

# **Dissident Voices**

Sociocultural Transformations  
in Sri Lankan Post-Independence Novels  
in English

Árný Aurangasri Hinriksson

Dissertation towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Iceland  
The School of Humanities  
Faculty of Foreign Languages, Literature and Linguistics  
November 2014

Deild erlendra tungumála, bókmennta  
og málvísinda við Háskóla Íslands  
hefur metið ritgerð þessa hæfa til varnar  
við doktorspróf í enskum bókmenntum

Reykjavík, 14. sept. 2014

Hólmfríður Garðarsdóttir  
deildarforseti

The Faculty of Foreign Languages, Literature and Linguistics  
at the University of Iceland  
has declared this dissertation eligible for a defense  
leading to a PhD degree in English Literature

Doctoral Committee:

Guðrún Björk Guðsteinsdóttir, supervisor

Walter Senath Perera

Martin Regal

*Dissident Voices*

© Árný Aurangasri Hinriksson

Reykjavík 2014

Thesis for a doctoral degree at University of Iceland. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the prior permission of the copyright holder.

ISBN 978-9935-9189-7-0

Printed by: Háskólaprent ehf

## **Acknowledgements**

This dissertation was written at the Department of English of the University of Iceland.

My main supervisor, Professor Guðrún Björk Guðsteinsdóttir, has been a constant source of ideas, gentle criticism and vast encouragement for which I am deeply obliged. I would like to thank her immensely for all her very valuable suggestions for the improvement of this thesis and I must acknowledge an immense debt to her for her enthusiasm and for her labouring tirelessly to help me locate material needed. Also, I wish to profusely thank my co-supervisor, Professor Walter Perera, of the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, for his clarifying insights on issues that my thesis addresses, all the supervisory support and for providing some of the articles and books required to read for my thesis. His comments and advice made me view the thesis afresh from the perspective of Sri Lanka's history, and he has immeasurably improved my prose and citation. I offer my sincere thanks also to Dr. Nihal Fernando for providing some valuable books and advice. I must gratefully acknowledge the helpful and critical comments of Professor Martin Regal which sharpened the text considerably.

I owe all my teachers in the Department of English at the University of Iceland a significant intellectual debt, especially my previous supervisor, Professor Julian Meldon Darcy. I am also thankful to the Ministry of Education in Iceland and the University of Iceland for the travel subsidies given to me during my study period. A special word of gratitude should be awarded to Rohina Usman Johnston Macan Markar, for graciously hosting me in Colombo, during my many study visits to Sri Lanka



## Abstract

After four and a half centuries of Western colonial rule, at the time when Sri Lanka obtained Independence from the British in 1948, there were high hopes among all ethnic communities living in the country that the new era would bring far-reaching economic and political changes. However, the economic and social legacy left behind by the British was not adequate enough to solve the problems that were to emerge during the first five decades after Independence. Two insurgencies, the first in 1971 and the second from 1987-89 were followed by a protracted ethnic war between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. The insurgencies were effectively part of a violent class struggle initiated by the educated but disenchanted Sinhalese youth of the country, who were unable to prosper under post-Independence Governments. The age-old Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic animosities and tensions were exacerbated by the Tamil demand for autonomy and a separate state, and resulted in thirty years of civil war.

During the post-Independence period, a considerable range of new Sri Lankan literature in English emerged, written both by residents and expatriates and some of these novels, unsurprisingly, centred their themes on these social upheavals and ethnic polarizations. This dissertation focuses on a number of novels by Sri Lankan writers whose thematic concerns are the sociocultural and political climate of the country after Sri Lanka gained Independence. My main aim is to examine their depiction of the implications of British colonial rule, and the various whiplash effects of volatile civil conflicts that ensued when colonial oppression and rule by division was lifted. Indeed, the rationale behind the selection of novels, which spans the period from 1948-2012, is to be found in the degree to which they are successful in articulating the violent aftermath of Independence. Within this broader framework, the novels exhibit further thematic parallels and contrasts on a range of issues, including national identity, language, ethnicity and post-colonial education.

All the novels regarding the insurgencies deal with the reality of colonial/Western education which has conditioned upward social and economic mobility to an exclusive urban class. They illuminate some of the crucial issues of the rising expectations and ambitions, as well as the growing disillusionment of the Sinhala-educated youth that led them into insurgency, in a country affected by chronic unemployment and underemployment. Many of them criticize colonialism which left them in a state of poverty and led them to hold in fierce contempt people, organisations, and systems that continue to follow colonial methods and culture. The narratives are rife with revolutionary political rhetoric and express the need for drastic changes to fulfil the aspirations of the poor segments and thus to reduce the inequities and inequalities in Sri Lankan society.

Tamil novelists writing on the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic conflict implicitly and explicitly bring to light a series of concerns regarding human rights; their writings are subtle interrogations of the failure of the post-Independence governments of Sri Lanka as well as commentary on the nature of social injustices that resulted from blatant discrimination in the country's linguistic, territorial and social policies. These novelists dramatize the magnitude of psychological and physical damage engendered by the war and effects of war upon the common people, displaying conscious awareness of the power of their writings to serve as a forum to air their grievances to a global as well as a local audience. They portray the members of the Tamil liberation movement as heroic freedom fighters and highlight the repressive use of the State's military forces against innocent Tamil people in the North. As such, these novels are powerful political critiques.

In contrast, the novels of Sinhalese authors are written from a privileged position, speaking on the whole for the marginalized groups. Overall, they see the separatist struggle as unacceptably violent and frequently highlight the enormity of the problem of terrorism in the country and focus on the destruction and disruption caused by subversive terrorist activities. They bypass the question of government responsibility for military excesses in the North and North East, and the passing of discriminatory legislation which affected the Tamil community economically and educationally. On the other hand, they admit a few conspicuous incidents of grave Sinhalese atrocities committed against the Tamil people.

The moral sensibilities conspicuous in all the novels are the authors' creative fervour and crusading zeal with which they concern themselves with grave social problems that assail Sri Lanka. They seem to formulate their observations and insights in close touch with contemporary realities and their works are essentially ideology-infused literature which envisions alternative social possibilities. Both the Sinhalese insurgents and the Tamil militants are depicted as revolting groups motivated to fulfil their aspirations by violent means. The novels are works of literature that record the course of these sociocultural developments and the authors are not only social reformers but also humanitarian publicists. However, the insurgencies and the ethnic war seem to have evoked a state of moral dilemma and aggravated a revulsion against violence. What unifies all the analysed novels is the authors' singleness of intention and genuine concern that peace prevail and that the people of Sri Lanka are able to live without interference from tyrannical State authority.

## Ágrip

Ritgerð þessi er á sviði nýlendu- og eftirlendufræða og bókmennta minnihlutahópa. Rýnt er í skáldsögur Sinhala og Tamíla, brottfluttra jafnt sem heimamanna, sem skrifaðar voru á ensku á árunum 1948-2012 um átökin í Sri Lanka. Nýlenduástand hafði ríkt í Sri Lanka í 450 ár þegar landið fékk sjálfstæði frá breska heimsveldinu árið 1948. Öll þjóðarbrotin væntu að sjálfstæðinu myndi fylgja nýir og betri tímar með efldum fjárhag og bættum stjórnarháttum.

Stjórnar- og menningararfleifð Breta reyndist þó ekki fallin til þess að takast á við vandamálin sem blöstu við næstu fimm áratugi sjálfstæðis. Tvær uppreisnir voru gerðar, sú fyrri árið 1971 en sú seinni á árunum 1987-89, og við bættust langtíma átök á milli Sinhala meirihlutans og minnihluta Tamíla. Uppreisnirnar voru uppgjör menntaðra ungmenna úr dreifbýli sem þeir fundu sér ekki farveg í því samfélagi sem stjórnvöld mótuðu að fengnu sjálfstæði, en krafa Tamíla um aðskilnað og sjálfstæði ýfðu upp aldagamlar krytur og árekstra á milli Sinhala og Tamíla og ollu borgarastyrjöld sem stóð í þrjátíu ár.

Helstu niðurstöður þessarar rannsóknar eru að enskar skáldsögur skrifaðar í Sri Lanka á tímabilinu sýni glögglega hvernig nýlendurekstur Breta raskaði innbyrðis valddreifingu með því að deila og drottna, og skilja eftir óleyst félags- og menningarleg vandamál sem blossuðu upp af heift þegar heimamenn fengu völdin. Flest skáldverkin sýna átökin á gagnrýninn og oft óvæginn hátt, en beita sér ekki að sama skapi í uppgjöri við breska nýlendutímann; val á tungumáli hefur verið sérstök menningarpólítísk átakamiðja í Sri Lanka en skáldsögurnar sýna sterka viðleitni í átt til sátta og friðar.





## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Ágrip</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Historical Background</b> .....	<b>5</b>
1.1 Dutch and Portuguese Influences.....	5
1.2 The British Period.....	6
1.3 English Language and Western Culture.....	7
1.4 Independence and Rising Nationalism.....	8
1.5 The “Sinhala Only Act” and its Repercussions .....	10
1.6 Sri Lankan Literature in English.....	12
1.7 The Continuing Importance of English.....	13
1.8 The Politics of Language .....	14
1.9 Pioneer Novelists in English after Independence .....	19
<b>2 The Insurrections</b> .....	<b>21</b>
2.1 The Insurrections of 1971 and the Period of 1987-89 .....	21
2.2 Novels Written in English on the Insurgencies.....	30
2.2.1 The Student Involvement .....	31
2.2.1.1 A Professor’s Dilemma and His Rebellious Students Ediriwira Sarachchandra’s <i>Curfew and a Full Moon</i> (1978) .....	31
2.2.1.2 Loss of Innocence <i>The Rebel</i> (1979) by Punyakante Wijenaiké .....	40
2.2.1.3 A Fiery Commitment to Youthful Ambitions <i>The Ginirälla                     Conspiracy</i> (2005) by Nihal de Silva.....	45
2.2.2 Economic Constraints .....	53
2.2.2.1 The Curse of Free Education Raja Proctor’s <i>Waiting for                     Surabiel</i> (1981) .....	53
2.2.2.2 A Struggle for the Rights of the Rural Folk <i>An Asian Gambit                     by James Goonewardena</i> (1985) .....	62
2.2.2.3 The Caste Factor and the Newly Bestowed Voting Rights <i>Out                     Out Brief Candle</i> (1981) by M. Chandrasoma .....	68
2.2.3 Exposure of State Terror .....	78

2.2.3.1	The Violation of Journalistic Freedom <i>Of Terror and Trials</i> (1998) by Tennyson Perera .....	78
2.2.3.2	The Task of Identifying the Perpetrators <i>Anil's Ghost</i> (2001) by Michael Ondaatje .....	86
<b>3</b>	<b>The Sinhala-Tamil Ethnic Conflict.....</b>	<b>97</b>
3.1	The Colonial “Divide-and-Rule” Policy .....	97
3.2	Minority Disenchantment .....	99
3.3	British Colonial Culpability .....	99
3.4	The Birth of the Tamil Insurgency.....	102
3.5	Reconciliation Attempts.....	105
3.6	The War Ends but What Next? .....	108
3.7	Novels on the Ethnic Conflict.....	110
3.7.1	The Colonial and Political Implications of the Conflict.....	111
3.7.1.1	Coming out of the Closet <i>Funny Boy</i> (1994) by Shyam Selvadurai .....	111
3.7.1.2	A Subaltern Consciousness <i>When Memory Dies</i> (1997) by A. Sivanandan.....	120
3.7.2	Terrorism, Urban Violence and Civilian Sufferings .....	133
3.7.2.1	A Record of “Man against Man” <i>An Enemy Within</i> (1998) by Punyakante Wijenaik.....	133
3.7.2.2	A Perilous Journey across a Dangerous Strip of Water <i>Kilali</i> <i>Crossing</i> (2002) by C. Suriyakumaran.....	141
3.7.2.3	Mutual Understanding, a Requisite for Peace <i>The Road from</i> <i>Elephant Pass</i> (2003) by Nihal de Silva .....	152
3.7.2.4	A Tale of Love, Death and Duty <i>No Longer My Child</i> (2005) by Arthur de Zoysa .....	163
	<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>173</b>
	<b>Bibliography of Primary Works .....</b>	<b>193</b>
	<b>Bibliography of Secondary Sources .....</b>	<b>197</b>

## Introduction

Post-independent Sri Lanka has been plagued by two insurgencies and a protracted ethnic war, which has resulted in a tremendous loss of life, social upheaval, and a significant economic slump. Sri Lankan novelists have found thematic material for their writing in these civil disorders. This dissertation examines a number of novels written in the wake of British decolonization, specifically the insurgencies of 1971 and 1987-89 and the conflict between the two major ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Evidently these two sets of novels are preoccupied with a complex political backdrop and speak of some of the most compelling political and social transformations of contemporary Sri Lanka.

Although a number of articles have been written, there are only a few book-length studies that include the novels in question. Rajiva Wijesinha analyses the significance of social distinctions in Sri Lanka in novels published during the 1980s and 1990s in his collection entitled *Breaking Bounds: Essays on Sri Lankan Writing in English* (1998). D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke's *Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People 1917-2003* (2005) is a timely publication consisting of essays in the field of Sri Lankan literature in English. His book very briefly lists and analyses the main novels published in English after Independence up to 2000, but also includes some discussions of drama and poetry, providing a useful companion to readers of English Sri Lankan literature. *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature and Resistance and the Politics of Place* (2007) by Minoli Salgado, is a collection of essays in which the author analyses the works of a few resident and migrant writers. She discusses how critics have responded negatively to the ways certain diasporic writers have represented Sri Lanka. She examines and compares space, place and home, as well as identity and belonging, in selected novels by James Goonewardena, Punyakante Wijenaikē, Jean Arasanayagam, Carl Muller, Michael Ondaatje, and Romesh Gunesekeera, all of whom are leading novelists of Sri Lanka. Salgado sets a theoretical basis for examining Sri Lankan writing in English by local as well as expatriate writers; she critiques formal political and social relations and other sites of difference, such as the dominant gender and aesthetic ideologies. In a widely researched recent publication titled *Terror and Reconciliation: Sri Lanka Anglophone Literature* (2012) Maryse Jayasuriya analyses a number of novels, short stories and poems about the ethnic conflict that were published during the period of 1983-2009. She examines the influence of the ethnic conflict on Sri Lanka Anglophone literature and has chosen works of both resident and diasporic authors, some of them the same as those selected by Salgado.

However, the need to step back and take a broad historical and comparative overview on Sri Lankan novels in English on the two insurgencies as well as the ethnic conflict prompted my own venture into these contentious and daunting topics, seeking to

research the disparate literary documentation and interpretation of the social changes caused by the conflicts. The novels selected are thus historical and deal with turbulent events related to violent social upheavals in Sri Lanka's recent history. Even decades after Independence, the power structures established during the British period continued to be reproduced and amplified or – significantly – inverted. As Edward Said explains in “Yeats and Colonization”:

The national bourgeoisies and their specialized elites, of which Fanon speaks so ominously, in effect tended to replace the colonial force with a new class-based and ultimately exploitative one, which replicated the old colonial structures in new terms. There are estates all across the formerly colonized world that have bred pathologies of power, as Eqbal Ahmad has called them. (295)

The urban upper class of English-speaking Sri Lankan administrators alienated the Sinhala speaking masses. But they also brought about economic and social reversals for the Tamil community after the British colonizers left – the marginalization of the Tamil language and the threat to their identity.

The “contested geographies” and the “partitions” of “irreconcilabilities” in Sri Lanka after Independence are thus the result of “the habitual, imperial legacy,” according to Said in an interview from 1999 (2000: 437). He suggests that the role of the intellectual entails “the investigation of knowledge and truth” fostered by academic freedom as well as engagement in “clarifying and dramatizing the irreconcilabilities of a particular situation” (437).

Said explains:

To my mind partition hasn't worked. What I'm proposing is to go back to these geographies and to these irreconcilabilities that they represent, and suggest that we start from there and accept them and build around them, instead of saying let's just curtain it off and say this is my part and this is your part. I'm interested in that midpoint where there is that overlap. The nature of experience is, in fact, overlapping. There is no way, for example, of writing Israeli history without Palestinian history, and vice versa. I'm interested in the work of people who are trying to deal with these irreconcilabilities in imaginative ways, either by looking at precisely those things that get left out for which there is no written history or documents. (2000: 437)

This study assumes that “those things that get left out” of official narratives may be found in fictional depictions of the extent to which the British colonial experience transformed the social, political and cultural structures of Sri Lanka. “To make them aware is a service that one can do for one's own people,” says Said about intellectuals (444), but his statement applies equally to literary writers who mediate experience that the official narratives leave out.

The novels reveal the culpability of the British administration for the creation of social conditions that ultimately led to the Southern insurrections and the Northern ethnic conflict. The novels expose a range of pressing contemporary issues that confront Sri Lanka but were created by the larger implications of British colonial rule on national

identity, ethnicity, language and education. Language has played a leading role in colonization as well as in de-colonization, and thus among the objectives of this thesis is to examine the novels on the insurgencies and the ethnic war in terms of their sustained engagement with language, and the critical role language plays in the conflicts; namely, how language affects social dislocation and influences current social trends. With this purpose in mind, this dissertation highlights the language issues embedded in the analysed texts. It explores the historical and political conceptualizations embodied in them and the impact of Western culture and the English language. Taking into account the fact that right after Independence there was an unprecedented wave of national fervour that discouraged writings in English, I examine to what extent the selected novels are prone to incorporate local cultural and historical elements.

