.

Along with caste discrimination, gender exploitation is another insidious and not so subtle presence amidst this group of displaced persons. One of the fellow-refugees at the camp, Mugudan, has established a stronghold over the distribution of food-rations and he uses this acquired position of apparent advantage to control the dolling-out of rations to the refugees, particularly this woman:

> What does a woman who has a university degree in English, Sociology and Western Classics give, to a man, a horrid, filthy man, in return for a packet of milk for her son? In the refugee condition she has only her body to offer.
>
> (Fernandopulle,114)

Personal details such as these however are superfluous for the project-report the narrator is intent upon accomplishing:

> We just sit in our little office rooms and write reports and do surveys and stats, observation studies, on post-traumatal behaviour….,and file them all in boxes and send them to HQ.
> ...things that are never written down in our reports, in our surveys, because I suppose, it's not our business. We have nothing to gain from learning the inner workings of a person like that. One person dosen't make a social phenomenon.
>
> (Fernandopulle, 113, 114)

It is similar such undocumented histories, in this case of illegal immigrants from the island-nation which form the subject-matter of Jean Arasanayagam's short story *The Journey*. On account of the armed conflict in the Jaffna peninsula, illegal immigrants from the island were more often than not, either former cadre's of the LTTE[17] or Tamil parents seeking to protect children from forced enlistment as child soldiers or suicide bombers for the LTTE[18] or citizens simply seeking a life free of terror. If from the south of the island, asylum seekers may be persons who have been former members of anti-state groups, such as the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna*. As the narrator of Arasanayagam's story, a Sinhalese man in his twenties reasons, illegal immigrants as asylum seekers or refugees are not an unusual occurrence in a land beset by:

> Conflict. Ethnicity. Massacres and assassinations. To Revolutions. Human rights violations. Disappearances, torture, death….and now, ethnic cleansing, so that the reclaimed territory rests on a foundation of skeletal remains: bones that branch out like a subterranean forest, the flesh nourishing the soil yet its poisons creeping through the still veins to create a monstrous foliage.
>
> (Arasanayagam, 5)

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[17] The LTTE had established an interim mode of administration and governance on the peninsula from approximately 1990 till 2009. The movement of inhabitants was restricted and monitored by the LTTE administration. For more information on the Tigers, read M.R Narayan Swamy *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas* (Colombo: VijithaYapa 2007) and *The Tiger Vanquished:LTTE's Story* (New Delhi: Sage, 2010).

[18] For child soldiers of the LTTE, refer to Tamara Herath's *Women in Terrorism: Case of the LTTE* (New Delhi:Sage, 2012).
For suicide bombers of the LTTE, refer to M. Bloom's *Dying to Kill: the Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

As part of a group of illegal immigrants, sixteen in all and all Tamil except for the narrator and since he is not fluent in the Tamil language, he remains preoccupied with his thoughts for most of the journey. It is his stream-of-consciousness, as exemplified in the above quotation which outlines the conflicts that this land, once known as Serendip, has been embroiled in since independence. However, as the narrator in *Dear Vichy* pointed out, news-coverage regarding the "huge humanitarian disaster" transpiring in Sri Lanka is heavily censored, so first-hand knowledge by a person who has lived in the war zone, must be heeded (Fernandopulle, 113).

The civil war(s) of this island, a phase which lasted for over three decades with collateral damage resonating through generations continue to be among the lesser known or even unknown conflict of our times. It is significant thereof that Arasanayagam's collection of stories about the *wars* on the island is entitled "All is Burning". The title refers to *The Fire Sermon*, wherein Shakyamuni/Buddha details the causes for human suffering and advocates the need for detachment from sense perception. In this regard, the narrator's categorising the military action carried out in the north and east as "ethnic cleansing" resonates with the politics of identity that has dominated post-independent Sri Lankan society.[19] This state action, undertaken ostensibly in the quest for peace, has, as the narrator states augmented the suffering of the civilian population, particularly the Sri Lankan Tamils:

> Armies of occupation in their soil. Their sons and daughters too, marital women who have their own regiments, have gone against all the traditions of their society, joining the militant movements. Fighting for a cause. Families broken up. For them seeking political asylum is often a matter of life and death.
>
> (Arasanayagam, 7)

While the above reasons validate the need for political asylum for those belonging to the Tamil community of Sri Lanka, the narrator is wary of being granted asylum on similar grounds since he belongs to the ethnic denomination of the majority. Furthermore, he disavows association with the anti-state JVP movement by defining himself as a "peaceful kind of person" who does not:

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[19] This refers to the armed conflict between the Tigers and the GOSL, termed as the "Eelam Wars", four in all, dated: '83-87; '90-95; '95-2002; 2006-'09.