This doctoral dissertation is divided into four main chapters. Chapter one treats the historical background of the country which led to social and ethnic struggles and the politics of nationhood. In order to accommodate an understanding of contemporary writing in Sri Lanka, it was necessary to present a brief overview of the historical background of the country and the importance placed on the English language by the urban élite, consulting the official narratives of historians and political analysts of different ethnicity – Sinhalese, Tamil and Burgher – with the aim of establishing some “midpoint where there is that overlap.” Chapter two is devoted to the analysis of eight novels, in which the central themes deal with the 1971 and 1987-89 insurrections in Sri Lanka. Chapter 3 deals with six novels which portray the chaotic political and social situations caused by the thirty-year ethnic conflict that raged in the country. Novels written by Sinhalese and Tamil, as well as resident and diasporic authors are examined, all which present the contemporary social conditions of the country. Chapter 4 collates and assesses the information yielded by the research. Before each main section, the circumstances that led to the insurrections and the festering conflict between the two main ethnic groups the Sinhalese and the Tamils are examined. The controversies that surrounded the passing of the “Sinhala Only Act,” and the social and linguistic forces involved in this development have been discussed in some detail, as they have affected each conflict differently and are to a considerable degree at the core of the problems that have marked the relations between Sri Lanka’s majority Sinhalese community and the minority Tamil community. The dissertation uses the abbreviations JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) and LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) for reasons of brevity.

The theoretical stances taken by major postcolonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha, Frantz Fanon and Edward Said form the basis for this investigation. Since Fanon’s works concentrate on racial stereotypes and postcolonial situations, they were found particularly useful. Parts of India and Sri Lanka were colonized first by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and by the Dutch in the seventeenth century. The Indo-British encounter and the economic exploitation by the three colonists of the two

countries were similar and the struggle for Independence from Britain also had similarities, except that the freedom struggle in India was far more intense. The teaching of English in elite metropolitan schools and the competence of the language to obtain government positions, as well as for upward social mobility, were common to both countries during the British colonial period and decades after Independence. Other post-Independence situations during the process of decolonization were somewhat similar as well, for example, the rising nationalism of different ethnic groups and demands for greater autonomy. Therefore, writings of Indian postcolonial theorists and subaltern study scholars like Gayatri Spivak, Leela Gandhi, Partha Chatterjee and Arun Mukherjee were found to be extremely appropriate. These theorists interrogate the subaltern conditions and effects of British colonization and subsequent Western influences and social transformations which are common to both countries.

# 1 Historical Background

## 1.1 Dutch and Portuguese Influences

Sri Lanka's long encounter with Western colonialism lasted until the middle of the twentieth century, and left an indelible imprint upon the country. Portuguese conquistadores, who arrived in Sri Lanka at the beginning of the sixteenth century, heralded five hundred years of European colonial domination. Displacing the Arab traders who controlled the spice trade, the conquerors established large plantations of cinnamon for export to Europe. It was internal strife between various kingdoms within the country that served as an opportunity for the Portuguese to consolidate themselves in Sri Lanka. According to K. M. de Silva in *A History of Sri Lanka* (2005), the aim of the Portuguese was more economic than political, "One striking feature of Portuguese activities in Asia and Africa was that they did not aim at territorial conquest so much as the control of commerce by subduing and dominating, by means of naval power, the strategic points through which it passed" (2005: 147). In the wake of Portugal's deadly embrace, many locals converted to Catholicism and adopted Portuguese names. By 1600, as described by de Silva, there were widespread discontent and resistance movements against the Portuguese. The driving force behind the dissention, other than the hostility towards the Roman Catholic religion, was "the rigours of Portuguese land policy, the lawlessness of the officials and the government's increased demands for services and goods from the people" (2005: 165). The expulsion of the Portuguese was planned by the Kandyan King Rajasinghe II, with the connivance of the Dutch, and they were displaced in the seventeenth century.

The main attraction for the Dutch was also the abundant availability of cinnamon which grew naturally in Sri Lanka, together with other cash crops like coffee, pepper and cardamom. The Dutch were methodical in all their activities. They built roads to the cinnamon plantations, instituted a system of land registration and established a form of justice based on Roman-Dutch law, which yet remains the bedrock of Sri Lanka's legal system. The Dutch occupation in Sri Lanka was not controlled by a national army but by the Dutch East India Company, which drew its cadres from all over Europe. Regarding the production and sale of cinnamon, de Silva in *Sri Lanka's Troubled Inheritance* (2007), states that:

The capital was theirs, the sales were theirs, and the profits were theirs. The local Sinhalese population, particularly the caste of cinnamon peelers, provided the virtually bonded labour. (2007: 195)

There was widespread discontent during the Dutch period because of their discriminatory land distribution policies favouring Dutch companies and a particular local community belonging to the Southern coastal area and because that profits of the

enormously lucrative cinnamon trade were excluded for the greater benefit of the people. The inefficiency and dishonesty of the Dutch administration are thus recorded by de Silva, “The corruption ranged from the alienation of unoccupied land and the assignment of revenues to high-ranking Dutch officials, to participation by these officials in smuggling and the illegal private trade; the latter included the smuggling of cinnamon [...]” (2005: 255). The Dutch surrendered to the British, and the island became a crown colony of Britain in 1802. Each of these colonists left lasting impressions upon the culture, cuisine and languages of Sri Lanka. The Dutch and the Portuguese colonial past are largely reflected today in the architecture of many buildings, and a considerable number of Dutch and Portuguese words have become part of the local vocabulary. But the period of the British is the most significant, because of the influence of the English language and the systems of education and administration introduced by the British colonizers.

## **1.2 The British Period**

The subjugation of Sri Lanka by European powers such as the Portuguese, Dutch and lastly the British lasted over a period of 450 years, ending in 1948. Colonialism meant subjugation of the indigenous people, cultural subjugation and exploitation of national resources, as stated by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, in order “to provide raw materials for the burgeoning economies of the colonial powers” (46). During the British period, English was made the official language in 1833. Sri Lanka inherited the English language as a result of colonial occupation and colonial ideology. In 1815 the British employed subversion and sabotage to persuade the nobility of the hill country kingdom in Kandy to depose their monarch and surrender their kingdom to the British, which ended a royal line stretching back by 2400 years. Land ownership and distribution of land was controlled by the colonizer and raw material transferred to the colonizing country. The British introduced tea, rubber and cocoa to the island. Roads, railways and harbours were built by the British to facilitate the exploitation of the country’s agricultural produce, gems, minerals and timber and to enhance the circuit of colonial production. As categorically stated in *The Scandal of Empire* (2006) by Nicholas B. Dirks:

Indeed, it is now widely accepted that colonialism had a far greater influence on the colonised world than has been recognized even in accounts that take for granted that empire was driven by the relentless forces of economic and political exploitation. (27)

However, the people of Sri Lanka also benefitted by the development of tea, rubber and coffee plantations from which economic opportunities that had not existed before were created. As it was difficult to force Sinhalese peasants to work as wage-labourers on the huge plantations, thousands of indentured Tamil labourers were imported from South India. They were to live for generations in appalling conditions, isolated from the general populace.



### 1.3 English Language and Western Culture

The island was known as Ceylon during the British colonial period (1815-1948). English was the language of rule and the main purpose of spreading the language was to facilitate administration, which in turn served the purpose of the colonizer. At first, the colonizers drew their officials from their own home country. Later in order to produce a local élite capable of functioning in English and taking up posts within the colonial administration, they began to teach English in urban schools. Today Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic,<sup>1</sup> multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural country.

Sri Lanka absorbed literary and political ideas which reached them through the language and literature of their British rulers. According to de Silva, “The acquisition of an English education had the obvious advantage not only of enhancing an individual’s status and bolstering his self-confidence, but also of giving him easier access to the rulers of the day” (2005: 420). The English language was not spoken by everyone in the country, but about 5-6% of the population when Sri Lanka received Independence.<sup>2</sup> As English became the medium of communication of the colonial administration, members of the subaltern élite fluent in the English language held coveted civil service jobs. According to Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998), apparently for their own good, “Countless colonial intellectuals certainly parroted the lines of their masters” (88). While the power and prestige of those proficient in English increased, those who were not fluent in English became increasingly identified with deprivation and lower status. This postcolonial situation is best explained by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967):

Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilising nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. (18)

Colonial Sri Lanka had two systems of education, the rural and the urban, and each somewhat insulated from the other. Western colonial culture; music, art and literature were dominant elements in the lives of the urban people and those of a class privileged background. The members of the elite educated class enjoyed the favours of the British, and overlooked the larger national interests and tried to imitate the ruling class in order to secure their own personal interests. After Independence, a certain sector of the urban ruling class made every attempt to maintain English as the preferred and dominant language. Referring to the colonial situation in general, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the 2001 population census conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka, of a total population of 16,929,689, 82% are Sinhalese, 4,3% Sri Lankan Tamil, 5,1% Indian Tamil, 7,9% Sri Lankan Moor, 0,2% Burgher, 0,3% Malay and 0,2% other. For further statistics regarding religion see <http://www.statistics.gov.lk>.

<sup>2</sup> The word “Independence” is capitalised by Sri Lankan convention.

and Helen Tiffin in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, describe the urban ruling class as:

a relatively privileged, wealthy and educated élite who maintain a more highly developed capacity to engage in the international communicative practices introduced by colonial domination, and who may therefore be less inclined to struggle for local cultural and political independence. (55)

As a consequence, in post-independent Sri Lanka tensions between the urban leadership and rural power bases increased, while urban society flourished, rural poverty deepened. People who lived in villages felt incompetent and inferior because of their lack of knowledge in English and their lack of access to Western technology, science and commerce. The English language itself had become complicit in the oppression of people and the limit of their command of the language, conditioned the limits of their world. In other words, the English language functioned to install a class difference. The urban, English-educated population has been typecast as Sri Lanka's most anglicized community. The ethnocentrism in the introduction of knowledge controlled by the colonizer was later perpetuated by the Sri Lankan upper class and for many years after Independence had been granted, the situation remained the same. Rohan Gunaratna in *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?* (1990), probes the deep-rooted causes which created a segment of disgruntled Sri Lankans after Independence:

Since Independence, the new rulers developed and modernized the economic system bequeathed to them by the British on the same lines as those chosen by their former masters. The social elite created by them continued to maintain the economic interests of the colonialists. These economic programmes are now well rooted in Sri Lankan society. Similarly, the political structure was modelled on western concepts and designs. Even long after Independence the rulers remained subservient and pliable to the colonial masters. The best of British traditions were kept. To this date the Government functions on the survival of an administrative structure furthering a colonial exploitative system resulting in a widening gap between the rich and poor. It is this which has led to the socio-economic and political crisis of Sri Lanka. (356)

The move towards the increased and popular use of English was not only brought about by the colonizer but also by the Sri Lankans themselves who wished to employ English for social and economic advancement. The source for potential top level managers, professionals, executives and technicians were the urban Westernized schools. This gradual emergence of the new urban élite, endowed with English language skills and all the characteristic insensitivity to the national life outside the cities, similar to the agents of European imperialism, proved to be an indication of danger for the future.

#### **1.4 Independence and Rising Nationalism**

Anti-colonialism in Sri Lanka has taken many forms in the course of the freedom struggle, which were mild compared to that of neighbouring India. In Sri Lanka, resistance was in the form of strikes, rallies, sabotages, inciting speeches and various newspaper articles written by nationalists against the colonial administration. The

ideology behind the freedom struggle was purely a national liberation and the establishment of an independent nation. Prominent anti-colonialist figures in Sri Lanka were mainly Sinhalese politicians, extreme nationalist Buddhist monks and a couple of leading Tamil politicians who became prominent before and during the years of Independence. With the colonial system drawing to a partial close and with the decline of the British Empire, Sri Lanka gained Independence a few months after India, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1948. First there was the initial euphoria of independence and nationalism and the awareness that the colonizers had subjugated the inhabitants of Sri Lanka, condemned people to wretched toil and reduced the nation to misery and despair. Bhabha, in his foreword to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), states the following about the effects of national consciousness, anti-colonial politics and thought:

It is, of course, one of the most significant lessons of the postcolonial experience that no nation is simply young or old, new or ancient, despite the date of its independence. "New" national, international, or global emergences create an unsettling sense of transition, as if history is at a turning point [...]. (xv-xvi)

As a result of the newly acquired Independence of Sri Lanka, the focus shifted from writings in English to writings in local languages like Sinhalese and Tamil, and feelings of nationalism and appreciation for the Sri Lankan traditional way of life surged. This transitional social reality is described by Bhabha in the introduction of *Nation and Narration* (1990), as: "the attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress, the narcissism of self-generation, the primeval present of the *Volk*" (1), "that grim prose of power that each nation can wield within its own sphere of influence" (1).

The social order of post-independent Sri Lanka was dual: the modernized minority of the English-speaking élite and the majority of the traditional Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking indigenous population of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims who had remained outside the reach of Western influence. The rhetoric of traditional nationalism was never challenged by the English-speaking minorities. The early nationalists of the country were English-educated, like Charles Ambrose Lorenz (1829-1871), Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933), the two famous Tamil brothers Ponnambalam Arunachalam (1853-1924) and Ponnambalam Ramanathan (1851-1930) and James Peiris (1856-1930). Although there were few Tamil activists involved in common national concerns, "Ramanathan rose to his full stature as the champion of the Sinhalese during the troubled time following the riots of 1915.<sup>3</sup> He was appalled at the supineness of the Police in not taking vigorous action against the rioters at the outset" (Thalgodapitiya 85).

---

<sup>3</sup> Ethnic intolerance and religious animosities between the Sinhala Buddhists and a recently arrived Muslim community from India called the coast moors erupted in a riot in Kandy in 1915. They were different from the indigenous Muslim community who had migrated long time before and who were less tenacious in protecting their trading rights. For further details see K. M. de Silva's *A History of Sri Lanka* (474-78).

The Western-educated élite and the socially privileged class were not overtly concerned about the plight of the village and peasant class and the local languages. Power and wealth were still in the hands of the feudal élite and the landed aristocracy, and as a result there existed a wide economic chasm between the two groups. It took time for the process of decolonization to develop away from the cultural orientation imposed by the English educational system. Also, grievous burdens on the national psyche gradually started to disappear, as the local literatures and languages gained acceptance and prestige; the Western colonizers previously having regarded the local literatures and languages as culturally inferior. This attitude of denigrating Eastern literature and the ubiquitous colonial assumption that native intellectual capacities are inferior stems from the colonizers' own cultural illiteracy. This assumption of superiority is amply demonstrated by the infamous and disparaging paragraphs 10 and 11 of the "Minute on Education" prepared in 1835 by Thomas Babington Macaulay, the architect of English education in India, in which he remarked that "a single shelf of European literature was worth all the books of India and Arabia." Loomba, in *Colonialism/Post Colonialism* (1998), explains the colonists' view as regards to the unworthiness and the inability of colonised societies to develop their literature on independent lines:

Even those literary texts that are, arguably, distant from or even critical of colonial ideologies can be made to serve colonial interests through educational systems that devalue native literatures, and by Euro-centric critical practices which insist on certain Western texts being the markers of superior culture and value. (85)

### **1.5 The "Sinhala Only Act" and its Repercussions**

The "Sinhala Only Act" of 1956, introduced by the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike<sup>4</sup> was an event of immense political significance. He was an Oxford educated politician who sought to strengthen his position among the majority Sinhalese Buddhists Sri Lankans through "a social programme couched in the language of religio-linguistic nationalism" (de Silva, 2005: 549). The law made Sinhala, the language spoken by 70% of the country's population, the sole official language. Bandaranaike's SLFP<sup>5</sup> Government considered this law primarily as an act to distance itself from the colonial masters, and his genuine intention was to deliver the common man from imperial bondage. However, opinions are divided about Bandaranaike's ulterior political motives in relation to his attempts to establish linguistic nationalism in Sri Lanka. The historian de Silva enumerates the reasons for his success in reaping substantial political popularity

---

<sup>4</sup> Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike, the fourth Prime Minister of Sri Lanka was an esteemed and persuasive politician who served from 1956 to 1959, until his assassination by a Buddhist monk. His wife Sirimavo Bandaranaike was elected the first woman Prime Minister of the world after his death. For further details see K. M. de Silva's *A History of Sri Lanka* (642-43) and (652-53).

<sup>5</sup> SLFP – Sri Lanka Freedom Party. In 1951 S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike crossed over from the United National Party, along with a small group of his supporters to join the then opposition. During the same year SLFP was inaugurated.

through linguistic nationalism, as opposed to the policies forwarded by the political party UNP<sup>6</sup> previously in power:

The SLFP accommodated itself- as the UNP clearly did not- to an expanding ‘political nation’ in which Sinhalese-Buddhists intermediary elite sought an influence commensurate with its numbers. Ideologically hazy and politically opportunistic, Bandaranaike’s ‘middle way’ promised people social change, social justice, economic independence from foreign powers and the completion of political sovereignty. It gave a sense of dignity to the common people and fortified their self-respect. (2005: 633)

The Act triggered off a sequence of unprecedented events, as it alienated the minorities living in Sri Lanka, especially the Tamil ethnic<sup>7</sup> minority in the country who felt linguistically discriminated against. As a consequence of Bandaranaike’s language policy and his promotion of a Sinhala-Buddhist nation, there was a communal riot in 1958 during which many innocent Tamils were attacked. The reprehensible features of using nationalism as a battleground for politics are pointed out by Partha Chatterjee in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World – A Derivative Discourse* (1986): “Nationalism in political terms can give rise to mindless chauvinism and xenophobia and serve as instigation for organised violence and tyranny (2). He rightly notes: “Nationalism as an ideology is irrational, narrow, hateful and destructive (7). The “Sinhala Only Act” became one of the reasons, other than territorial, for the demands of the Tamil people for a separate state within the island and the protracted war that began several decades later. The leadership after Independence was well aware of the necessity of unity across religious, ethnic, racial and regional divisions. Yet, no one could predict the political turmoil and complexities that one day would ensue years afterwards, because of the “Sinhala Only Act.”