> Rave and rant against the exploitation of my own people by multinationals and vested interests. (7-8)[20]

The narrator's reason for seeking asylum however, as far as the reader can gauge is the fact that he wishes to lead a life in a land, not blighted by ethnic discrimination and the resulting suffering, as he has witnessed on the island. His journey in this regard is an evolutionary step as it entails transforming the feelings engendered by the ethnic conflict: "….hatred, enmity and violence…"; into humane compassion and respect and dignity for those he has hitherto been coerced into believing were: "strangers, even enemies….people who were trying to divide the country, claim territory for themselves." (Arasanayagam, 9, 8). This journey enables the narrator, born and raised as Sinhalese-Buddhist to transcend the narrowness of ethnic conclaves encouraging distinctions amidst human beings particularly in a land blighted by ethnic conflict. In this regard, choosing the path of an "asylum seeker" or "a refugee" is to tread the path of the Bodhisattva and strive to attain a level of consciousness like the Buddha or the enlightened being (8).[21] It is significant that the epigraph Arasanayagam chooses for this short story which is about seeking refuge from conflict is from the Buddhist text the *Dhammapada*:

> oneself is one's own protector (refuge); what other protector (refuge) can there be? With oneself fully controlled, one obtains a protection (refuge)

The destination of the group is Berlin, a city with a past not free of the violence of ethnic cleansing. Attempts to overcome the parochial mindset that legitimised the holocaust of the Jews is evident in the manner with which Berliners reach out to embrace heterogeneity of cultures and cosmopolitanism evident on the streets of contemporary Berlin wherein urban space is shared by people of different ethnicities. In a decisive move towards overcoming divisions, the Wall that separated East Germany from the West too has been demolished:

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[20] As per the dictates of the JVP, it was the pro-capitalitist stance of governments that was anti-national and hense worth of decimation by violence.

[21] Both the Theravada and Mahayana branches of Buddhist philosophy advocate the extraordinary ability present in each human being to strive to attain the enlightenment of the Buddha. This is referred to as the Bodhisattva www.budsas.org/ebud/ebudha126.html

> There is no East, no West any longer. No Wall…. Berlin has known defeat. The defeat of two World Wars. It is a city that seems to be seeking a new identity, one made up of many nationalities and races, not just pure Aryan alone.
>
> (Arasanayagam, 18)

Cosmopolitanism however, even when as a desired state of civil society is a process is also the deferred utopian dream, as the case of the city of Berlin shows.[22] Ugly acts of racial discrimination, as the narrator knows and has learnt through media reports are a recurring phenomenon, in Germany, as also in other parts of an otherwise cosmopolitan European society. Reports of racist acts by groups such as the neo-Nazi's, the Redheads and the Skinheads cannot be wished away. However, in the spirit of Berlin, striving towards a more compassionate and evolved manner of existence, the narrator and the other immigrants too wish to strive, adapt, evolve and shed their former labels of identification, earned by acts which classified them unilaterally with death and violence, as: "'….terrorists, militants, subversives, misguided youth…'", and so forth (6). It is in this regard that the narrator juxtaposes this *illegal* journey traversing national borders without visas and passports, with the passion of a spiritual pilgrimage. Like a pilgrimage, this journey too is undertaken in the hope of cleansing and purifying the human spirit, weary with the violence it has hitherto been made to partake.

Guides, paid to enable the group to reach their destination take them through the travails of the Siberian desert. The text describes the harrowing terror and even humiliation this journey entails. To avoid detection the group travels along the paths most unlikely to be trodden; paths covered with frozen ice and then they are stacked above crates for hundreds of miles in transport containers and even packed behind rows of frozen meat carcasses. On account of the silence necessitated by this journey and on account of the language barrier between him and the other immigrants, the narrator's mind wanders across space and time to recollect similar such journeys he has read about. He recollects the historic experience of the plantation workers transported from South India, two centuries ago by the colonising British. They were deployed as bonded labour to clear-out vast swats of uncultivable forest for the coffee, tea and rubber plantations in

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[22] For cosmopolitanism, read Timothy Brennan. *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge: Harvard UP 1997).

Ceylon.[23] This community of workers were made to endure inhuman hardships as they travelled across: '"thick, animal-infested jungles…. So many died on the way of cholera, dysentery, malaria." (Arasanayagam, 4).

Once the group arrives at territories designated "no man's land", the guide instructs the members to destroy all documents connecting them to the identities by which they were known on the island: '"from now on, no identity. No identity. You understand that? Any record pertaining to identification which link the travellers with their '"national origins'" and ethnicities, such as '"passports, visas and diaries -- must be destroyed.'" (12). Ironically it is the same norms of the nation-state which deemed their journey as "illegal" which now enables them to enact an annihilation of their previous national and ethnic identities and adopt brand new and fresh identities. It is as if the past may never have happened, except in memory. On their new passports, they have new names and are declared (illegally) to be inhabitants of other nation. The act acquires symbolic significance considering the importance accorded to ethnic denominations in the land of their birth and it was their ethnicity that determined inclusion or exclusion from economic privileges in the country of their origin. The civil war on the island was carried out on this account. Identity was the burning issue of the day and appeared insurmountable, worth killing and dying for!

The text demonstrates the constructed nature of divisions such as ethnic considering that with the crossing of national borders those ethnic denominations, which hitherto held the power of life or death, have now ceased to exist. The narrator juxtaposes this bureaucratic performance, regarding passports with the symbolism of re-birth. The immigrants may now shed the burden of an identity forged in violence and hatred and productive of further paranoia. They may transcend identities constricting them to unfortunate acts of violence and labelling them as terrorists and subversives.