The embryo of two social revolutions was created by Bandaranaike. It was the changing political and social scenario that made each ethnic group conscious of its own identity. As a result, various political parties, whose goal was self-determination and national independence, sprang forth. Gandhi analyses this aspect of decolonization in *Postcolonial Theory* (1998), “The shifting strategies of anti-colonial struggle, combined with the task of imagining a new and liberated postcolonial future, generate a crisis within the social fabric” (130). Today, according to the Sri Lankan constitution, which was amended in 1987, both Sinhala and Tamil are national and official languages of Sri Lanka. Yet, the ethnic issues and communal conflicts did not abate as a result of this amendment.

---

<sup>6</sup> UNP – United National Party. During the years 1946-47, just before Sri Lanka was awarded Independence, D. S. Senanayake took the initiative to form the United National Party. He became the first Prime Minister of independent Sri Lanka.

<sup>7</sup> According to the Sri Lankan historian K. Indrapala, ethnic Tamils in Sri Lanka are “the Tamils who lived in Sri Lanka in the early centuries of its history and with the evolution of an ethnic community speaking the Tamil language in the northern, northwestern and eastern regions of the island whose descendants in modern times perceive themselves as an ethnic identity that is different from the Tamils of south India as well as other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka” (22).

## 1.6 Sri Lankan Literature in English

The first novel known to have been written in English by a Sri Lankan came out in 1917 which was by Lucian de Zilwa, a medical practitioner of Dutch descent. The beauty of the island has invariably attracted writings from foreigners. Leonard Woolf, the husband of Virginia Woolf, who worked as an Assistant Government Agent during the British colonial period in Hambantota<sup>8</sup> in Sri Lanka, wrote the novel *The Village in the Jungle* and published it in London in 1913. The characters in his novel, although fictitious, were based on people whom he had met during his tenure of office in Sri Lanka. His novel conforms to how the imperialists regarded Asia and Africa and as described by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), “the tropical chaos that was deemed despotic and ungovernable and therefore worthy of the civilizing mission” (169).

Much earlier, during the seventeenth century, an English sailor called Robert Knox was taken prisoner along with other foreigners by the Sri Lankan King Rajasinghe 11 (1629-1687) of the Sinhalese kingdom of Kandy. Knox wrote and published in England in 1680, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon* (1681). He lived in villages in Kandy, Sri Lanka, for close to two decades and based his book on personal observations on the despotic king and the manner he ruled, the Kandyan society, their customs, food and clothing, and on his period of captivity and his escape-strategies. It is speculated that Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, first published in 1719, had been influenced by Knox’s *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*. The Sri Lankan historian, E. F. C. Ludowyk, in *Story of Ceylon*, describes Knox thus:

He worked hard to improve his condition, engaging in activities which must have impressed Defoe who knew his story, since they could now be described as Crusoe-like occupations – fishing, breeding goats, and even, following Biblical precedent, gathering the ears of “corn” as he walked through the fields, not for food but for his private business. (183)

The major part of Sri Lankan literature in English is the product of the last sixty-five years; the period when, for the most part, the British were no longer governing the country. It constitutes a canon of writing which is struggling to emerge as an important aspect in the field of postcolonial studies in Asia. D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke clearly states in *Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People 1917-2003* that: “Sri Lankan writers in English have fared better in the genre of poetry than in any other. The beginning of their achievements lies in the 1930s and 1940s” (196). The nature of Sri Lanka’s literary tradition has been greatly influenced by England and also by its closest neighbour India and according to Goonetilleke:

These poets were obviously generated by the Romantics and especially by Tennyson, the poets to whom their literary education at school was then restricted; they were also inspired by Indian poets such as Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu [...]. (199)

---

<sup>8</sup> Hambantota is a town in the South-Eastern coastal area of Sri Lanka. It is famous for its salt flats and intensely hot and arid climate.

With reference to Sri Lankan Drama in English, Goonetilleke says that it “is a product of a metamorphosis through migration” (153) and that and local productions were British influenced up till the 1950s and 1960s. But today Sri Lankan dramatists hail from different backgrounds and their works are influenced both by Western drama as well as Sinhala drama. In 2005 Goonetilleke states: “It looks as though, in the last fifteen years, Sri Lankan drama in English has spurted and offers more novelty and experimentation, wider horizons, in a word, more promise” (192).

Evidently, the British colonizers have played an immense role in moulding Sri Lanka’s urban life and thought, especially writings in English. The use of the English language remains as much a part of the country’s historical heritage as any other. Even though the British demanded that the colonized subjects emulate them, the Sri Lankans were never regarded as equals. Also, in the British school system, students were not taught to be critical of the British Empire. For the British colonizers, Sri Lanka was simply an unimportant territory out in the periphery, where people had to be subjugated in order to be civilized and improved upon, so that they might become worthy beneficiaries of an advanced society. Hence, the assumptions about the supremacy of the colonizer became part of an accepted ideology. An excellent command of the English language appeared to be the first step towards emancipation. But Western culture and the English language did not have significant effects on the rural folk of Sri Lanka, mainly due to their inaccessibility to elite, Western education. As Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), the colonial powers deliberately aimed to instil an idea of European superiority among the colonized. Especially the urban élite were given the opportunity to go through a British influenced curriculum in education.

Despite the above historical marginalization, the local culture remained surprisingly rich in potential. Such a realization prompted writing by Sri Lankan authors in English after Independence. Having freed themselves from the shackles of subordination, the people of Sri Lanka are living in new times – times in which radical re-articulation and reconfiguration of identity and belonging are taking place. Due to cultural and economic influences, both indigenous and as a result of repeated colonization, migration and globalization, postcolonial writers of Sri Lanka are grappling with the cross-cultural worlds, which is evident in Sri Lankan literature in English.

### **1.7 The Continuing Importance of English**

Due to the still prevailing British influence, the urban educational curriculum is modelled upon and preserves the imperialist disciplinary core of the organisation of school learning and pedagogy. Further, English became the lingua franca of local trade. In other words, Britain had fulfilled a double mission in Sri Lanka at the time of Independence: one of destruction and the other of regeneration, because a good command of the English language had opened doors to the whole world to English-

educated Sri Lankans, while those who could not obtain English education were pushed to the margins.

Another reason for the widening gap between the urban and the rural areas was due to the fact that post-primary education was centred almost entirely in the cities. Health services were also primarily confined to urban areas, and the colonial administrations had greatly reduced infant mortality and death-rates in general. The success in improving health facilities resulted in a population increase. Colonization imposed its constraints upon the people of Sri Lanka from the beginning of Western rule. Although during the British colonial period, there was not an enormous number of British officials resident in Sri Lanka, they successfully managed to establish and impose a repressively structured government. This was possible because the indigenous élite found the repressive structure useful to entrench their positions and aspirations. Even now among the English-educated class there is a very strong colonial identification with European traditions of thinking. Fanon who strongly denounced imperialism in its multiple forms, political, economic and especially linguistic, points out in *Black Skin, White Masks* that, “Mastery of language affords remarkable power” (18), “to speak a language is to assume a world, a culture” (18), which appears to be the case in urban Sri Lanka. The Sinhala-educated youth’s and the rural folk’s extreme discontent grew out of this situation and heightened in the 1960s. Therefore, Independence brought in its wake, not only freedom but also divisions. Increasing disparities were emerging between the more industrialized and Westernised urban populations on the one hand, and the agricultural and the more traditional and isolated rural peasants on the other hand.

### **1.8 The Politics of Language**

After Sri Lanka gained Independence in 1948, the first Minister of Education, C. W. W. Kannangara, strived to effect radical changes in the education system of the country, which brought in its wake widespread education to the rural masses, as well as some deep seated problems. The Minister made possible free education and established central schools all over the country offering instructions in the Sinhala and the Tamil languages. As a result, the command of the English language of the rural Sinhala-educated people remained poor or non-existent and speakers of English in rural area amounted to a meagre percentage of the total inhabitants. Until today, the future of the youth of Sri Lanka has been plagued by hard economic factors which are the endemic ills of all developing nations, like high unemployment and the complicated inefficacies of stultifying political and administrative systems.

Although certain common ideas of writing continue after independence, depiction of characters, narrative techniques and language are shaped by the Sri Lankan way of life, the indigenous languages and traditional literary structures in Sri Lankan writings in English. Before Independence, novels written in English by Sri Lankans were very few. During the 1940s and 1950s no work of extraordinary merit was produced in English,



except for the works of Martin Wickremasinghe, which were translations of his novels from the Sinhala. The English literature that was available in the country was all written by the British and imported from England. They were considered immeasurably superior to what was written locally, which was seen as lacking in critical direction. According to Goonetilleke: “ It is true that it was only after Sri Lanka gained Independence from Britain in 1948 that literature of significance was written [...]” (2005: v) and that “The literature before Independence is not very rewarding in literary-critical terms, [...]” (2005: v).

A national hero, who just before Independence, vigorously campaigned in order to develop a patriotic consciousness was Anagarika Dharmapala. He was a man with a message and a vehement crusader. As stated by Thalagodapitiya in *Portraits of Ten Patriots of Sri Lanka* (1966), Dharmapala found it of utmost importance that the Western influenced Sri Lankans sacrifice their self-interest for the good and gain of the whole nation:

He went up and down the country denouncing in searing words the slavish aping of western habits and habiliments. The men were ashamed of themselves and gave up the fantastic combs that adorned their heads; the women were abashed and abandoned the trailing Victorian skirts for the saree. (37)

Immediately after Independence it was generally considered inappropriate to write in the language of the colonizer and during the 1950s nationalistic feeling intensified. As stated by Gandhi, who has widely researched the cultural history of the Indo-British colonial encounter:

The colonial aftermath is marked by the range of ambivalent cultural moods and formations which accompany periods of transition and translation. It is, in the first place, a celebrated moment of arrival – charged with the rhetoric of independence and the creative euphoria of self-invention. (1998: 5)

In accordance to that, after Independence there occurred in Sri Lanka dramatic events which had a considerable impact not only on the political and social scene, but also on the cultural and linguistic, affecting writings in English and other Western influenced cultural activities.

The importance assigned to Sinhala was inextricably associated with questions of national and cultural identity and the language became a medium through which national aspirations were voiced. The indigenous nationalistic élite, who were conscious of the havoc brought about by imperialist hegemony on Sri Lankan culture, felt that the time had arrived for the inhabitants of Sri Lanka to speak up as authentic representatives of their own traditions.

One of the greatest nineteenth century Sri Lankan-born scholars was Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy of mixed Sri Lankan and British parentage. It was his considered judgment that language and culture are the identifying attributes of human beings and an inescapable pre-condition for social existence. When Sri Lankan traditions

were considered inferior due to the pressures of colonialism, he sought to remedy the situation by exalting the significance of tradition. At a time when the concept of tradition carried negative connotations, he sought to make it positive, although he himself was the product of modern Western education. As exemplified by Wimal Dissanayake in *Enabling Traditions: Four Sinhala Cultural Intellectuals* (2005):

In works such as, *Borrowed Plumes*, he warned Sri Lankans against mindless and unthinking imitation of western forms of thought, imagination and dress. For him, the most devastating impact of colonial rule was to be seen in the arena of arts and crafts – traditional arts and crafts were wilting under the relentless influence of colonialism and Western culture. (29)

Yet another outstanding scholar of Sinhala and a cultural icon who excelled in the areas of grammar and the study of language, and contributed to the growth and systemization of Sinhala was Munidasa Cumaratunga. He considered linguistic discipline to be important as social discipline. He spoke out with fierce independence of thought and self-confidence in what he undertook to do to popularize classical Sinhalese:

At a time when the colonial powers had enthroned English and pushed Sinhala to the margins, he repeatedly drew attention to the disconcerting peripheralization of the Sinhala language. He complained that there was tendency to ignore Sinhala and to worship English blindly. It was not that he was opposed to people studying English; in fact he realized full well its importance as a window onto the world. (Dissanayake 47)

What Cumaratunga and Coomaraswamy were seeking to establish was that the Sinhala language should not be marginalized and relegated to a secondary and impoverished position and that the authority of tradition should not be ignored either.

Among the other leading Sinhala cultural intellectuals of contemporary Sri Lanka, Gunadasa Amarasekera has made a profound impact on the reading public during his time and has encouraged Sri Lankans to take a fresh and admiring view of the traditions of the country. One of his enduring concerns has been to encourage a social awareness for the restoration of dignity to Sinhala cultural causes that had largely been ignored. He is perturbed by the ever increasing influence of multi-national corporations which serve to undermine national identity. He vehemently asserts that, “At this point when we are moving towards the half-century mark since independence, our native land has been turned into neo-coloniality. We are the slaves of the imperialists who are living within this new colonialism” (Dissanayake 126). The reason why he highly recommends that Sri Lankans should pay: “greater attention to tradition is because it presents a formidable bulwark against the threatening and disruptive influence of this neo-colonialism” (Dissanayake 126).

A certain sector of Buddhist monks is still at odds with the English-educated élites’ intentions of laying emphasis on the English language, the adoption of Western habits and the impact of Western ideas. The monks regard the rapid sociocultural impact of Western influence as a decadent, menacing otherness that undermines Sri Lankan Buddhist/Sinhalese traditional values and threatens the self-identity and national culture.

Historian de Silva, in *Reaping the Whirlwind* (1998) enumerates many examples of the fears of the Buddhist monks regarding Western influences and their intervention and agitation during early electoral campaigns for, “the re-establishment of a Sinhalese-Buddhist society on traditional lines” (88). The Western educated, however, look upon Western countries and America as sources of greater opportunities and readily embraces their cultures and language as stepping-stones for personal advancement and modernity. Nowadays, even village folk tend to hanker after a Western influenced life because of their access to information technology and of what they have observed on mass media. The Buddhist monks, however, display outright resentment and consider the acceptance of Western culture and values and the English language as acts of disloyalty and even as cultural treachery and openly deride those who opt to ape Western lifestyles. The monks’ endeavour to create an awareness of the harmful and demoralising nature of European colonial impact on Sri Lankan culture is in order to prevent further encroachment which might destroy age old traditions. Partha Chatterjee, the Indian postcolonial scholar, in *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993) expresses similar sentiments of suspicion and apprehension about intrusive colonial influences in neighbouring India:

the very institutions of home and family were threatened under the peculiar conditions of colonial rule. A quite unprecedented external condition had been thrust upon us; we were forced to adjust to those conditions, for which a certain degree of imitation of alien ways was unavoidable. But could this wave of imitation be allowed to enter our homes? Would that not destroy our inner identity? (125)

The English-educated nationalists would have been bedevilled by their own contradictions of wanting to address people who are not proficient in English. Some extreme nationalists strongly derided the pedagogic and linguistic indoctrination of the previous colonizers and accused those who sought to perpetuate them of slavish, colonial mimicry. A notable example quoted in Goonetilleke’s *Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People 1917- 2009* (2005) is about the Sri Lankan poet Lakdasa Wikramasingha. A man of aristocratic ancestry, he felt that the very exercise of writing in English alienated him from his own culture and civilization. In a note to his first volume of poems, *Lustre* (1965), Wikramasingha openly declared that it is immoral to write in the language of the colonizer:

I have come to realise that I am using the language of the most despicable and loathsome people on earth; I have no wish to extend its life and range, enrich its tonality. To write in English is a form of cultural treason. I have had for the future to think of a way of circumventing this treason; I propose to do this by making my writing entirely immoralist and destructive. (qtd. in Goonetilleke 215)

In the wake of the country’s literary awakening in Sinhala, he came to be regarded as a nativist writer who has attempted to wrestle the critical ethnocentrism of Eurocentric opponents to the ground in the name of a Sri Lankan particularism. Abhorring the mimetic subservience, he typically included Sri Lankan idioms and expression in his poetry. His writings are praised as a landmark in the understanding of what it is to reflect

on the notion of Sri Lankan culture. This was a time when the Sinhalese looked unquestioningly to their writers to act as the conscience of the nation. Yet, it must be noted that Wikramasingha is a writer not quite alert to the ethnic and political risks of opting for Sinhala as the national/official language in a country where there are other languages in use. His attitude towards English is somewhat similar to that of contemporary African writers, as we see with the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o who strongly denounces imperialism in its multiple forms, including linguistic. As quoted by the Raymond F. Betts in *Decolonization* (1998):

Ngugi argues that Africans ought to recognize that writing in European languages is tacit acceptance of a form of neo-colonialism. In using these languages, "are we not paying homage to them, are we not on the cultural level continuing that neo-colonial slavish and cringing spirit?" (87)

On the other hand, as commented by Betts, the African writer Chinua Achebe defends the use of English:

contending that he has adapted the language, has made it serve African interests and concerns. "But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings." (87)

On the subject of Sri Lankan nativist writings, Salgado makes the following observation:

Nativism in Sri Lankan literary criticism does not only delineate the boundaries of belonging in relation to the nation as a whole, but also works to delineate a highly selective reading of the subject constitution of the native itself. It thus has an ontological rather than an epistemological basis, and it is scripted by a reverse discourse of cultural development as a return to roots and origins. (34)

Further on the subject, Rajiva Wijesinha expresses his opinion on the scarcity of writings in English during the first thirty years after Independence in his essay "Sri Lankan Fiction in English" (1989): "This paucity, given the spate of writing in the last decade, may be diagnosed as due not entirely to a lack of talent. Rather, the social climate of the time, it could be said, actively discouraged writing in English [...]" (26). He even accuses university academics for the state of affairs that prevailed:

Sri Lankan critics, led by academics in University English Departments, were determined to bury Sri Lankan writing in English. The attempts at creativity in English that had marked the colonial era gave way after independence to diffidence springing perhaps from a developing nationalism that sought to celebrate the indigenous languages. (56)

In time, although the harsh features of colonial repression and subjugation of indigenous history and culture had substantially diminished, the Sinhala-educated sector of the population still felt that they earned derision and marginalisation from the English-educated élite of the cities, and were being treated as an underclass. These internal divisions were breeding class hatreds. Therefore, the nationalists and the Sinhala-educated wished to be self-representatives and custodians of decolonization and in wielding strong influence in fashioning a new cultural identity. They found the changes

from colonial to national far too slow and felt that the upwardly mobile metropolitan élites were standing in the way of necessary changes. As a result, there was a flurry of scholarly work that gave rise to a broader awareness of the Sri Lankan heritage and traditions. Sri Lankan novelists evince certain admiration for classical Indian literature. Despite the fact that there are writers who resist Western influence, presently Sri Lankan intelligentsia constantly borrows from Western precepts, especially Sri Lankan writers in English who continue to mimic and assimilate Western models of writing and discursive categories established by European modernity.