Among the group are a woman and her child - a boy of seven or eight. The narrator sums her up as: '"….tough woman. Only tender towards the child.'" (2). She may have been a former combat-fighter with the women's wing of the Tigers or then perhaps she could be escaping the peninsula to protect her boy from forced enrolment

[23] The island of Ceylon was renamed Sri Lanka in 1972.

with the Tigers.[24] Arasanayagam highlights the moment of human empathy which draw the narrator towards this mother and her son. The narrator is reminded the younger brother he has left behind - his *malli*. On seeing the boy shiver, the narrator instinctively reaches out for a sweater and even offers to share his food rations with the boy.

No longer bound by conflict and its ideology, the Tamil and Sinhala are no longer "warring" entities but bound by the laws of their shared humanity. In return, the mother offers the narrator refuge at a critical moment when the possibility of deportation looms large. Once in Germany, unlike the woman and her child, received by their relatives and taken into the fold, the narrator, on the contrary, is an alien in a strange land. The Sinhalese and Tamil appear more connected to each other in this alien land and narrator recalls the mythical tale chronicled in the *Mahavamsa* recounting the betrothal of the Tamil Princess Kuveni of South India to the Sinhala prince and founder of the Sinhala race, Prince Vijaya.[25]

Ethnic affiliations however, as the text demonstrates, run deeper than bureaucratic documentation.[26] Once the journey is over, the immigrants prefer to move into the insulation offered in their ethnic conclaves showing thereby the efficacy of cultural and linguistic boundaries regarding social formations. After the journey, the narrator is glad to be accepted back: "among my own" and the mother and child are: "welcomed by their own people" (20).[27] At the same time, the narrative has also implied the altered nature of ethnic belongings in this new territory. The journey moreover has

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24 Strict injunctions were chalked out regarding liaisons between LTTE cadres. Female sexuality, in this regard was closely monitored and controlled by this code of conduct treated as sacrosanct and inviolable by the organisation. The penalty for disobedience was often death unless the union was blessed by the top-rung hierarchy. In this regard the need for asylum by the "mother", in Arasanayagam's story could be a choosing between life or death - for herself and her boy. For more details regarding the female cadres of the LTTE refer to Anne Adele's *Women and the Struggle for Tamil Eelam: Freedom Birds of Tamil Eelam* (Jaffna, Sri Lanka Publications section, LTTE, 1990).

25 This is one of the numerous stories from *The Mahavamasa* – a Pali chronicle, compiled by a Buddhist monk Mahathera Mahanama, and the *vihara* he belonged to, around the fifth century BCE from texts written as early as the third century BCE by Buddhist monks of the Mahavihara explicating the origins of the Sinhala race and the advent of Buddhism on the island. For further details refer to *The Mahavamsa: The Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka* by Mahanama Thera, (trans.) Douglas Bullis (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2005).

26 For further reference regarding the formations and development of ethnic communities, consult Paul Brass, ed. *Ethnic Groups and the State* (New Delhi: Sage, 1985).

27 The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora played a significant role in the Tamil Eelam movement.

asserted the humanity that binds the group together and demonstrated the possibility of, if not surmounting boundaries at least peaceful and cooperative cohabitation.

The two texts discussed so far have pointed to the manner in which state policy in Sri Lanka has engendered modes of belonging and not-belonging. Those excluded are slotted into categories which can broadly be classified as refugees, and these may either be located in the homeland itself - as internally displaced persons, or seek asylum abroad, perhaps even illegally.

The common denominator between categories implying exclusion is the fact that they comprise of communities tangential to the desired nation image which in the case of the nation-state of Sri Lanka is clearly, the majority, the Sinhala-Buddhist. The collateral damage caused by this transformation, in terms of human value is slotted under the rubric "refugee". This transformative act from Ceylon to Sri Lanka and the bureaucratic governance invoked towards legitimising this change, has progressively generated communities of citizens, now dispossessed and traumatised refugees.

The third story selected to add to the discussion for this chapter takes into account the case of the plantation workers of Sri Lanka. This demonstrates yet another facet of the victimization resulting from the move to transform the plural and inclusive cultural ethos of Ceylon into monolith ethnic dimensions. The plantation workers were bonded labour, transported by the British in the early nineteenth century for work on the coffee, tea and rubber plantations of Ceylon. As history records, they were drawn from the lower castes of south India and were deployed for labour intensive tasks such as clearing the forests of the hill country for use of the land as plantations. In this regard, the plantation workers of Ceylon were integral for an economy that continues to thrive on the cash crops produced on the plantations.

This pioneering group of workers came to be known as Hill-Tamils, as life in the plantations located in the hill-country enabled the community to develop a cultural ethos distinct from the Tamils of either India or Sri Lanka. Emphasising their distinctness, M.S Annaraj, specifies:

> Like all other communities in Sri Lanka, the plantation Tamil community too has a separate and distinct identity, a culture and a way of life that is entirely different from that of the other communities, including the other Tamil-speaking communities in Sri Lanka. Their songs, dances, dramas, music and

> traditions are their very own….
> …For a long time they lived in isolation on their estates by design or by necessisity and hardly interacted with the rest of the people in the country. They were born, they lived and died as workers on the estates, leaving their bones to fertilize the soil of the plantations….
>
> (M.S Annaraj, iii)[28]

On account of their low status in the caste hierarchy, the Tamils residing in Jaffna distanced themselves from this group of plantation workers, who subsequently came to be referred to as Indian Tamils as opposed to the appellation - Sri Lankan Tamils - used to denote the latter category.[29] Pilloried as aliens and as outsiders, the Indian Tamils, who had contributed significantly to the economic progress of the island, were disenfranchised soon after independence by an Act of Parliament. After two hundred years of having lived in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, soon after independence, this community was repatriated in large numbers to south India.[30] The alienation they experienced in south India showed that the ancestral links they once shared with India had been severed. Shunted between the two nations - India and Sri Lanka, and subjected to marginalisation by both countries, the plantation workers or Indian Tamils, as they were called – a community that should have been offered the choice of belonging to either of the two countries - was confronted with the damning prospect of statelessness.[31] Pointing out the difference between stateless people and refugees, B.S Chimni has shown that while stateless people are technically considered

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28 *Dreamboats: Short Stories from the Sri Lankan Plantations* ed. M.S. Annaraj and Paul Caspersz,sj (Kandy: Satyodaya Centre, 2004).

29 The fraught status of this community is illustrated by the fact that they have borne the brunt of a series of attacks, documented as: 1977, 1983, 2000, on account of being associated with the Tamil community. Expressing this dilemma, Jagian Morgan, a field officer at the estate states: "The Tamils, think we are not like them and the government does not help us because ethnically we are Tamil". https://www.opendemocracy.net/openindia.

30 The parliamentary moves enabling disenfranchisement began with the introduction of the Ceylon Citizenship Act in 1948 followed by certain amendments made to the Parliamentary Election Act. This was also a breakaway from the universal franchise recommended by the Donoughmore Commission in 1928. The political anxiety motivating these parliamentary legislations were based on the weakening of the Sinhala base in the Hill country on account of the large number of Indian Tamil voters and to dissipate the threat of Marxist infiltration into the estate trade unions, as plantation cash crops were and continue to be the mainstay of the Sri Lankan economy. Refer to *History of Sri Lanka* by K.M de Silva, and Rajan Hoole's "Missed Opportunities and the Loss of Democracy: the disenfranchisement of Indian Tamils 1948-49" uthr.org

31 The Sirimo-Shastri Pact of 1961 led to the repatriation of 60,000 persons of Indian Origin to India and 375.000 were accepted as citizens of Sri Lanka.

a category apart from refugees, the trauma endured by people in either of these categories, on account of acts of governance, is much the same.

S. Paneerselvam's story *My Motherland*, addresses this issue of displacement from the point of view of one such plantation worker. The narrator of Paneerselvam's story, a senior bureaucrat recently posted to the hill-country is disturbed by the spectacle of a drunken vagabond imploring the inhabitants of this hill-side town to pay heed to his story:

> "Why are you going on as if you haven't seen or heard me? Wouldn't at least one of you stop awhile and ask me about my plight?" (Pannerselvam, 14)

After office-hours, the bureaucrat returns to find the derelict in a rare moment of clarity and coherence. The derelict vagabond, in this rare moment of clarity and coherence narrates the cause of his dereliction and dispossession. He informs the narrator that he was born on the island which he considers his "motherland" (15). He was ten years of age when his parents were repatriated to India:

> suddenly the Prime Ministers of the two countries signed an agreement. Every human feeling was squeezed out of this agreement
>
> (Pannerselvam,17)

The plight of the vagabond, as the bureaucrat realises is the plight of the community of plantation workers. The plantation worker, now rendered into a derelict vagabond describes his/their blighted, homeless condition and sense of alienation at being ousted from the newly nationalised countries:

> "….we were frightened to speak in our mother tongue….we were humiliated as *kallathonie*s (illegal immigrants), *thottakarans* (estate people) and stateless people. We were looked down as Indian-Tamils. We didn't even have the right to vote."
> "….Wherever I went I was branded a refugee…".
> "…. I have carried the burden of life in two countries, two generations and lakhs of people…."
>
> (Pannerselvam, 17)

This semiotics of this emotive connection with the land/motherland can well be compared to the semiotic bond between mother and infant as conceptualised by Julia Kristeva in her theory of the semiotic. The semiotic as per Kristeva, is the prenatal, pre-

lingual communication as it exists between mother and child. Contrapuntal to this is what Kristeva refers to as the Law of the Father or the realm of the symbolic which comprises of acquired societal behaviour including communicable language and the unwritten codes of power as they operate in any given society.[32] In the context of Paneerselvam's text, this sense of hectoring is evident in exclusionary policies of government as they veer towards cultural nationalism.

Ironincally, despite the rejection the plantation community was subjected to by the other Tamil groups on the island they were not spared from the violence of ethnic demarcations. As the vagabond explains to the officer, the plantation workers have, as a matter of routine been subjected to mental and physical tortured by the state authorities on account of their Tamil affiliations.