### **1.9 Pioneer Novelists in English after Independence**

In an environment charged with nationalist feelings, only a few authors who wrote in English became central to the literary landscape during the years 1940-1970. Punyakante Wijenaike and James Goonewardena were two pioneer writers who first published their books in the 1960s, despite the prevailing aversion for writing in English. Two of the country's most celebrated writers of mixed ethnicity are namely Michael Ondaatje and Carl Muller, and they have dominated the Sri Lankan literary scene for two decades or more. Ondaatje's poetry and novels have earned international renown that no other Sri Lankan contemporary writer has yet received.

After the national hysteria subsided, in the 1980s and 1990s, writings in English proliferated alongside literature in Sinhala, and a greater awareness of the craft of writing led to mature works in both languages. However, contrary to what Gandhi proclaims in *Affective Communities* (2006), where she says that, "English literature more often than not fuelled the energies of anticolonialism in South Asia [...]" (12), Sri Lankan fiction writers in English are less prone to give prominence to colonial atrocities of the past, although recent novelists do write about the social changes brought about by imperialism.

Sri Lankan English writers do adhere to standard grammatical forms in their writings. However, Wijesinha, in his collection of critical essays *Breaking Bounds* (1998), stresses that:

What is important on the contrary in this emergence at last of a genuine Sri Lankan voice in the creative use of English is the ready employment of what may be termed an indigenous vocabulary, together with the introduction of allusions and references that spring from the particular cultural context. (16)

This indicates that Sri Lankan novelists are not strictly bound to the European cultural traditions in their writings. Moreover, today, the country is caught in the cultural maelstrom of globalization and heterogeneity due to migration which is naturally depicted in its literature.

A sudden literary boom has led to more optimistic predictions for the future of Sri Lankan literature since the 1980s. The period 1970-2012 has been dominated by political and social changes of great depth and, at times, violence has provided fresh topics for

writing. The honesty in describing the trauma of ordinary people caught up in the insurgencies and the ethnic conflict has helped to shape a whole generation of writers. Younger writers of Sri Lanka are trying to reach a wider audience than that of their predecessors and the characters in their fiction tend to be more transparent to political and social issues. This is confirmed by Chelva Kanaganayakam in an article published in *Ariel* in 1998 that: “writing in English was beginning to reveal an awareness of the political upheavals of the nation and writers were becoming increasingly conscious of the futility of ignoring the political and social unrest in the country” (54). Sri Lankan novels have also become a major platform to convey political views and expose breaches of human rights. Sinhala poets, novelists and playwrights have expressed their feelings of unrest against the established social order and emphasized the need for a drastic change to fulfil the aspirations of the poor segments of society in their writings, far more than the English writers who have dealt with social conflicts, inequalities and iniquities. Another remarkable feature of Sri Lankan fiction in English during the last couple of decades has been an explosion of writing by women.

## 2 The Insurrections

### 2.1 The Insurrections of 1971 and the Period of 1987-89

In the year 1971 and during the years 1987-89 a political organization called the JVP<sup>9</sup> came close to capturing power in Sri Lanka. The insurrections originated in the South of the country, and are also known therefore as the Southern insurrections. Their first non-violent civil disobedience soon escalated into outright violence. The uprisings stemmed from the mass dissatisfaction of unmet needs due to reproduction of colonial domination structures. The rebellions were led by a Sinhalese radical by the name of Rohana Wijeweera,<sup>10</sup> whose communist views of re-distributing wealth to the poorer classes, and utopian ideals earned him great popularity. It was he who provided a conduit of mutinous thought which led to outright anarchism. From a postcolonial point of view, the two insurgencies were the first serious and violent anti-colonial politics whose agenda found articulation after Independence. The insurgents felt that even after three decades of Independence, colonial systems and policies did not end and even though the colonizers had left, the feeling of inferiority that the indigenous people were subjected to was being reproduced by Western-educated groups who obviously regarded colonialism as an unqualified blessing for Sri Lanka. It is somewhat ironic that the insurgents even waged their struggle against later socialist governments that had made their anti-colonial stance very clear.

As inheritors of the colonial systems, the JVP supporters resented the hold of the colonial past in post independent Sri Lanka. They wanted all residual traces of subordination and Western influence to be eliminated and to execute a swift and decisive departure from the practices of the colonial past. They were particularly against the First World capital which exploits the Third World labour markets. As a political group, the JVP strived for a complete divorce from Western democracy and believed that they were mitigating the burdens of a colonial inheritance. They thought that they were helping their society to become more workable and would be able to ensure economic justice and political correction of corrupt colonial practices for the future. The great tragedy was that though their intentions were somewhat honourable, their terrorist tactics were highly questionable and contrary to accepted social values. They were seen as misguided, patriotic bullies who were trying to force conformity upon everyone. Their excuses and ostensible reasons for their actions were that they felt that their embittered complaints

---

<sup>9</sup> Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, was also known as The People's Liberation Front.

<sup>10</sup> Rohana Wijeweera born in 1943 in the Southern part of Sri Lanka, became a medical student at Lumumba University in Russia. He was unable to complete his studies because he had joined the pro Chinese communist group in Sri Lanka. For further details see K. M. de Silva's *History of Sri Lanka* (662-73).

had fallen on deaf ears and their questions were cast aside. They felt that the only way to voice their protests was through acts of violence and aggressiveness. Their mentality of wanting “to blow the colonial world to smithereens” is in line with what Bhabha notes in his foreword to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963): “The colonized, who are often devoid of a public voice, resort to dreaming, imagining, acting out, embedding the reactive vocabulary of violence and retributive justice in their bodies, their psyches [...]” (Bhabha, xx). Further, according to Fanon, “decolonization is always a violent event” (1), “decolonization is quite simply the substitution of one “species” of mankind by another” (1). The two insurgencies in Sri Lanka were regarded as acts of youth rebellion and resistance that manifested in the process of decolonization; to a certain degree the thirty-year ethnic war was also an inevitable situation arising from the process of decolonization.

Modern nationalism in Sri Lanka has grown out of a reaction to the colonial systems. As argued by Alastair Pennycook, in *English and the Discourse of Colonialism* (1998), post-coloniality is “a material state after the end of colonialism (39),” and post-colonialism is “a political and cultural movement that seeks to challenge the received histories and ideologies of former colonial nations and to open a space for insurgent knowledges to emerge” (39). Both insurgencies and the thirty-year civil war in Sri Lanka were violent post-colonial situations. Bhabha, who expounds the fundamental concept behind postcolonial violence in his foreword to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, offers a sound explanation: “Violence can thus be understood to be the perfect mediation. The colonised man liberates himself in and through violence” (Bhabha xl). Gandhi as well, in *Postcolonial Theory* (1998), goes into considerable detail over postcolonial violence: “So also it was observed that the history of decolonisation has generally, and perhaps most effectively, been articulated through the resistant counter-energies of anti-colonial nationalism” (122). In these terms, the violence in Sri Lanka worked as an eye-opener for Governments that were insensitive towards the rural youth and frequently overlooked their needs. As anti-colonial aspirants, the JVP possessed an acute awareness that the best way to achieve their goals was to oppose systems of neo-colonialism. As Gandhi observes: “Ideally, national consciousness ought to pave the way for the emergence of an ethically and politically enlightened global community” (1998: 123).

The antagonisms of the insurgents were shaped by a profound mistrust of the ruling institutions established by and based on the power structures of the former colonizers. They were, in fact, a Sri Lankan cultural defence against the backdrop of the imperial civilizing mission. However, it is imperative to take into account that the rebels’ concomitant aversion to Western influence and their lack of international openness were shaped by their lack of command of the English language and their lack of opportunity to learn it. They were made to see themselves as the “Other” by those proficient in English who belong to the ruling class. As observed by Spivak in *Toward a History of*



*the Vanishing Present* (1999): “The language is persistently one of inescapable obligations, although the concept in question is that of freedom” (11). The tragedy in Sri Lanka was that the youth rebels, who were largely lower middle class adherents to the cause, dared to oppose civic policy by extreme violent means, and their urgent mission was abhorred by the English-educated urban class who wielded power, as well as rejected by all peace loving citizens of Sri Lanka. Yet, it was an awakening of national consciousness which the rebels felt that by violence alone would enable them to be heard.

In order to inculcate national pride, the rebels spread anti-Western propaganda, denouncing all vestiges of decadent Western culture which they considered evident in the lifestyle of Western influenced Sri Lankans. They treated with contempt the urban élite whom they considered to have jettisoned Sri Lankan culture in favour of Western ones. Post-Independence Governments of Sri Lanka retained contact with the former colonizers for economic reasons. Part of the insurgents’ rooted hostility was due to the fact that they were suspicious of foreign economic interests in the country. They considered capitalism and imperialism as two sides of the same coin and machinations of the white powers against the oppressed Asian people. The insurgents also accused the urban élite of lacking creativity and inventiveness and for paying slavish obeisance to the West and therefore viewed their authority with immense distaste. They also felt that the urban élite displayed a touch of condescension towards them and therefore exhibited the same British superior assumptions towards the colonized. As such, this became a conflict between the English-educated intellectuals and the mass of the population.

The dissident Sinhalese youth of Sri Lanka evoked a flood of contradictory impressions. For most of them Western ideas shrivel up in the midst of strong national imperatives. Although they reacted with anger and indignation to policies favouring Western methods, Western influences were not wholly absent in their lives, considering the long period of British domination in Sri Lanka. A large part of the rural youth of Sri Lanka is adept in using some modern equipment but they are rural and traditional inwardly and are not urban influenced. As a result, some of the rebels do not fit smoothly into any category but live in a state of discomfort and bewilderment. These postcolonial conundrums and historiographical conditions are succinctly examined by Chatterjee<sup>11</sup> in *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1986):

In some ways, this is not surprising, because we now tend to think of the period of colonialism as something we have managed to put behind us, whereas the progress of modernity is a project in which we are all, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm, still deeply implicated. (14)

---

<sup>11</sup> Partha Chatterjee is an Indian Subaltern and Postcolonial Studies scholar.

Bhabha describes this condition in *Nation and Narration* as “a growing, if unfamiliar, sense of the nation as one of the major structures of ideological ambivalence within the cultural representation of modernity (4).

The insurgent groups organised two violent rebellions against two widely different democratically elected governments of the country. The 1971 rebellion took place during the formative stages of the organisation and gave the people of Sri Lanka a foretaste of events to come. As enumerated by Gunaratna<sup>12</sup> in *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution? : The Inside Story of the JVP* (1990): “the JVP grew in number and had over 100,000 members by early 1971. University staff, students, workers, *bhikkus* mostly from the rural sector formed the inner core of the JVP” (9). But nothing prepared the country for the fury and desperation unleashed by the young rebels in their 1980s struggle, which was a ferocious and unbridled bid to grab political power. The strikes, wilful destruction of economic targets and organised crime of the rebels had a devastating impact on the economy of the country at that time. Since the JVP was a clandestine, underground, conspiratorial, revolutionary youth movement, the Government was taking on an unknown enemy. The Sri Lankan Army, which was up to that time a mere parade ground outfit, had to play a key role in resisting the JVP rebels. The troops and the police were neither experienced enough nor trained to handle an insurrection of this scale and intensity. The motive behind the insurgent actions was to bring the economy of the country to its knees, and then forcibly take over. More drawn out and brutal were the militant activities of the second insurgency. During the height of insurgent sabotage and disruptive activities, agriculture, plantations and industries had come to a grinding halt. Statistics enumerated by Nimal Sanderatne<sup>13</sup> in *Economic Growth and Social Transformations* (2000) reveals how the internal disruptions caused havoc in the country’s economy: “The insurgency of 1971 disrupted nearly all economic activities and increased government expenditures on defence from less than 1 per cent of GDP to 4 percent of GDP in 1972-75. In 1971 the growth rate dropped to as low as 0.2 per cent” (32). The economic destruction during the second insurgency was far more severe:

Again in 1987-89 the annual average economic growth was only 2.2 per cent. The insurgency, which disrupted nearly all economic activities, was mainly responsible for this severe dip in the economic growth from an annual average of 4.8 per cent in the previous three years to only 2.2 per cent per year in the next three years 1987-89. (32)

Both the insurrections and the counter measures of the state were implemented with much brutal force, the peak period of activity being the late 1980s.

The bone of contention of the rural educated youth of Sri Lanka who supported the clandestine network of the JVP was the increasing unemployment, widespread deteriorating economic conditions in the country and the fact that the English-educated

---

<sup>12</sup> Gunaratna is also the author of the book *Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Crisis and National Security*.

<sup>13</sup> Nimal Sanderatne was a senior Economist and Director of Economic Research and Statistics of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka at the time he wrote his book.

élite in the cities held positions of power and the best jobs. The rising educational levels in the country had driven the job requirements up, so that the prospect of getting lucrative employment became difficult for those who were not proficient in English. White-collar jobs were the preferred form of employment but they were beyond access for the village youth. Fred R. von der Mehden, who conducted a timely and extensive study of the political, social and economic background of South-East Asia, examines, in *South-East Asia 1930-1970: The Legacy of Colonialism and Nationalism* (1974), the impact of colonialism and attributes the following reasons for the yawning urban-rural gap:

Modern university and technical education is primarily the prerogative of the urban economic and political élite. The result has been the development of a self-perpetuating group whose power is based upon technical and administrative superiority over the rural peasantry and urban workers, in much the same way as the European colonial administrations maintained their superiority over the Asian subject after the Industrial Revolution. This situation was made permanent through the availability of scholarships to prestigious institutions of higher learning for those with political contacts. (127)

Sri Lanka was ill prepared for the onrush of post-Independence problems such as, unemployment, insufficient modern educational institutes, especially in the rural areas and trade imbalance.

The rebels' negative attitude towards the English language was especially because the Sinhala-educated graduates and Arts graduates had to stay unemployed for some time, waiting for the so-called suitable jobs. In other words, there was a mismatch between the aspirations and the expectations of the educational returns and jobs available for the new university graduates. The result of this mismatch phenomenon was, as far back as 1969 and during the early 1970s, a highly Sinhala-educated, disappointed and disillusioned group of rural youth who became vocal and rebelliously active, and sought to overturn a democratically elected government through violence. Gandhi notes that the "anti-colonial archive" suggests that Indians were never "the passive objects of an authoritarian and alien pedagogy" (1998: 155). The national aspirations of the rural Sri Lankans, and their resistance to an alien modernity imposed upon them were also an imperative for the uprisings, taking into account that the British colonists were certain in their notion that their culture was far superior to that of the natives of Sri Lanka. However, not all the ills that the insurgents believed should be purged were of European manufacture.

The socialists sympathised with the pro-poor rhetoric of the JVP which made it easy to deliberately stoke trouble in the country. When the JVP began to expand with their persuasive arguments for a socialist regime that could administer social justice in providing equal job opportunities for the Sinhala-educated, and consequently better living standards, especially the village youth became particularly attentive. The disaffected youth felt that there was no sense of reality in colonial education and that the time had come for radical changes. They lashed out at symbols of Western affluence and

denounced the ostentatious emulation of Western lifestyle by the upper class, urban Sri Lankans. They desired that new systems that would dispel symptoms of colonial slavery be introduced. The rebels felt that the English language operated as an instrument of oppression and as a powerful weapon of suppression of the Sinhala language and they strongly regarded English as the language of their oppressors, of the former colonists and that Sinhala was their own language by inheritance. Besides, for the rural folk of Sri Lanka, English was always an acquired form of speech. Amidst shrinking options for the rural youth, as those who had a superior knowledge of English managed to wrest away the top jobs in the cities from them, their frustrations deepened. Anatoly Voronov strongly expresses his view about the influence of the English language: “The English language is the new currency of exchange, with the result that, that the world is now made into new sorts of have and have nots. (*New York Times*, April 14 1996)

Crucial to the JVP argument was the fact that the urban élite did not consider themselves subalterns due to their claims to elevated birth and privileges awarded to them because of their better command of the English language, whereas the rural poor were continually subjected to the historical silencing of the subaltern. As pointed out by Gunilla Florby in *The Margin Speaks: A Study of Margaret Laurence and Robert Kroetch from a Post-Colonial Point of View*, “The constructing of a national identity is bound up with the concern with language” (16). The Sinhala-educated majority did not want the Sinhala civilization to be done away with and a European civilization forced upon them, and for that purpose alone they desired to rid the Sri Lankan society of the lingering ill-effects of colonization. Further, they no longer had faith in Western political systems or Western philosophies. A certain sector of Buddhist monks who sympathised, as well as supported the militants, propounded that everything worthwhile has been invented, created, discovered and written in the East. They refused to be overwhelmed by the European cultural heritage and appealed to the aspirations of the Sinhalese Buddhists, especially in the villages. Some of the monks preached that in a country with glaring social contrasts, the only way for the underprivileged was to rise up through vehement demonstration, and thus stirred them into action.