Rejected by civil society formations of both nations – Sri Lanka and India, the plantation Tamils are unanimously referred to, and treated, as refugees in both the countries. On account of the politics between nation-states, the term resonates of the pejorative and parasitical associations it has come to acquire in recent times.[33] The easy use of this slur for persons and communities that have contributed significantly to the societies they have been living in shows the how societies are being increasingly balkanised depending on the ethnic group that commands a majority.

To be labelled a "refugee" means more than traversing national boundaries or to be straddled between belonging to two nation-states. The process, as the three texts discussed have proven, can be traumatic, and inhumanly brutalising. The experience may be explained by referring to Kristeva's concept of the "abject" which she explains in *The Powers of Horror* as essential for human existence. The abject as per Kristeva exists:

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[32] Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

[33] Semiotics of the term "refugee", differ in the subcontinent (as discussed in this chapter) and the western perception, particularly after the influx of refugees from the Middle-East into Europe. As history records, the flight of the Parsi community from Iran and their asylum in Surat was not perceived with paranoia; nor for that matter did the Partition refugees camping on the grounds of the Red Fort in Delhi meet with alienation. While the same may not hold true for the refugees from Bangladesh and Nepal, Refugees thus have commanded a phenomenon presence in the nation-states of South Asia.

> On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. …. Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck…. Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection.
>
> (Kristeva ,1982: 11)

In contemporary times, refugees and Internally Displaced Persons are no longer just the 'other' of cultures apart from the self or those who are legitimately part of the nation but rather they are the abject for the new nation and its majoritarian mode of self-fashioning. They are those who are part of the national-self but violently rejected and rendered abject as the new nation seeks to define its cultural limits and set its ethnic boundaries.

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# CONCLUSION

The five chapters of this thesis have addressed the Sri Lankan conflict in the following manner:

In the introduction, I have provided a brief history of the political turmoil in Sri Lankan following independence and the onset of electoral democracy. I have focussed on determining acts of parliament such as the "Sinhala-Only" act of 1965; the rise of the JVP; the LTTE and the movements towards establishing ethnic identities within this scenario. I have focussed on three viewpoints posited towards explaining the ethnic -conflict. These are, mythological, as explicated by Lasiri Fernando; the determining effects of economic policy as posited by V. Nithiyanandam and the colonial mapping of the colony of Ceylon as illustrated by Nihal Perera. I have outlined my methodological intent as steering clear of meta-narratives such "terrorism", "ethnicity" or even "trauma-studies" or "studies in violence", as is the practice in study of conflict and focussed rather on the micro-narratives, the local reasons and voices, rather than universalising global trends. This methodology is in ideologically in tandem with the fundamental intent of this study which is to celebrate the diversity and plurality of our common humanity and to build societies that are just and equitable not sundered by the politics of identity. Literature in this regard proved to be the apt discipline, as the literary narratives with their focus on voices otherwise marginalised by state-histories of conflict, opened-up the space for interrogating and re-formulating established concepts and ideas. Literature moreover, enabled me to focus on the pain of the survivors.

My first chapter focussed on the first post-independence insurrection on the island - the Seventy-One insurgency - also referred to as the student insurgency. The texts selected for the discussion showed how youth unrest on account of growing unemployment, the welfare schemes initiated towards free-education and mainly on account of the dissemination of JVP ideology, culminated in this debacle. A focus on this event deflects attention from the Tamil resistance to the GoSL and draws attention instead to the lesser-known Sinhalese resistance to the GoSL which also took the form of a deadly armed insurrection. The discussion for this chapter included

diverse viewpoints, ranging from early commentators such as Fred Halliday to contemporary scholars such as Gananath Obeysekera; experts on terrorism such as, Rohana Gunaratna; testimonials of insurgents as documented by the Hon. A.C Alles, as chairperson of the judicial inquiry on the student-rebels and also the writings of Rohana Wijeweera, the leader of the youth movement. The literary texts discussed in this section were *Curfew and a Full Moon* (Ediwira Sarachchandra), *An Asian Gambit* (James Goonewardene) and *A Rebel* (Punyakante Wijenaike). My analysis highlighted the fact that while popular renditions of this event, including the three texts mentioned, empathise with the youth thereby aligning themselves with the dominant perception of the student-rebels as "misguided" or "misled", it is the stance regarding cultural nationalism which shows the political leanings of the author and illustrated the wide reach of ethnic ideology. In this regard, while Ediwira Sarachchandra upholds the idea of Sri Lanka as a pure Sinhala-Buddhist nation, James Goonewardene is deeply critical of it and Punyakante Wijenaike addresses the issue through the lens of female emancipation vis-à-vis these new political transformations. I have also shown how ideas of "cultural authenticity" and "ethnic purity", dominated the public sphere at this time, as these theories figure prominently through the thesis. Thus, D.C.R.A Goonetilleke dismisses Goonewardene's denunciation of Sinhala nationalism by labelling him a "cultural alien" and a person completely bereft of a *proper* understanding of the Sinhalese way of life. I have also cited from sources documenting the trial of the rebels and of the leader Rohana Wijeweera.

The second chapter continued with the line of inquiry set in the first to show how critical response to writings on the Sri Lankan war by the diaspora are judged by standards of cultural authenticity as set-in-place by the new nationalism/patriotism. With an illustrious diaspora, comprising of Reinzi Cruz, Michael Ondaatje, Ru Freeman, Yasmin Gooneratne, Chandini Lokuge and Shyam Selvadurai among others, it was the reception of Romesh Gunesekera's texts on the island-nation that was met with vituperative criticism. Celebrated in the western world for his prose and conferred with awards of literary merit; in Sri Lanka however the critical reaction was markedly different. For this, I drew on the critical analysis of Walter Perera and Thiru

Kandiah among others to illustrate the reception of Gunesekera's much acclaimed novel *Reef*. Subsequently, the author chose to set Heaven's Edge, on an unknown island and obfuscated the time-period. The text nonetheless is about war and peace in entirety. Unable to critique the text as it had no overt link with Sri Lanka, Minoli Salgado laments this lack of "knowable" registers. Critics from the island follow suit.

My analysis has evaluated the criticism against the writer's message. I have therefore shown Gunesekera's concern with the psychic effects of violence and with the effects of chemical warfare on the environment; factors that did not as much as merit a mention by the in-house critical brigade. This is borne out by a study of *Heaven's Edge* wherein on account of being located on an unnamed island and indefinable time-period enabled the author to offer a thorough dissection of the brutalising effects of armed conflict on the people and the environment. The question of peace has been accorded equal importance in this text. I have discussed this by drawing on the peace debates raging on the island during this time and as typified by the arguments posited by Mark Jurgensmeyer, Peter Schalk and Gananath Obeysekera. Gunesekera's stance regarding peace however is different, and may best be described as active non-violent resistance. In my analysis, this is strikingly similar to the idea of non-violent resistance as posited by M.K Gandhi in the concepts of *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* and as put into practice at the Sabarmati Ashram.

The intolerance regarding Gunesekera's texts, as my discussion has shown is mainly on account of the fact that the critics in question feel that his representations of the island ranges between the tropical paradise of yesteryears to the death-trap of contemporary times. Ire against this representation of the present situation, as my analysis has stated, has led to an obstinate myopia regarding the message and aesthetics of Gunesekera's Sri Lankan novels. My discussion in this chapter ahs brought out these nuanced features while along-with addressing the criticism.

Chapter Three focused on women voices from this war and highlighted the concerns articulated by women, caught as they were, in the midst of a seemingly endless ethnic conflict that was tearing asunder the familial space of the home and chalking out new roles for them. The absence of men folk, on account of the war had

led to a sharp increase in women-headed households. I began this chapter by addressing gender constructions and the manner in which these become all the more pronounced during war-time. This was followed with nationalist constructions of women in both Sinhala and Tamil cultures and their reliance on idealised notions of womanhood, particularly motherhood. My focus in this chapter was on a movement of resistance, referred to as the "Mother's Front". This non-violent mode of protest originated out of the customary concern a mother would show for a child who had just "disappeared" while under judicial custody. While this common grievance brought the mother's together as they demanded information regarding their progeny, it could not surmount the divide that had been constructed between the north and south or Tamil and Sinhala communities; so immense was this politicisation of ethnic affiliation! The movement however succeeded in breaking-down the patriarchal strictures of passivity, silence and privacy otherwise stringently imposed on women. The grief and the loss which the women had suffered were the tools used by the Mother's Front to confront the government, demand reprisal and win empathy. A surge of poetic writing by women, particularly mother's, documenting their plight, was also witnessed during this time.

My texts in this chapter have comprised of a selection of poetry written by mothers from different backgrounds. This has ranged from the mother's of armed forces personnel, to civilian mothers battling to protect their families from the war. I have also included poetry by women cadres of the LTTE and finally poetry written by the pre-eminent Sri Lankan poet, Jean Arasanayagam. The difference in the style of the poet and the poetic texts in first-person present an interesting aesthetic comparison even as one remembers that these are but different ways in which the history of the island-nation is being documented as is the pain and suffering caused by the ethnic conflict.

My analysis, particularly for the poem by the LTTE cadre, Captain Vanathi, has also shown how normative constructions of womanhood explicated through symbols such as the *kumkum* and the *tali* are used to define the new role that women in the *Illivar* were called upon to perform. Reference to these symbols moreover is indicative of the world beyond the battlefield or the activities partaken by women

during peacetime and by contrast, the consciousness of the female cadre regarding the sacrifices she is making for the homeland yet to be realised, *Eelam*.

The poetry of Jean Arasanayagam on the other hand is objective and detached unlike the other texts discussed in this chapter. Her war poetry documents the pain and suffering of those around her that she bears witnesses to even as her aesthetic documents the reverberating effects of violence and not the causes or legitimacy of the war. Scenes from the Homeric epic, *The Illiad* depicting peace, war and the bonds between men and women have been a constant source of enrichment for the discussion of this chapter.