The radical changes that the rebels envisaged were sought through extreme violence and many towns and villages were traumatised by the political violence and by numerous killings and disappearances. As explained by Adolfo Gilly, the Argentinian historian and journalist, in the introduction to Fanon’s *A Dying Colonialism* (1965):

Liberation does not come as a gift from anybody; it is seized by the masses with their own hands. And by seizing it they themselves are transformed: confidence in their own strength soars, and they turn their energy and their experience to the tasks of building, governing, and deciding their own lives for themselves. (Gilly 2)

Anyone who broke the confidentiality of the insurgents or betrayed their identity, even within their cadres, was swiftly and cruelly dealt with. As regards mass killings, sometimes the responsible party was the JVP and sometimes the State, and the full

weight of the law was hardly brought to bear on the countless murders and disappearances during this turbulent period. The detractors of the different Governments accused the leaders of authoritarian rule, restricting political freedom in practice, while continuing to pay lip-service to democratic norms.

Sri Lanka has been exceptional among the developing countries of the world in preserving a multi-party parliamentary system since gaining Independence. At various times of the political history of Sri Lanka, other leading political parties have flirted with the JVP. The *Daily Mirror* journalist Subash Wickremasinghe, attributes the following reasons in his collection of critical articles called *Under Attack* (2007), for the JVP's political unpopularity in their attempt to amalgamate with other political parties: "However, due to the rashness and absolutely unwelcome rhetoric coupled with politically unpolished behaviour the JVP got itself kicked out from the bandwagon" (73). Other political observers of that time had also predicted that JVP adventures were doomed to fail from the start, because of their lack of efficacy in their weaponry, fighting skills and organization. Despite their lack of expertise in fighting, the youthful group was over-confident. There were a series of mischievous reports and fears for some years that the rebel groups would be successful in enlisting enough support to overthrow the government by an armed uprising. After the rebel group's failed attempt in 1971 to overthrow the government, which was a premature and an amateurish attempt, many of the members were jailed. The failure was attributed to constant in-fighting and disagreements within the group, defective communication among the district leaders and lack of sophisticated weaponry. Further, there were different factions within the group with different agendas and there were no unified aspirations or consensual point of view. One of the reasons that the rebel struggles failed was also because the Western influenced generation of urban people since Independence, had tended to have diluted memories of the colonial era and the exploitation. The elite-educated class adopted a Western life style and their whole approach to politics and public administration were strikingly Western. Also for the sake of economic development, they considered it necessary to cultivate and imitate the economic and material accomplishment of Western civilisation and to seek a pragmatic approach towards international investors.

The JVP viewed foreign investments as part and parcel of neo-colonialism, with a possible danger of crass economic exploitation, as much as they were wary of the all-pervasive infliction of insidious Western intellectual and corrupting cultural influences in the cities, like the proliferation of bars, night-clubs, dance halls, drug-dens and prostitution, which were seen as a danger to national cultural values. Their dissatisfaction with Western culture made them look upon foreign assistance as tainted with some sort of commercial exploitation and full of ulterior motives. From a political view, they felt that the new constitution did not provide for an economic structure somewhat protected from the depredation of international exploitation and that even after Independence, the commerce and economy of Sri Lanka was inextricably bound to

the former colonizer and other Western countries. The JVP insisted that the battle against poverty at village level comes at the cost of a deliberate political blindness towards the violation of economic rights and the systematic exploitation of poverty suffered by those who live under the rule of multinational capital. This fact is largely true, as the global capitalist system heavily relies on cheap labour from developing countries, to ensure that production continues and commerce increases, although employment opportunities are generated.

The political regime that followed, freed those who were in jail in 1977 and an inconsiderable number of rebels regrouped once again under the leadership of Wijeweera. However, a majority of former members of the 1971 insurgency, moved away from revolutionary politics. C. A. Chandraprema<sup>14</sup> records in *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror: The JVP Insurrection 1987-1989* (1991), the course of action taken by some of the former die-hards of the 1971 uprising:

After the failure of the revolt, some of these people retired from politics altogether. Others joined the various constituent parties in the ruling United Front Coalition Government. Some are now doing well as politicians, businessmen, academics, civil servants and private sector executives. The vast majority later turned against their erstwhile leader Rohana Wijeweera. (2)

The 1987-1989 uprising of the JVP was also led by Wijeweera. It was a ferocious class struggle by Sinhalese chauvinists. The JVP economic projections were also fashioned after the Stalinist model where sweeping nationalisation was seen as the panacea for the economic ills of the country. But in a social context, the JVP ideologies predictably collided because of the mere impossibility of achieving progress at the expense of keeping away modernity and Western influences. Party positions within the JVP movement were determined by self-appointment, more than elections within the party.

A potentially pernicious phase of the movement was when the rebels mounted an unusually aggressive campaign which included enforced strikes, murders and numerous robbing missions to augment party funds. With the engagement of anti-social activities, such as organisation of strikes, forced closure of factories and other public utilities, the rebels attempted to destroy the economic infrastructure of the country and also to instil a psychosis of fear in people which often enforced the general public into compliance. It was also believed that the insurgents received covert aid “on a long-term basis from some unidentified foreign source” (Chandraprema 3). The insurgents were willing to exploit any avenue available to get into power, which included the physical annihilation of political opponents. This is what finally led the JVP into a stance of political defeatism.

The government crackdown to eliminate the dissenters began in earnest in mid-1989, and thereafter the organisation’s leadership and the majority of the rank and file

---

<sup>14</sup> C. A. Chandraprema is a Sri Lankan Social Scientist.

were killed by the Sri Lankan army and police. Even when any of the rebels were captured, it was evident that they were not allowed a fair trial. “Its leaders as they were apprehended, were kept alive only so long as to extract information relating to arms caches, safe houses, and the location of other party leaders, immediately after which they inevitably died in a “confrontation” with the forces (Chandraprema 5). The belief was that if they escaped they would commit even more outrageous terrorist acts.

The elusive JVP leader Wijeweera, masquerading as a planter, bearing a false name, was living in hiding, with his family and a retinue of servants in an estate bungalow in Ulpane, Kandy, at the time of his arrest by the Sri Lankan forces on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1989. Ironically, contrary to the views that he expounded, the revolutionary leader who attempted to build socialism through communalism and preached austerity to his followers, was found living in luxury during the last years of his life. Whilst championing for Sri Lanka’s poor, he had amassed a considerable amount of personal wealth. Shortly after his arrest, he was forced to address the nation on television during which he confessed that his policies were wrong and misguided, and made a voluntary appeal to the JVP members to lay down their arms and give up the armed struggle. During the following days Wijeweera’s mysterious death was announced by the Government. The details of his death were obscure and the reason given was that he put up an armed struggle with his interrogators, during which he was killed. Rohan Gunaratna poses a question couched in highly political terms about the JVP leader:

However the most important fact is not how and where he died but as to who turned Rohana Wijeweera into a monster. Was it not the creation of the socioeconomic policy and the political environs of three successive governments?  
(1990: 36)

Upatissa Gamanayake, the powerful General Secretary of the insurgent organisation was killed the day after by the forces, and with the demise of the leaders of the JVP and other hard-core activists, violence gradually abated in the country and there was relative peace, except in the North and North-East part of Sri Lanka due to the growing ethnic problems. Chandraprema envisions the chief architect of the JVP thus:

Wijeweera was a masterly and indefatigable intriguer. He revelled in conspiratorial politics. None of those around him could ever match him at this game. It is a tribute to his skill in manipulation to have been able to lead two insurrections which shook the established order to its very foundations without firing a single shot. He had the knack of getting his dirty work done by others and his orders obeyed without question. (1990: 56)

It was the time of the rebels and the official suppression of them. The insurgents pointed their weapons at those who opposed them; not only at the police and the army but also at the civilians who openly criticised their draconian policies. They also had an audacious agenda, of removing English-speaking top-notch officials from their positions in order to ensure employment for the Sinhala-speaking youth. They branded the Western-educated as a class clinging to the vestiges of feudalism. Loomba explains that this phenomenon is

frequently seen when dissidents spearhead anti-imperialist activities in their struggles to construct a national identity, while the newly elected post-Independence governments are still maintaining connections with the former colonizer for economic reasons:

The postcolonial state often uses an anti-imperialist rhetoric of nationalism to consolidate its own power while making enormous concessions to multinational interests. And then, it is not just merely the state but other social and political configurations that lay claim to the rhetoric of “the nation.” (207)

During these uncertain times, danger lurked everywhere and there were even instances when critical words brought death to the speaker, for having expressed opinions that would hurt the Government or the movement of the insurgents. Entire towns and villages convulsed in fear during this period of insurgency, as appalling and barbaric acts of terrorism were committed both by the insurgents and the armed forces. Eventually, the JVP achieved nothing other than the death of many thousands of young cadres and a similar number of non-JVP Sinhalese. Events connected to the insurrections intruded rudely into the lives of ordinary people and have spurred creative writing.

## 2.2 Novels Written in English on the Insurgencies

Today, there is a profound sense of amnesia among people and a desire to forget the terrible years of violence when a large number of youth were gunned down or disappeared. After all, if Sri Lankans chose to be bound by the past, they would never move forward. Yet, a number of Sri Lankan authors both in Sinhalese and in English found it profitable to clothe the hard historical facts in their fiction, and prominent among them are Ediriweera Sarachchandra, James Goonewardena, Punyakante Wijenaike, Nihal de Silva, Raja Proctor and M. Chandrasoma, Michael Ondaatje and Tennyson Perera. Certain authors obliquely mention the situation created by the attempted revolution. In her semi-autobiographical novel *Monsoon & Potholes* (2006), Manuka Wijesinghe refers to the JVP as the “Red Fungus” and portrays them as a public nuisance and a national menace. Michael Ondaatje, in *Running in the Family* (1983), writes about the insurgents in the town of Kegalle,<sup>15</sup> who had visited his ancestral home and demanded arms and ammunition which were in the possession of his stepmother. Yet another author who has several times referred to the chaos created by the rebels is Sivanandan in his *When Memory Dies*. A more recent novel, not dealt in this dissertation, is Neluka Silva’s *The Iron Fence* (2011), which highlights the dichotomy between the privileged and the under-privileged. The socio-political relevance of this literature became important after the insurgencies and the deepening ethnic conflict, and according to Maryse Jayasuriya, the author of *Terror and Reconciliation: Sri-Lankan Anglophone Literature* (2012), “the current shape of Sri Lankan literature in English

---

<sup>15</sup> Kegalle is a town situated 78 km away from Colombo and located in the Sabaragamuwa Province. The town of Kegalle and the suburbs were under insurgent control for several days during the 1971 insurgency.



reflects the centrality of war, terrorism and attempts at reconciliation to the Sri Lankan experience of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries” (1). The first insurgency took place during a period of nationalistic fervour that followed independence, and many writers in Sinhala created an aura of romanticism and adventure around the JVP insurgents. However, novelists who wrote in English, who were mainly from the English-educated, urban, upper class painted a grim picture.

Organized in three thematic sections with overlapping concerns, the impact of the insurgencies on Sri Lankan society is explored from different angles in this dissertation. The below mentioned authors have more or less based their narrations, wholly on situations created by the youthful rebels during the two insurgencies. In the first section, the three selected novels written by Sarachchandra, Wijenaike and de Silva are mainly about the circumstantial and internal aspects of student life in the universities in Sri Lanka, and the result of student involvement in the insurgencies. They also denote the extent to which politics are present in the university culture. In the second section, the economic and social factors which have largely contributed to the insurgencies are thematically depicted in the novels of Proctor and Goonewardena. They scrutinize the social relationships and economic forces at work between different classes during a specific period, and uncover economic and political functions of the Western-educated upper class, actively involved in the governance of the country. The exposure of state-sponsored violence is the main theme of the novels written by Perera and Ondaatje, which is presented in the third section.

## **2.2.1 The Student Involvement**

### **2.2.1.1 A Professor’s Dilemma and His Rebellious Students Ediriwira Sarachchandra’s *Curfew and a Full Moon* (1978)**

A household word in Sri Lanka, Professor Ediriwira Sarachchandra is a novelist, playwright, critic, and opera producer. An influential and iconic figure in the field of education and drama, he enjoyed a long career as a university lecturer and later held the position of the Chair in Modern Sinhalese Literature at the University of Ceylon. For over four centuries, Sri Lanka had known the burdens of subjugation to foreign imperialists. Since they were all Western Christian powers, local literature did not have a chance to thrive and the colonists had scant respect for local art, customs and traditions, and serious national issues were side-lined or ignored altogether. After Independence, Sarachchandra’s works in Sinhalese fulfilled a national need, at a time when national fervour and sentiments were coming into the forefront in various cultural activities. Despite his appreciation of traditional culture, “He was the first to apply Western standards to make a distinction between good and bad in Sinhalese literature,” as stated by the biographer L. B. Herath, in *Sri Lanka’s Modern Writers and Patriots* (39). Sarachchandra’s efforts of restoring interrupted traditions of Sri Lankan indigenous literature and his commitment to traditional cultural revivalism did not go

unrecognized.<sup>16</sup> Equally proficient in both Sinhala and English, the novel *Curfew and a Full Moon* (1978) about the April 1971 youth uprising was originally written in Sinhala by Sarachchandra. Self-consciously a Sri Lankan writer, the complete and unexpurgated translation of the book into English was handled by the author himself and, therefore the English translation has retained the cultural specificities of the Sinhala version. This is a remarkable achievement, considering the fact that very few Sinhalese writers have broken through the language barrier into English. Further, *Curfew and a Full Moon* was the first English language fictional treatment of the insurgency by a Sri Lankan, and apparently a daring subject to write about during the turbulent years. For that reason, Sarachchandra is considered the founding father of the sub-genre. On account of the fact that he has cleared the ground for other writers to deal with the volatile subject of the insurgencies, his writing is taken as authoritative.

The novel charts the disaffection of the young post-colonial intelligentsia of the universities of Sri Lanka. The year 1971 was a watershed of radical youth activity in Sri Lanka. Whilst paying undivided attention to the youth rebellion, Sarachchandra also contemplates the novel from a different perspective, compared to writings on the subject by other authors. That is, he places emphasis on the hero of the story who is a Professor of the Peradeniya University of Sri Lanka. It is evident that the inspiration of portraying the hero as a senior university staff member and choosing the setting as the Peradeniya University<sup>17</sup> and the period 1970-1971 are all derived from the author's own experiences. Sarachchandra is a cultural insider of university pedagogical life, and the anguished awareness of the values that he upholds as an academic and as a teacher is evident in the novel. It is a historically true fact that during the insurgencies, the class struggle was seen in the most heightened form in the universities which were the breeding grounds for dissidents and ideological battles. The JVP-backed student associations were grossly responsible for forcing Vice-Chancellors and other senior staff officers to resign under death threats, and perpetrating acts of humiliation on senior academics that did not fall in line with their revolutionary politics. In spite of these rude and intimidating facts, the student rebels in the novel retain a core of essential innocence.

The setting of the story is at a time when independent Sri Lanka is facing multiple problems, some of them which have arisen as a result of British imperialism. Professor Amaradasa, the protagonist of the story, belongs to a middle class family. "His father

---

<sup>16</sup> Sarachchandra has been honoured with the prestigious awards, Magsaysay by the Government of Philippines and Bharat Padmasri by the Government of India for his distinguished literary contributions to Asia. His illustrious academic career culminated with the diplomatic appointment as Ambassador of Sri Lanka in France. During his life time he was unanimously recognized as the national dramatist of Sri Lanka and an artist who helped to resuscitate a culture in decline. This recognition came with his plays in Sinhala *Maname* (1956), *Sinhabahu* (1961) and *Pemato Jayati Soko* (1969).

<sup>17</sup> The University of Peradeniya, the largest university in the island, is located in the Central Province on a site of great natural beauty, 6 km from Kandy, the last historical capital of Sri Lanka.

had been a clerk in the government service who had no other income than his monthly salary, and had denied himself considerably in order to spend more on the education of his son” (32). Professor Amaradasa completes his education by sheer diligence. By excelling in his studies he wins a scholarship which enables him to obtain his tertiary education in England. On his return to Sri Lanka he is appointed as a lecturer at the Peradeniya University. He proves to be a dedicated teacher and although his education has elevated his class position, he is down to earth and friendly towards his students who come from poorer backgrounds. Occasionally he socializes with them in his bungalow situated in the campus area. It is apparent that the exposure to Western ideologies has led to a critical evaluation of his attitude towards student rights and his genuine concern towards them.