Chapter Four focuses on Tamil resistance. Since the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have been a major player on this front, this chapter began with the formation of the LTTE on the peninsula and its subsequent domination of Sri Lankan Tamil politics. This chapter takes into account three authors and five novels. A. Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*, explicates the transformation of race-relations between the Tamil and Sinhalese. The text draws on an important facet of post-independence Sri Lankan history – the politics involved in the re-writing of the past to suit the new power structures. It also draws attention to histories of tolerance and peaceful co-existence, as was the norm on the island of Ceylon. Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* explores the different ways in which one may be Tamil, thereby undercutting any notion of a culturally homogenised Tamil identity. With *Cinnamon Garden's*, Selvadurai looks at the final years of colonial rule and the administrative decisions of the Donoughmore Commission which were to affect ethnic relations in the future. What is also highlighted is the ascendancy of the Tamil community to positions of power under the colonial rule. The Mudaliyar has made his fortune working for the colonial office. His mansion and way of life are exemplary of the best of colonial culture. After independence, it was this factor that irked the majority. With the *Hungry Ghosts*, Selvadurai completes the final act in this sad saga of ethnic genocide. The text is about the creation of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. The island however, practically purged by now of the Tamil race, is not exactly what one would refer to as a haven of peace and conviviality. The war may have ended but decades of bloodshed, xenophobia and apartheid have left indelible marks on the social fabric.

Buddhism, as the title of the text illustrates, is present only in theory, the spirit of compassion, so integral to the Buddhist way of life has no place in this new society founded on murder and bloodshed. In this chapter, I have also used Ernest Macintyre's play, *Rasanayagam's Last Riot*, wherein the playwright enacts a symbolic representation of the ethnic war on the island trough the depiction of an inter-ethnic union between a Sinhalese and a Tamil. By showing the marriage moving from a state of indifference regarding ethnicity to an acute awareness of the same, Macintyre is able to depict the historical trajectory of the island as enacted in the move from Ceylon to Sri Lanka. While this chapter ahs taken into account the entire gamut of Sri Lankan Tamil resistance, it has deconstructed the idea of identity as unitary and of ethnicity, which is but one component comprising the identity of an individual, as fixed, static and essential.

Chapter Five dealt with the repercussions of this ethnic war which lasted over three decades by focussing on the refugees and internally displaced person's generated. While both these terms have been well defined in official and general parlance, they are laden with the semiotics of loss, dispossession and trauma and this is perhaps best illustrated through the telling of stories. I discussed here the international bureaucratic standpoint regarding refugees and the refugee question on the subcontinent placing the Sri Lankan issues within these parameters. The three stories, Neil Fernandopulle's *Dear Vichy*; Jean Arasanayagam's *All is Burning* and S. Panerseelvam's *My Motherland*, addressed the situation from the viewpoint of gender, national identity and the Tamil plantation workers respectively. My analysis showed refugees from the island-nation, a category that includes the IDP's and plantation workers, to be the outcome of the Sinhala-Buddhist self-fashioning of the nation-state. This chapter concluded with Julia Kristeva's formulation of the idea of the "abject" and its applicability to the present situation.

**II**

On 19th May 2009, after a long-drawn battle, the GoSL declared that the enemy, the LTTE, had been vanquished and the war was finally over. However, "nearly 3000,000 war-zone Tamils" were still "incarcerated in fortified 'refugee camps' ". (Deshapriya, 2015, 89). As Sunanda Deshapriya writes, rather than taking

the requisite steps to ease inter-ethnic tensions, in the aftermath of this military victory what one witnessed rather, was: " a mentality of triumphalism", with the Tamils being treated as the "defeated enemy", who in turn perceived the Sinhalese as "encroachers and military-backed colonisers.", on their land. (Deshapriya, 2015, 89).

How would reconciliation be possible in this scenario? Why was the defeat of the LTTE taken as the defeat of the Tamils? How then is it possible to achieve an interaction based on mutual respect and understanding? On the 8th of August however, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, granting the usage of Tamil in Tamil dominated areas was abolished. Senior Tamil politician of the TULF, Anndasangaree, in an open letter to President Rajapaksesaid expressed grief at the manner in which the Tamils were being discriminated now more than ever before:

> However much you may boast that the country is now back to normal, I am sure that in your own mind you are not convinced so. I speak on behalf of the minority communities. I am convinced more than anybody else that the minorities feel discriminated more than ever before.
>
> (*http://www.srilankabrief.org/2012/12/i-am-convinced-more-than-anybody-else.html*)

As this thesis has shown, "peace" has been an elusive, fraught and much debated term on the island-nation since independence. An end to the war should have meant an opportunity for the inhabitants of the island to live their lives without the fear of violence and with dignity and mutual tolerance. Sadly, as expressed by Anndasangaree and Deshapriya, the question eludes civil society on the island even today. In this regard, it may be worthwhile to reiterate the Preamble to the UNESCO Constitution, which states that: "since Wars begin in the minds, it is in the minds of men [and women] that the defences of peace must be constructed." (www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/.../constitution/) To achieve durable peace then would mean addressing the core issue of the ethnic conflict which is the majoritarianism of the Sinhalese-led government and the resultant discrimination. Peace in such a situation would mean doing away with discrimination at the level of state formation. This means constitutional amendments safeguarding the collective rights not just of Tamils but all minorities in Sri Lanka and making provisions for the sharing of power.