Somarathna, Munasinghe and Wijesiri are three final year students who regularly visit the Professor. Here, perhaps, we are near the roots of the Professor’s appeal to the young. It is from these three that he first learns about the student unrest and their fervent interest in various radical student bodies forming within the university. He also becomes aware of the signs of class restiveness among students through posters displayed by the Che Guevara influenced group which read “Class Hatred is Love of the Motherland” (22) and “The Rout of Imperialism is the Liberation of People” (22). But the focus of attention of the Professor is mainly the education of his students and therefore he pays little attention to the tremors of dissention rumbling under the surface. However, at the request of his students he signs a printed subscription paper, appealing for support for an island-wide organization, Peoples’ Liberation Front (JVP) fund, without paying much heed to what repercussions it might bring.

Cyril Ranatunga, a high ranking Sri Lankan Army General, who has a gallant war record, took a leading part in the hunt, capture and destruction of JVP rebel groups during the 1971 insurgency. He has dedicated an entire chapter about his experiences and observations during this dark period in Sri Lanka’s history, in his informative memoirs *Adventurous Journey: From Peace to War, Insurgency to Terrorism* (2009). Ranatunga confirms the very mood depicted by Sarachchandra in his novel:

The University of Peradeniya by the year 1970 was a well-known hotbed of JVP proliferation and this situation was not one that materialized overnight, as signs of violence were distinguishable as far back as the 1960’s. The first indication was the emergence of aggression amongst the existing student Marxist elements supported by a sympathetic staff. Some of the staff too had Marxist leanings and aired their own differences of opinions with the authorities but their methods were limited merely to discussions and ‘strikes;’ never resorting to violence or destruction. (24)

Sarachchandra explores the student-teacher involvement in the movement and his writing discloses a sensibility that has been strongly influenced by pedagogical life and an educator’s concern over an erratic course taken by his students. Despite the fact that the professor does not wish to get overtly embroiled in students’ affairs, his curiosity is sufficiently aroused to accept an invitation to attend a meeting of a student union

supporting the JVP, where for the first time he listens to an inciting, impassioned, revolutionary speech made by the legendary leader of JVP, Rohana Wijeweera. Sensing an extraordinary opportunity to expand their numbers, the student wing of the JVP had invited Wijeweera to address a large gathering. The magnetic inspiration of his presence and the impact of his speech boost the credibility of the movement. But the professor observes that the rebel leader does not appear to be much of a he-man despite his inciting rhetoric:

People saw him now to be a short and stumpy man, square-jawed, and with a head and shoulders that seemed disproportionately large for the lower part of the his body, presenting a figure in which the lines tapered down to the bottom as in some familiar cartoon. He could have been somewhere in his thirties. (43)

In spite of Wijeweera's unimpressive appearance, he makes a great impact on the students by instilling a paralysing fear of being poor and unemployed for the rest of their lives, unless something radical is speedily done by them to change the existing system. He convinces his attentive audience that as Sri Lankan society still has its feet firmly chained to the colonial past, it is impossible to progress unless elements and systems which follow Western influence are speedily removed. He expresses his revulsion at the vulgarity and gross wealth of Colombo society, the class system and the upper classes in particular. In order to lend more credibility to his claims he gives facts and figures of the Sinhala-educated unemployed youth. Wijeweera's very presence emboldens the student supporters to assert themselves more aggressively to his cause.

Sarachchandra appears to highlight class differences more than linguistic for the root of the conflict in his novel. But in actual fact, during the 1970s, the Sinhala-educated youth had no marketable skills to compete with the English-educated in obtaining employment and therefore ill-equipped to cope with lifelong economic responsibilities which adulthood inevitably brings. They were also made to feel that the urban elite and the Sinhala-speaking rural folk could never meet on equal terms under the present circumstances, as the latter have little ability of securing opportunities for social mobility through proficiency in English. Therefore the JVP encouraged the Sinhala-educated youth to fling themselves into revolutionary action, as self-appointed dispensers of justice. That is the reason why the rebel leader Wijeweera's rhetoric inspired a strong following among the university students. According to the novel, leaflets and other literature were also circulated during this time, which displays that the rebels had mastered the rhetoric of the written word to advance their own political and social interests.

Sarachchandra is unique in involving the rebel leader in his novel. He is the only author, among the many who have based their novels on the insurgencies, who brings the ultimate leadership of the movement into his narrative. Subsequent novelists who have written on the subject have carefully left out Wijeweera's name, perhaps for reasons of their own personal safety. Sarachchandra also accurately mentions in the novel the exact

places where the violence escalated during the 1971 insurgency, giving a sense of authenticity to his novel, while other authors have used fictitious place names. Also, one can recognize in the narrative, a deliberative consciousness of ideological discourse and the rhetoric of the rebels, which seem to take on an explanatory importance. The rebels are depicted not only as opponents of the Government, but also as stoic liberators of the poor, and the influence of language has a significant bearing on this issue.

The novel is marked by the growing unease of the university students of Peradeniya. The outward calm appearance of the university atmosphere is rudely shaken when a bomb explodes in the ceiling of one of the male students' resident halls. The somewhat naive professor is blissfully unaware of his own students' involvement and the fact that the campus is becoming a breeding ground for insurgency. At the same time, it is rumoured that the police has found a considerable cache of arms and explosives in a hall of residence during search that followed and his student Somaratna is taken in by the police for interrogation. After his release by the police, Somaratna disappears for a while, neglecting his studies, much to the concern of his dedicated teacher. The actual police findings in the University premises during this time are confirmed by General Ranatunga:

A few days later, an explosion ripped through a hall of residence building at the University of Peradeniya. The police recovered bombs and large quantities of explosives and weapons. Uniforms were in the process of being stitched in a women's hall of residence and similar uniforms were recovered from other areas along with shot guns and explosives. The uniforms had a familiar style with four large shirt pockets, and were blue in colour. Further investigations unearthed a transmitter. (23)

The Professor and other staff members organize an educational excursion to the Buddhist ruins of Polonnaruwa<sup>18</sup> and Anuradhapura,<sup>19</sup> which is intended to widen the historical, archaeological and aesthetic knowledge of his students. Anuradhapura had been the centre of Sri Lanka's Golden Age for over a thousand years; probably the only capital to survive for such a long period. It is with great relish and enthusiasm that the Professor explains to the students about the ruins and their importance to the cultural heritage of the Sri Lankans. During the trip, the Professor is a witness to various heated arguments and even fights among the students, which spill over to even the other university lecturers who have joined the trip. Each of them are defending various political ideologies and the professor realizes how politically charged the students are

---

<sup>18</sup> Polonnaruwa is a town situated in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka. The region is famous for its ruins of an ancient city which dates from the late 10th century. There is also a large artificial lake, Parakrama Samudra, built by King Parakramabahu I, whose reign was the region's golden age.

<sup>19</sup> Anuradhapura is one of the ancient capitals of Sri Lanka, famous for its well-preserved ruins of the country's ancient civilization. Situated in the North Central Province, it is today a UNESCO World Heritage site.

and how their hotly contested ideological differences are leading to animosities and antagonisms.

Apparent evidence of the Westernization of Professor Amaradasa is indicated by the reference to his lack of knowledge and appreciation of a part of Sinhala culture:

He had practically given up listening to the radio many years back because he found the stuff they put on it so boring and insipid, and he was out of touch with Sinhalese music entirely. Hence he was hearing for the first time many of the songs the students sang, and he wondered where they had learned them. (86)

Apparently, the Professor's cultural appreciation seems to have changed due to the Western education he has received. In Polonnaruwa, a former student of the Professor who is currently the District Revenue Officer offers to host the group in his bungalow. Mysteriously, the Professor's three senior students Somaratna, Wijesiri and Munasinghe break away from the group and disappear. Their absence is felt only when the party is rudely disturbed in the night by the sound of explosions and gunfire and various army vehicles speeding down the roads. A posse of police officers charges into the bungalow and demands to examine the bag and baggage of each and every member of the excursion. During the search, the police find two suitcases with rebel uniforms hidden under the seats of the bus they are travelling on. The number of bags does not tally with the number of people on the trip, as three students have already absconded. Immediately, the professor and his colleagues and the students are suspected of collusion with the rebels and the professor and other staff are rudely interrogated. The Professor, who is a confident man, maintains a dead-pan face during the interrogation and continues to plead innocence. From the police, the party gets the information that the rebels are attacking police stations and the forces are retaliating. Professor Amaradasa's former student, the District Revenue Officer, uses his influence with the Government Agent of the area who has been appointed the Supreme Commander for the region in view of the crisis, to obtain a permit for the party to leave immediately.

The travelling party observes on their return journey, hundreds of bodies of young people strewn on either side of the roads, the aftermath of the brutal crackdown on youth dissenters by the forces. They smell the odious odour of "tyre pyres" where the bodies are swiftly burnt leaving no evidence. These images evoke a frighteningly macabre and eerie quality to the narrative. A sense of despair for the disappeared three students is palpable among the party and their former enthusiasm is much dampened. On their return home, they get the news that the rebels have gone amok, attacking police stations and daily curfews have been imposed which restricts the movements of the public. The Professor is baffled, devastated and deeply saddened by the disappearance of his three students and is at a loss as to what to say to their parents. Meanwhile, there are radical changes in the university administration and a new Vice-Chancellor is appointed, whose first task is to investigate the involvement of university student and staff in JVP activities. His findings unfold a career-threatening revelation about Professor Amaradasa, as his

name heads the list of contributions to the student wing affiliated to the JVP. In view of the enormity of collaboration of students and that of certain university lecturers in activities of sabotage and on-going JVP crimes, the Vice-Chancellor decides to temporarily close the Campus and postpone all impending examinations. Some of the students and staff are arrested, and in an effort to clear his name, the Professor broaches the subject with the new Vice-Chancellor. He pretends that he has never contributed to the collection of funds for rebel activities.

Curfew is imposed and daily life becomes increasingly problematic. Despite encountering difficulties in travelling, most staff and students return to their respective hometowns, as transport and other essential services come to a halt. The Professor is strongly advised by his colleagues to leave his residence because of the disruptive atmosphere in the campus. But he lingers on with his increasingly agitated and uneasy family, vacillating and wondering what to do. Some days later, in the middle of the night, two of his near-starving, renegade students arrive at the Professor's house seeking food and shelter. Extremely concerned about the safety and health of the two students, the Professor and his wife give succour to them for a few days. A while later, a colleague of his takes him for a walk and shows the half-burnt, rotting corpse of his student Munasinghe, who had been particularly close to the Professor. He receives a letter from his other student Somaratna, who is now imprisoned because of his involvement in the insurgent movement. The student states the reason for joining the rebel group in his letter. "My friends told me that even if I got my degree I would still remain unemployed, and some of them even promised to give me a job after they overthrew the government and seized power" (198). This confirms why the youth of the country could not with tranquillity accept injustices by an artificially created class system which alienated the bulk of the people in the country. The student explicitly details in his letter, the harrowing torture he is going through in jail and requests the Professor to visit him. The Professor tries to maintain an even keel though he has involuntarily implicated himself by harbouring insurgents and by innocently having contributed to their fund-raising attempts. He constantly contemplates the fate of his students and ponders whether he should risk visiting Somaratne in jail. To the horror of the Professor's wife and children, a few days later, a police jeep arrives at his house and he is taken away to Colombo for questioning. The story ends evoking a nagging doubt, concerning the uncertain future of Professor Amaradasa and that of the youth participants of the insurgency.

A profoundly interesting novel in its relentless emphasis on the class struggle, *Curfew and a Full Moon* offers a satisfactory explanation of the rebellious attitudes of undergraduates. In a somewhat didactic manner, they are depicted as a naive group of youthful dissidents who receive the opportunity to cultivate intellectual freedom and the spirit of inquiry at university but soon fall victims to misguided politics and ideologies. Being young and inexperienced in politics, they fervently believe that they are the active participants in changing the history of the country and instigating a national reawakening

by toppling a corrupt regime, and instead, be successful in bringing in a social power structure intended to meet the needs of everyone. Sarachchandra's presentation of the ideological stand of the rebels tends to be rather romanticised throughout the novel, as he seems to be anxious to stress the essential naivety and the innocence of the dissident students who are projected as unaware of the wider social implications of their actions. He explores the insurgent activities as a sub-culture of university life, and elucidates the reasons for the youth rebels' acceptance of the JVP leader Wijeweera as a cult figure in their struggle for social equality. The university under-graduates were merely following a Western tradition of inquiry, of bringing the least palatable truths into the open. According to the thoughts of Antonio Gramsci, recorded in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971), the degree to which mobilization of youth and galvanizing them into insurgency by conviction is explained thus: "To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is "psychological"; they "organise" human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle etc." (377).

Sarachchandra appears to blame the deficiencies in the educational system that prevailed for the legitimate ire of the dissident youth and seems to convey the message that it is a part of pedagogical responsibility to understand and sympathise with their plight. His special concern about student welfare is confirmed by P. B. Galahitiyawa's news article published on the seventh death anniversary of Sarachchandra:

If one were to form in mind a composite image of this multifaceted personality one ought to try and understand his mastery of many languages (both eastern and western), his knowledge of many religions and philosophical traditions, his profound understanding of many arts and sciences and above all his affection for people, particularly his students. (*Daily News*, 16 Aug 2003)

Taking into account this paragraph, as well as the rhetorical gestures in the novel, it is evident Sarachchandra has allied himself with the oppressed classes.

*Curfew and a Full Moon*, being the first novel in English dealing with the 1971 uprising, raises an ethical dilemma in a manner that has broken new ground for Sri Lankan fiction in English. As appropriately observed by Wijesinha, in *Breaking Bounds, Essays on Sri Lankan Writing in English*:

Significantly enough it was only Ediriweera Sarachchandra, previously the doyen of writers in Sinhalese (whose work had in general over the preceding decades been quite appreciably illuminating about prevailing social realities), who provided in English a thought provoking account of the insurgency and its impact on the English-speaking middle class that had hitherto exercised an unquestioned dominance over the social and political life of the country. (31)

It is noteworthy that the insurgency was depicted in English and Sinhala poetry in Sri Lanka even at the time that the author wrote *Curfew and a Full Moon*. Goonetilleke, in *Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People 1917-2003* compares the poetry written on the insurgency and the novels. "I have maintained that Sri Lankan writers



have performed better as poets than as novelists and so have other critics but it seems to me that this judgement does not apply to literature about the insurgency” (76). There is undoubtedly depth and sagacity behind the paradox and irony presented in the novel and the fact remains that Sarachchandra’s novel is a candid exposition of the university politics of his time and a bold effort at a time when writing on the subject might have cost one’s life.

The university student component in the JVP movement has always been inordinately important to the rebel organization. Luring youth support to increase the numerical strength of the insurgency was easy at that level, as the majority of university entrants were from the lower-middle class and predominantly arts students who would face difficulties in obtaining suitable employment upon graduation. Moreover, in 1971, the method of recruitment was more doctrinaire and tended to attract those with somewhat more intelligence and youthful idealism, as is evidenced by the novel. The novel, published in 1978 is an early eye-opener of the situation of the Sinhala-educated youth of Sri Lanka. Wilfrid Jayasuriya, who has made a literary case study of Sarachchandra’s novel in *Sri Lanka’s Modern English Literature* (1994), elicits the following response to the problem: “The course of the youth revolt of 1971 has been superbly dramatized in *Curfew and a Full Moon* but it points to no solutions except to a sympathetic understanding of what the youth were trying to do” (126). The youth of Sri Lanka succumbed to the idea of a grand social plan and subsequently witnessed its impossibility. This confirms the fact that the time has come for a new valuation of the national psyche and the youth of the country. It is exactly an understanding of the problem and speedy remedial actions taken by governmental authorities to redress the situation and correct gross moral and social discriminations that could have avoided the second youth insurrection during the years 1987-89, which was far more virulent than the uprising in 1971. The enormity of these tragedies of the neglect of the youth of the country still gnaws at the collective conscience of the Sri Lankans.

The novel is endowed with certain timeless qualities, as student dissention is a universal problem which surfaces now and then, and in Sri Lanka as well. It is a clever guide which employs a framework to understand a social reality that is gesturing towards a solution to youth problems, which could have averted the second insurgency. This attitude is intensely fostered by Sarachchandra’s characters that are depicted as idols of university students, who in turn stubbornly dominate our thoughts about student rights, education of youth and society. The narrative, in fact, contains an accurate portrayal of the political atmosphere of the period and the novel’s strength lies in its wilful immersion in the sensibility of the youth in revolt. The author also stirs the social consciousness of the Sri Lankans into understanding the link between education and employment for the youth of Sri Lanka

The novel depicts the first insurgency as a class conflict and rejection of the cultural elitism of the English-educated upper class. Since culture and language are integrally

related, the author coerces the reader to look upon the English language as a symbol of colonization and repression. The compelling need to absorb the class of literate, Sinhala-educated majority of youth into modern public life is also hinted at in the novel. Considering these social imperatives, Sarachchandra has contributed courageously to a pressing national question, by bringing the topic up in his writing for the first time. Subsequent novels by other authors like James Goonewardena and Punyakante Wijenaïke deal with the insurgencies and echo themes similar to those of Sarachchandra's novel, but they highlight the acts of terrorism of the rebels. As analysed by D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke in "The 1971 Insurgency in Sri Lankan Literature in English" published in *The Writer as Historical Witness: Studies in Commonwealth Literature* (1995: Thus Sarachchandra's view of the insurgency appears fair and sensible. He has more sympathy for the insurgents than has James Goonewardena. All Sarachchandra's rebels appear human beings [...]" (384).

#### **2.2.1.2 Loss of Innocence**

##### ***The Rebel* (1979) by Punyakante Wijenaïke**

Authors like Punyakante Wijenaïke<sup>20</sup> and Nihal de Silva have used universities in Sri Lanka as settings for their novels and have included indecent ragging as a part of university life. Sarachchandra too mentions this despicable practice and the warped mentality of the raggers but in a less significant manner. Ragging has been a perennial problem around the universities in Sri Lanka and a forum for Sinhala-educated students to denounce the so-called English- educated and Western influenced youth of the cities. All students, whatever ethnic group they belonged to were subjected to ragging at the time these novels were written. But the minority entrants from the elite schools, especially those who had previously attended exclusive English medium schools were compelled to go through a gruelling ragging by the majority Sinhala-speaking village entrants. JVP influenced Student Unions have taken a lead in perpetuating this practice over the years.

Wijenaïke and Jean Arasanayagam are notable in being pioneer, female, Anglophone writers of their generation, whose works, which span over many decades, have gained regional mainstream recognition and popularity. These female authors chronicle a shifting landscape which bears direct correspondence to political and demographic changes that have taken place in the country over the past fifty years. Wijenaïke started writing during times when women were grossly under-represented as published writers in Asia. The themes of her works register a wide range of pressing

---

<sup>20</sup> Punyakante Wijenaïke is the author of a number of novels, short stories and autobiographical sketches. Some of her works have been translated into Sinhala, Tamil, Russian and German. She has received the Kalasuri Award in 1988, The State Literary Award in 2002, the special Sri Lankan Government award Sahitya Ratna in 2003 and The State Literary Festival Award for Non-fiction in 2005.

postcolonial issues of the country, like the insurgency, the ethnic problems, the shifting economic landscape of the country, the political and demographic changes which affect the villagers and about women tethered by patriarchy and psychological studies of women caught up in the social changes of the country.

Wijenaïke's *The Rebel* (1979) appears in a collection of short stories and portrays the human angle of events and characters caught up in the youth rebellion of 1971. Her story is strikingly different from what other writers have written on the subject, as it lays more emphasis on the depiction of human emotions of characters involved in the rebellion than the actual horrendous events during the period in question. The setting of the story is an agricultural Sri Lankan village, hardly touched by advanced Western technology. The story revolves round a poor village girl called Kumari, whose father remarries after the demise of his first wife. The father, William Singho, is a poor, weary, struggling farmer who has to scrimp and save in order to give a higher education to Kumari, who at an early age shows academic promise. William Singho's second wife, Sophie Nona, finds it completely unnecessary to throw away hard-earned money on the education of her step-daughter Kumari. She feels their meagre resources are better spent on her own children. But the father has ambitions for his first-born. He hopes that, equipped with a university education, Kumari will one day be able to procure gainful employment, be an asset to the family, and will also have the financial ability to help the rest of his children.

On entering university, Kumari is in for an initial shock, which is the inhuman and obscene practice of the ragging of the first year students by the seniors. The entrants from the metropolis and from elite schools are targeted for extreme harassment; especially those who are English-educated are compelled to face greater indignities than the Sinhala-educated village entrants. As experienced by Kumari and Buddhi, her new found female friend:

The next morning as she and Buddhi walked to a lecture they saw a group of boys standing in a circle round the fresher from the Colombo school. On going nearer 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 on the ground and they jeered at him. 'Came to look down on us, did you? Just because you have led an easier life than us, you think you are better?' (14)

Here, Wijenaïke is highlighting a failure in the education system of Sri Lanka where intense ragging has caused immense psychological and physical scars on young students and even death, which could be avoided by greater vigilance by the authorities. She is depicting the ragers as stereotypical tyrants and over-sexed, sadistic, vulgar brutes who are congenitally violent. A recent Sri Lankan newspaper editorial examines the socioeconomic factors behind the practice of ragging:

Ragging is not a new phenomenon. Though it was present in University campuses ever since the opening of the University College in the colonial era it took the present crude and violent form only after the proliferation of universities and the qualitative increase of student intake.

Very often the senior undergraduates coming from impoverished social backgrounds give vent to their frustration and despair by inflicting humiliating punishment on the innocent fresh students. It is a warped means of expressing “class solidarity” by the mob leaders who conduct these bouts of ragging. (*Daily News*, 5 May 2010)

The ragging of new entrants has gradually become more violent, resulting even in students committing suicide. There seems to be a feeling of vindictiveness due to the prevalent frustration and disparity in social standards. Therefore, violence seems to be the only expression of so-called freedom of the under privileged.

Cautious and timid at first, as is usual of village women in Sri Lanka, Kumari is coerced by a senior member to attend training classes, which is a pre-condition to join the struggle of the revolutionary movement. The training camps are crucial rehearsal grounds for the final attack. A strict code of discipline is demanded from her where she has to abstain from any kind of youthful fun and entertainment, like going to the cinema, smoking, drinking and having boyfriends. Gradually, Kumari is brainwashed to live up to full doctrinal requirements and she becomes blinded by the persuasive rhetoric of the student leaders of the movement:

She was now a member of a secret movement of the students in the University. She was attending, one by one, the five classes training them for revolutionary action. From each class she learnt a new thing, the economic problems of her country, the false independence they had, about Indian expansion and finally the path to solution, which was the revolution. (33)

Preyed upon and radicalised by others, Kumari is increasingly drawn into violent action in support of the revolutionary groups.

Wijenaik points out the fears that the JVP harboured about “Indian expansionism” during the time of their revolution. As analysed by Chandraprema, Wijeweera and his cohorts firmly believed that as a part of the separatist struggle launched by the Tamil guerrilla groups of the North and East of Sri Lanka, there was an imminent possibility that South India would annex Sri Lanka: “led by the DMK and its offshoots and fostered and supported by American interests [...]” (89). While the theory of Indian expansionism served as one of the mobilising platforms of the JVP, the insurgents were also demanding a tough stand on illegal Indian immigrants on Sri Lanka’s soil. They regarded the prosperous businessmen of Indian origin established in Sri Lanka with resentment and suspicion, and accused them of monopolising certain kinds of trade and thus reducing business opportunities for the locals. On the other hand, the insurgents displayed a more benevolent attitude towards the descendants of the South Indian plantation labour imported by the British. They proposed that the plantation workers of Indian origin should have the right to obtain citizenship in Sri Lanka if they wished, and also that their living standards should be raised.

Kumari, despite protestations and admonitions from her fellow students, gets more and more drawn into the movement. She is soon trained to be a group captain, for which purpose, the highest degree of loyalty and a tenacious commitment to the cause are

expected of her. Once drafted as one of them, there is no going back, as she would be regarded as a traitor and killed. She is entrusted to collect and guard weapons, which are knives, axes and rusty old guns, and she is also given the task to sew uniforms for the insurgents. She gets totally immersed in the rebel cause and contributes significantly to it with her work. Her naive parents are completely ignorant of the latest developments in her life and somewhat confused about her erratic behaviour, especially when she returns home late.

Kumari being a Buddhist is aware of her religious obligations, which advise restraint on violence. Yet, she is gullible and naive from the very outset. What the insurgent leaders are proposing is a tantalising hope, a dream and a possibility of employment in the future. Hailing from a poor family, she shares the burning economic problems of the youth of the country. Gradually groomed by the extremists, like the rest of the rebels, Kumari fervently comes to believe that their efforts through violent means are a part of a heroic and patriotic struggle to liberate the poor. She does not expect her parents to understand their cause: “My father cannot realise this revolution as the only means the repressed have to overthrow their problems and march swiftly towards freedom. It needs courage to shed blood” (47). Here, the author confirms the social isolation and economic desperation which have contributed to the rebels’ affinity for violence, as well as depicting the period in the history of Sri Lanka when parents lived in constant fear of their children being forcibly recruited by insurgent groups and then subsequently getting caught in the island-wide search and reprisal by the forces. The actions of the JVP brought violent retaliations from the better armed Government security forces, and they imitated the same terror tactics of the rebels, like burning down villages and dumping bodies in central places to instil fear as a deterrent. Kumari is captured by the army along with a few other rebels. She is stripped naked by the soldiers and forced to go through a session of gruesome torture and humiliation in order to extract information about the names and whereabouts of fellow insurgents.

Wijenaikē coerces the reader to sympathise with the rebels, especially with the main character. However severe the torture Kumari has to endure at the hands of her ruthless interrogators, she refuses to divulge any information. Her dogged, mafia-like code of obstinate silence is due to the fact that she is highly enamoured by one of her colleagues whose identity and hiding place she is not prepared to divulge. During the interrogation she makes a desperate effort to escape and runs out of the door and tears through the gate and out into the road. She is barefooted and able to run faster than the booted soldier chasing her, but she is eventually shot by him. Finally, she pays the ultimate price for the cause of the youth rebels with her life. As readers, we experience a sense of frustration at the apparent helplessness of her attempts at escape and are naturally made to empathise with her. Kumari’s last moments are described by the author, in a manner similar to that of Peyton Farquhar’s in the short story “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” by Ambrose Bierce. The ending has the same kind of irregular time sequence which garners

the sympathy of the reader for the main character, and the author builds up hopes that Kumari will be able to get away during the last moments from the clutches of the ruthless soldiers.

The story ends with the untimely death of Kumari's father who is unable to bear the loss of his daughter and also having to face the shame and disappointment that she has brought with her actions. During this dark era of Sri Lankan history, much familial disruption was caused. For many parents and elders of the villages of Sri Lanka, the hopes for their children's future were dashed because of a crisis for which they had little responsibility or involvement. The author thus evokes a robust sense of social consciousness in her narrative, as the victims are the marginalised poor of the country.

The anti-social aspect of ragging which is obliquely mentioned in Sarachchandra's *Curfew and a Full Moon* is vividly illustrated in Wijenaiké's novel. She addresses this social problem far more resolutely than Sarachchandra does and sees the problem as a part of the predicament of modern-day university students, especially for those who come from class privileged backgrounds. In *The Rebel*, the English-educated student groups are rendered psychologically marginal because of their exposure to Western culture. Thus the class and language consciousness come into focus when the urban entrants to the university from elite schools are tormented by the raggers: "Won't those who have the advantage of studying in a foreign language learn medicine quicker [...]" (37). Wijenaiké also convincingly includes nationalist sentiments of the rebellious youth such as, "foreign ways would not suit us" (36), "Those stars and stripes belong to an imperialist power that has no right on our soil" (23), which demonstrate the animosities the rebels are harbouring about Western impact. This attitude of the rural youth of Sri Lanka and the reasons for their uprising are clearly explained by Gunaratna in *Sri Lanka A Lost Revolution?: The Inside Story of the JVP* (1990):

Seventy six percent of Sri Lanka's youth population lives in the rural areas. They comprise a larger percentage of the low income earning groups. The families to which they belong are larger. Often there are eight to twelve children in one family. The burden falls not only upon the parents but also on the first child of the family. He or she has no opportunity of furthering education, but has to fend for the rest. At rural level, virtually no English is taught. This closes a large percentage of avenues towards securing a job. The importance given to English has grown in the more recent years and this has destroyed the aspirations of even the several bright youth from the rural sector. (64)

It is imperative to mention here, that despite the aversion to Western influences by a certain sector of the population, there is hardly anyone in the country who is completely immune to the allure of Western cultural, technological, educational, medical and social advancements. Wijenaiké's novel examines the complex ways in which the Western influenced characters are situated in relation to language and culture. The author also brings into focus the economic stagnation and the widespread, rural poverty which has created the situation in the first place, while the urban privileged continue to live comfortable lives, with their standards of living rising ever higher. Wijenaiké mainly

concerns herself with individuals who are compelled to make traumatic choices during the turbulent period of political upheaval, for instance the university students who are drawn into the conflict because of their hopeless, personal circumstances. As a result, during the insurgencies, universities became virtually a war zone for clashes between students of various unions, administrative staff and academics. At a time when the universities of Sri Lanka loomed larger in political life than they should have, the novel provides a commentary on student involvement in the insurgency.

However, Thiru Kandiah in “Inadequate Responses and the Attenuation of Creativity: Sri Lankan English Fiction of the Insurgency of 1971” published in the book *The Writer as Historical Witness* (1995), highlights the shortcomings of Wijenaïke’s story such as, “Showing a single-minded determination to defend the interests and viewpoints of her class at all costs, she sets resolutely about the business of crushing the rebels in fictional terms, without once pausing to ask herself whether there were other important things too that needed to be looked at” (396). What Kandiah refers to is the predominance of Wijenaïke’s upper-middle class voice throughout the novel and her failure in attributing the corrupt society that the heroine of “The Rebel” lives in, for the situation faced by the impoverished youth.

The novel reveals the artificially rigorous conditions under which the rebel training and educational camps were conducted in the middle of jungles, the intention behind them being the training of rebel cadres to accept the harsh conditions which they were to face during the course of the revolution. The above procedure also reveals the austere methods of the frenzied rebels. Wijenaïke demonizes the Sri Lankan Army Officers as despots, by highlighting their methods of torture used to interrogate and intimidate suspected insurgents. She graphically records, the traumatic effects of such torturous brutality, as well as public torture and immolation of especially female insurgents and the excessive and aggressive display of power by the Army.

### **2.2.1.3 A Fiery Commitment to Youthful Ambitions *The Ginirälla Conspiracy* (2005) by Nihal de Silva**

Wijenaïke’s short story has influenced other works, for instance *The Ginirälla Conspiracy* (2005) by Nihal de Silva.<sup>21</sup> His novel is about the second insurgency, partly set in a Sri Lankan university and like that of Wijenaïke’s traverses similar ground by presenting the perennial social problem of ragging in the universities. *The Ginirälla Conspiracy* is comparatively new and is the third and the last of his novels published during the author’s lifetime. It depicts the brutality of politics during the turbulent period of the insurgency.

---

<sup>21</sup> Nihal de Silva, who is a late-comer to the literary scene of Sri Lanka, made his debut at the age of sixty three with his Gratiaen Prize award winning novel, *The Road from Elephant Pass* (2003). The author was the recipient of several literary prizes during his relatively short writing career. His untimely death, as he was just coming to the height of his literary career, was a severe blow to Sri Lankan literature in English.

A tone of omniscience throughout the narrative is one of the hallmarks of de Silva. “Ginirālla” in Sinhala means “a wave of fire,” and as the name suggests, the novel is about the slow but revolutionary ardour and gradual uprising of the youth of the country and its brutal aftermath. Sujatha Mallika, the protagonist and the narrator of the story, is an innocent but clever, young, village girl. The backdrop to the novel is the Jayapura University<sup>22</sup> of Sri Lanka. The structure of the novel comprises of four journals maintained by the protagonist during her university years and thereafter during her career as a journalist. Similar to Wijenaikē’s *Rebel*, the story commences with a poor, rural bred and unsophisticated village lass, Sujatha Mallika, entering the university with great hopes and ambitions for her future. She is terrified as she faces sadistic raggers who make her life miserable. She is aware that the indecent ragging that the freshmen have to go through is “something to be endured and then forgotten; one more torturous obstacle to overcome on the way to my goal [...]” (de Silva 3). Her only chance of escaping from poverty is through education. When interrogated by the seniors during the ragging, she lies to them that she comes from a village called Angunuwewa. Since the seniors are champions of the poor and the suppressed class of people, Sujatha Mallika’s poverty endears her to the raggers. But Mithra, the cripple whom she befriends, has entered the University from an elite urban school, The Royal College of Colombo. To make matters worse, his father is a wealthy and powerful bank manager. Therefore Mithra is compelled to go through a gruelling, degrading and utterly inhuman ragging. The fact that Mithra is a cripple does not deter his tormentors and in spite of his shattering disability, he does not act like a wounded animal but shows resilience. The bullies are attempting to break down the ingrained feeling of the English-speaking students that they are superior to those who are not proficient in the language. They treat those who are Western-educated as somehow unworthy and as traitors who are against the forces that propel their society along. A special friendship develops between the cripple and Sujatha Mallika, although there is a wide socioeconomic gap between them which appears virtually unbridgeable at first. While Mithra enjoys a privileged life, Sujatha Mallika is marked by self-conscious anxiety about her deprivations. The author’s satiric treatment of social snobs becomes obvious when she is treated with contempt by Mithra’s father when she visits his home.

De Silva openly spells out the names of the various student bodies within the university, for example, “The Independent Student Federation,” “The Socialist Students Union” (SSU); the latter was aligned to the leading leftist political party “JSP” (Janapriya Samajawadhi Peramuna). This political party in actual fact had a number of its members in the Sri Lankan Parliament. While the fresh entrants to the university are trying to settle in, various student union leaders approach them to join their cause. The

---

<sup>22</sup> “Jayapura University” may be a fictitious name or the short form for the University of Sri Jayawardenapura situated in Gangodawila, a suburb of Colombo. Sri Jayawardenapura University is one of the sixteen universities of Sri Lanka.



leader of “The Socialist Student’s Union” openly declares the futility of the education that they are about to receive and warns them of the despondent life of disillusion that is awaiting them:

None of you will get jobs. You will have to go back like beaten dogs to your villages and explain to your parents that all their suffering was in vain. Is that what you want to do?

Do you know why you will never get a job? Because a corrupt system reserves all the jobs for the people from the cities, for the children of people who are already rich! There is nothing there for you. Nothing! (21)

Such scathing attacks and thought provoking rhetoric, condemning in no uncertain terms, the urban élite and the prevalent colonial systems of administration, fall on attentive ears. The warnings of the student leaders are very similar to the eye-openers in the JVP leader’s speech in *Curfew and a Full Moon*.