The Sri Lankan case offers valuable political lessons to the world particularly since ethnic/racial conflict appears to be the order of the day. Sri Lanka with a long history of Buddhist philosophy took readily to the concept of universal suffrage and as Gananath Obeysekera points out, Sri Lanka had: "the largest voluntary voter turnout in the whole world" (Obeysekera, 1989, 107) but in a post-war scenario it is the deep emotional and psychological scars of war that must be assuaged. Taking in account the duration of the civil war, ethnic biases and prejudices would dominate the ideological thinking of members of both communities. These would need to be addressed and redressing of the damage, for tolerance and acceptance of cultural difference, would take a longer time. Unfortunately, peace remains an elusive term given the ground reality in the aftermath of war.

In this case, peace is concomitant upon changes in the political structure of the state of Sri Lanka and these must range from policies of employment to the administration of justice through all different layers of the state apparatus. In a multi-ethnic society the role of the state as ethnically and religiously impartial is of paramount importance, as this study has shown. This thesis has drawn attention to the manner in which a culture of intolerance can be perpetuated by government policy and the manner in which it affects civil society at large. The argument that has been elucidated throughout this study is that the ethnic conflict on the island-nation was rooted primarily in the structure of state policy and therefore any resolution of the tension has to be based on a restructuring of the state system particularly with regard to opportunities for education and employment. The task of reconciliation will involve restructuring of the policies which lent a monolith character to the state of Sri Lanka and uninhabitable for anybody not of the Sinhala-Buddhist denomination. Democratisation at all levels of state structures, education, employment and public education programmes is the way towards ethnic reconciliation and human rights.

In this regard Sri Lanka is facing pressure from the international community and in March 2012 the Human Rights Council of the United Nations passed a resolution calling for accountability and transparency and for an independent investigation of violations of international human rights during the last phase of the war. The Sri Lankan state needs to make a fundamental change in its approach to

human rights and governance on the one hand and reconciliation and equal rights on the other if peace is to be achieved not in terms of a military victory but as mutual cohabitation and equal rights.

**III**

As literary representations of the civil war in Sri Lanka, this thesis has brought together myriad articulations in diverse literary genres, with the purpose of addressing the conflict from varied vantage points. The war, as the five chapters summarised above demonstrated, has been represented from the Sinhalese, Tamil, expatriate, women and refugee viewpoints. An apt metaphor for this methodology would be a mosaic with the different pieces fitted together to exemplify a pattern; in this case a pattern that has sought to fragment a monolith and overarching term such as "war" or "conflict" into the numerous narratives that comprise it and are in turn also affected by it. It is for this reason that I have steered clear of all-encompassing, universalistic theories that purport to explain the broad-based idea of "War".

My argument with such theories is that they ignore the localised dimensions which are unique and peculiar to each conflict, and it will be no better than a generalised understanding which will be achieved if one tries to grasp the conflict using similar such meta-narratives. The roots of a conflict and the violence that accords it expression are to be realised through causes peculiar to the region, its history, politics and culture, and must be addressed as such, as this thesis has proven.

My methodology has therefore focussed on the localised aspects of the Sri Lankan civil war and the violence that accrued therein. This thesis has shown that any idea that seeks to homogenise conflict is as dangerous as it is futile.

Violence, sadly and needless to say is a staple feature of conflict. In this regard, I have not engaged with debates regarding the represent- ability of violence or whether the violence that transpired was of a sanctioned, legitimate and therefore justifiable nature. However, as the texts that aided this discussion have shown, such aspects are of immense concern to the parties engaged in the conflict. It is the effects of violence on people caught in this quagmire of hatred that has been my concern here

and the same holds true for the narratives that have contributed towards the making of this study.

This war, on account of the two main ethnicities on the island, the Sinhalese and the Tamil, has been referred to as an ethnic conflict. Sri Lanka however has also been home to diverse communities including Malays, Muslims and Burghers, among others and my thesis has shown the parochial aspect of post-independence nationalisms that were based on and in turn bolstered borders and boundaries based on ethnicity among a people who had cohabited for centuries. The term ethnic conflict is, as Michael Roberts (cited earlier-on in this study) termed, a: "convenient shorthand" for the wide-ranging political and cultural changes resulting from the transformations of the island of Ceylon into the Sinhala-Buddhist nation-state of Sri Lanka. It is on this account that I began this thesis with the comparatively lesser-known, Seventy-One insurgency and not with the LTTE. This thesis has also shown that the ethnic purging that transpired on account of the self-fashioning of this new nation began as a reaction to a dismal post-independence economic situation and the laws passed by the parties in governance to appease the majority electorate. It is the manner in which this parochialism in matters of government policy tore asunder the lives of individuals, is what makes for the matter of literature. My thesis has focussed on the pain of the survivors, on both sides of the ethnic divide and has proven the indispensability of works of literature for studies on conflict.

This thesis is dedicated towards fostering recognition of our common humanity and promoting an inclusive, just and peaceful society wherein our diverse identities would be recognised, promoted and even celebrated. I hope to do this by enabling a deeper understanding of identity politics and the terror of armed-conflict.

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