The village youths’ unfulfilled dreams of upward mobility and their inability to excel in the colonial based education system are evident in the novel. One of the colonial influences which bedevilled the Sinhala-speaking youth of the country is the prominence given to English speakers. The majority Sinhala-educated graduates expected “The Sinhala Only Act” and free education offered to them in various central schools and universities, to have ushered in a new era of economic change by which they could largely benefit from. The slowness in a radical shift in empowerment frustrated them, as they recognized a broad and ever widening discrepancy between them and the elite English-educated upper class. They are young men and women whose lives have been formed, and to a certain degree scarred, by the experiences of colonization, decolonization and neo-colonialism.

The reasons for their critical stance are the limited understanding of the postcolonial situation and the quintessential hybrid culture of Sri Lanka and the desire that all traces of Westernisation be eradicated which is an impossible and futile task. This situation is confirmed by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), as: “a refusal to concede that the historical fact of colonialism inevitably leads to a hybridization of culture” (129). The most influential formulation of this view point is that for the rural-educated, the English language has become a cultural commodity with a dubious function and a bewilderment of hybridity. It is their recognition of a bleak future thrust upon them and limitations in progress that have prompted them into rebellious activities and a feverish assault on Western influenced system and institutions.

Remembering the years of hardship and poverty of her own life, Sujatha Mallika falls easily for the obtrusive authority of the union leaders, however dogmatic or overbearing their ideologies appear to her at first. She is filled with powerful and disturbing emotions. She comes from an impoverished village called Medamulana,<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Medamulana is a village situated in Southern Sri Lanka.

which has no electricity or running water and she knows well what deprivation is. In addition, Sujatha Mallika has a deeply felt personal problem to hide. During her teens, in the absence of her mother, her drunken father repeatedly rapes her. Impregnated by her own father, she is compelled to go through an abortion. Then her father murders her mother fearing that he will be arrested for his crimes and subsequently commits suicide himself. A hardly sympathetic aunt of Sujatha Mallika's gives her temporary refuge. A Catholic priest engaged on missionary work in the village takes pity on her and helps her by educating her and getting sponsors to finance her for a higher education. She is haunted by her terrible secret and during her period as an undergraduate, the appalling difficulties which have assailed her private life in the past surfaces again and again, while she attempts to chart her traumatic transition from the menacing village life to the metropolis. She lives in constant fear that her traumatic past might be discovered and exposed by her fellow students and raggers. The personal turmoil of her life makes her socially insecure and that seems to be the reason why she is easily drawn to the rebels.

At union gatherings, Sujatha Mallika gives ear to Harith Jayakody who is the leader of the SSU. She is highly impressed by his rhetoric and becomes malleable. Voluntarily she joins the SSU. Jayakody tells to a rapt audience, that over forty thousand graduates educated in the Sinhala medium are unemployed in the country and explains the reasons for that tragic situation:

When the British occupied our land they gave jobs to the minorities. There were also some Sinhalese families who supported the invader. These traitors were rewarded with vast tracts of land and with prominent jobs.

The favoured ones learned English so they could lick the invader's boot. Once their positions were secure, their children were educated in the English medium in the best schools in the cities. They spoke this foreign language at their homes in preference to their mother tongue. Meanwhile the children of patriots could only educate themselves in Sinhala in poor rural schools.

Everyone expected the system to change after independence. Everyone expected change after the Sinhala Only act. But did it? Many of you may, in your ignorance, think that it has. There are forty thousand graduates out there who learned the truth when it was too late. They came to university full of hope; confident that they would find a good job as soon as they graduated. Now they know that all the sacrifices their parents made, all their own efforts, were in vain. (42-43)

Here we can observe how the colonial past echoes into the present and the societal damage caused by colonialism. Thus, the rebel spokesman warns the students not to be fooled any longer, but come together in their efforts to topple the current oppressive government in order to take control of their destiny. He stresses that the prosperity of the élite in the cities depends on oppressing the poor and that the time has come to banish: "the evil Western culture with its pornography, gambling, prostitution, alcohol and drugs [...]" (75). With such enlightening and inspiring speeches which are forceful verbal attacks on Western influenced capitalist culture, which also take on a measure of authenticity, the youth are motivated to join an increasing band of dissidents, to uphold what appears to them to be right, regardless of consequences. Sujatha Mallika becomes

one of them because she could easily relate to the rebel dream of destroying a corrupt establishment and replace it with a system which offers a place to millions of rural men and women like her.

During her final year at the university, she is recruited and trained in the middle of a jungle to be a part of a rebel endeavour called the “Giniralla” project, which is intended to cause mayhem and total destruction of Colombo, the capital city of Sri Lanka. She is taught to adhere to the strict rules of absolute secrecy. Meanwhile, in her village, there is sporadic trouble as the rebels step up their attacks with greater intensity. The Catholic father who has helped Sujatha Mallika is murdered by the dissidents for no known reason. Some of the other university student union leaders who have bravely opposed the JVP affiliated groups are also summarily executed. She even hears of the alarming news that the rebels are responsible for the slaying of their own cadres because of disagreements. The author depicts the rebels as misguided youth with a penchant for political extremism and mindless violence.

With the knowledge of brutal events and of the cold blooded killing of Sujatha Mallika’ mentor, the priest, and other innocent people familiar to her, she is terrified, dismayed and dispirited and her attitude towards the movement changes drastically. She realizes that her allegiance to the JVP has controlled her existence and curtailed her freedom of choice. She gradually begins to abhor the violence committed by members of the rebel movement. This self-realization is also strongly influenced and pressurized by her friends Nalini, Harith and Mithra who are against the violent course of action taken by the youth rebels. The friends with whom she forms a long term social bonds are those who persuade her from revolutionary politics of securing social justice by eliminating the rich, although she herself is less securely entrenched in the metropolitan social and political élite. Her friends are specifically the urban-educated undergraduates and are somewhat Western influenced and evidently she learns Anglicized ways from them. They are the type of young people who look upon Western culture as the model for appropriate social behaviour. Mithra for instance, has got his primary education at the Royal College in Colombo, a bastion of British education. He belongs to a generation of the urban class who regard Western technology and learning to be advanced and progressive. It is her associations with those who have embraced modernity and moderation through elite English education that spur a lucidity of thought in her. As a result she edges back from the brink of disaster by completely breaking away from the rebel group.

On graduating from the university she obtains employment as a journalist. But her troubles are not quite over, as the insurgents are hunting deserters down with a vengeance, and whomever they consider traitors to their so-called noble cause. The rebel leaders also consider the renegades potentially dangerous informers to the authorities. Throughout her university career, she had maintained a diary recording the union

activities and their destructive intentions. Here we observe the use of diaries, a genre rooted in Western traditions.

Unfortunately for Sujatha Mallika, the diary which is regarded as an important piece of documented proof gets into the hands of the insurgents who are plumb every scrap of evidence to nail the renegades and informers during the insurgency. She declines to speak to the police fearing that she will be further implicated, and more than that, because of her fears of reprisal by the rebels. Despite her apprehensions and deep rooted fears, she leaps into a perilous and bold move, to investigate the rebel activities in the middle of the jungle, along with three of her former university colleagues, Nalini, Harith and Mithra the cripple, with whom she had forged durable and lasting friendship.

Mithra has recently returned from Australia, after completing a higher degree in commercial studies and has established himself well in a lucrative private sector job and he is more than willing to help her. She feels that this course of action is deemed necessary, to avert a major catastrophe, as the rebels are planning to blow up the city of Colombo during the opening ceremony of a new urban complex by the incumbent President of the country. She becomes aware that she is being followed and a colleague at work gets shot due to mistaken identity. The tale ends with Sujatha Mallika and her coterie of friends getting caught by the rebels and having to go through a few terrifying experiences in the rebel camps deep in the jungle. They are able to get away without being harmed, but their naive but brave intention of halting the final cathartic wrath of the insurgent mob by exploding the city complex does not come to fruition. Despite the chaos and confusion and victims facing hideous deaths all around, there is a happy ending to the tale when Mithra declares his love to Sujatha Mallika, and he is readily accepted by her. Thus, the novel ends on a positive note, with the protagonist's mistakes and painful disappointments in life behind her and a life of usefulness, hope and happiness ahead. The story is in fact, a conspicuous contrast of youth love and loyalty versus youth violence and revolutionary ardour unleashed because of extreme ambitions.

The protagonists and the heroes of the novels are men and women heavily influenced by the intellectual currents present in the West and look upon contemporary postcolonial situations in the country with a questioning Western mind. Furthermore, Western based education had a direct and pervasive influence on the intellectual and urban social life in Sri Lanka. De Silva portrays the Westernized characters to be more intelligent, more steady and moderate in their conduct in the novel. In Sri Lanka, the interest and the anxiety to hone English language skills is strong among the burgeoning middle class, but the poorer classes cannot afford the high fees for the acquisition such skills which are not readily available, especially in remote areas. The plight of the rural-educated who are cultural victims is obliquely presented in the novel which is yet another example of the harsh realities of colonization.

Although the story stirs the conscience of the reader to understand the root cause of the rural insurgency, which is to find a place for the poor and the repressed, a thread of

invariable urban, Western consciousness runs through the narrative. Sujatha Mallika is drawn away from revolutionary JVP politics which involved widespread killings and carnage, by the bonds of friendship she has established with Western influenced friends who are the mainstays of her university life. These character's lives have been shaped and enriched by cross-cultural encounters and they are representative of the elite English-educated, capitalist class, who have benefited by Western education. Their competence of the English language and overt signs of Western influence are abhorred by the insurgents, who are also jealous about. By aligning herself with an established élite who are aware of democratic values, Sujatha Mallika brings about her own salvation. Thousands of youth who did not share the same opportunities of socioeconomic upward mobility were killed by the forces during the insurgencies, and Sujatha Mallika would have been one of them if not for the strong influence exerted on her by her Western, city educated colleagues.

De Silva's own social conscience appears to be shaped by class essentialism and, more significantly, conformity to colonial discourse that assumes that Europe is the centre of civilized, enlightened and rational thinking. The drawback that Kandiah found in Wijenaïke's *The Rebel* is discernible in de Silva's *Giniralla Conspiracy* too. On the other hand, both de Silva and Wijenaïke are not consciously endorsing "European superiority over Oriental backwardness" (Said 1979: 7). They are seeking only to demonstrate the changes in values and behaviour that were influenced by Western education, especially by the cultural and ideological conflict brought about by British colonization. They expose the dominant role played by Western culture and education during the first decades after Independence and display a critical awareness of the cultural reality of Western influence. Neither of these writers demonstrates Sinhalese culture as backward or inferior. As stated by the historian E. F. C. Ludowyk in *The Story of Ceylon* (1967): "The great result of English education socially was that it added to older divisions new divisions of cultural differentiation" (220). What can be observed here is the plurality of Sri Lankan culture, the existence of a double heritage, as well as the combination of Sri Lankan and European traditions. However, these two authors subtly downplay imperial harm and view the changes instead as modernization. Ludowyk quotes a British Inspector of schools in Sri Lanka in the sixties and reveals a starkly different opinion of the English-educated youth:

the schools were not turning out what was wanted. Sendall thought there were too many who were 'shallow, conceited, half-educated youths, who have learned nothing but to look back with contempt upon the condition in which they were born, and from which they conceive that their education has raised them, and who desert the ranks of the industrious classes to become idle, discontented hangers-on of the Courts and Public Offices'. (217)

Although the insurgents purported to despise everything that was foreign, Western technological changes have permeated all areas of economic, social and educational life in Sri Lanka and Western science and knowledge are aggressively displacing other

knowledge systems. Spivak, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, quotes Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education," in which he classifies the English-educated élite of India as of: "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect [...]" (369). Such a class of people, who have had the opportunity to avail themselves of education in Britain and other Western countries, or have received elite, urban education locally and are endowed with town-bred sophistication, exists in Sri Lanka as well. Westernization is often considered synonymous to modernization in Sri Lanka. Although numerically small, the Western-educated are psychologically significant in the manner that they understand and interpret democratic issues. They are a group who are frequently Anglophile in cultural preferences and naturally espouse elements of Western cultural psychology and ideologies of democracy, independence, social justice and economic reform, as opposed to the adoption of violent, revolutionary tactics advocated by the radicals, which are ultimately found to be self-defeating.

The political disqualification of the JVP, because of the movement's practice of violence that the author so sharply bears witness to in his novel, is precisely what every peace-loving citizen of Sri Lanka finally came to accept. The social fallout and the boiling hatred resulting from the enthronement of the English language are prominent in de Silva's *Ginirälla Conspiracy*. The novel contrasts the urban-educated elite's allegiance to Western values against the tenacious clinging of the rural youth to Sinhala language and local traditions. The author is concerned with the tensions between European sophistication and traditional morality, as well as with social and cultural resistance to Western influence. It is a fact that the JVP has severely criticized the urban-educated as excessive Anglophiles and has openly proclaimed that they are no longer prepared to come to terms with the supremacy of the English-speaking élite, who cling to a colonial system full of injustice. The narrative makes clear how Sri Lankan society is still struggling with the legacy of the colonial era and that the youth rebels' vision is that of emancipation from the bane of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

De Silva confirms that the nationwide upheavals are socio-political problems as a result of starkly overwhelming short-sighted policies of previous politicians. Nevertheless, his prime concern seems to be to highlight the fanatical form with which the rebels sought to break the normal order of society. For that purpose, de Silva reveals the sordid tactics of the rebels, and exposes the fact that idealism and good intentions were never a part of their plan. In order to seize power, they stood in the way of law-abiding citizens, although they purportedly appeared as standard-bearers of national values. The apparent linguistic strain of their protests and their bitter controversy with the English-educated upper class invariably mingled with cultural aspects as well. In this respect, their campaign to inculcate and strengthen national values pales into insignificance, compared to their violent tactics. De Silva also confirms that removal of political opponents in high places by assassination in order to create a power vacuum, was part of the JVP agenda,

and the overall use of organised violence for political purposes was the hallmark of the insurgent activities. The rebels had no qualms about doing away with anyone who attempted to sully their cause, even among their own cadres. The line of reasoning for this violent mentality, as a part of the collective consciousness of the suppressed colonized is attributed thus, by Jean Paul Sartre in the Preface of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963):

This repressed rage, never managing to explode, goes round in circles and wreaks havoc on the oppressed themselves. In order to rid themselves of it they end up massacring each other, tribes battle one against the other since they cannot confront the real enemy – and you can count on colonial policy to fuel rivalries; the brother raising his knife against his brother believes he is destroying once and for all the hated image of their common debasement. (Sartre lii-liii)

Although the JVP recognized the workers and the peasants as the vanguard and custodians of the state and social justice remained an announced public goal, those who disagreed or disobeyed them even among the poorer classes, were severely dealt with. The hypocrisy of some of the JVP leaders are stressed in the novel when one of the student leaders called Kalinga, who espoused the need for a rebellion and convinced the new university entrants to join the movement, later becomes a cabinet Minister of a government intent on crushing the rebels. However, as noted by S. W. Perera, in his review of literature published in Sri Lanka in 2005, “*The Giniralla Conspiracy* could also be read as a cautionary tale about the consequences of giving positions to those who have taken up arms against the State” (2006: 216).

The various violent, anti-social, insidious activities of the rebels were designed to spread a fear psychosis in the public, and among the rebel cadres to create and ensure utmost loyalty and submission. The novel seems designed to show de Silva's disgust of the worst faults and the most distasteful actions of the JVP, and demonstrates that it is their violent policy that effaced their own power. Unlike Sarachchandra, de Silva does not write as an advocate of the problems of the youth, because of his conspicuous abhorrence towards the violent tactics adopted by the rebels. These excesses of the movement and the reasons why the rebels were irrevocably damned by the urban class are thus amply illustrated in the book.

## **2.2.2 Economic Constraints**

### **2.2.2.1 The Curse of Free Education Raja Proctor's *Waiting for Surabiel* (1981)**

Among the many novels and stories spawned by the insurgency of 1971, Raja Proctor's *Waiting for Surabiel* (1981) can be attributed with considerable political importance, as it contains a significant recording of Sri Lanka's political history from just before

Independence to three decades after. Proctor<sup>24</sup> makes a serious attempt to analyse the social, economic and political conditions that contributed to the crisis, while exploring its impact on the attitudes of the characters in his tale. Significantly, the novel highlights corruption and widespread fraud, such as bribe and commission takings by politicians and Government officers, which is endemic in Sri Lankan public life. He also reiterates the yawning abyss between the rich and the poor in the country.

The story begins during the last decade before Sri Lanka was finally able to throw off the shackles of colonial subordination. The hero of the story is Surabiel, a rebellious up-country youth who is forced to leave his home village, because of his insolence to an English tea estate Superintendent, while he was just a very young boy. As a consequence of the colonial encounter, it was customary for the poor plantation workers at that time to adopt the names of their white superiors. But Surabiel resolutely rejects this ingratiating and servile practice and takes on his father's Sinhala name, much to the ire of the white boss. Knowing the repercussions of their son's behaviour towards the ruling race, and the fate of a subaltern under such circumstances, his parents, who are impoverished tea estate workers, send him away to avoid trouble.

Misdemeanour and irresponsible behaviour by the part of the colonizer finds expression in the novel, and that is the sexual exploitation of female tea plantation workers by the white estate Superintendents:

A tea-bush migration meant that a woman plucker had eased the frustrations of her Superintendent under a convenient tea bush. But if the results showed obvious European origins then the planting community organized a tea-bush migration for mother and child. (6)

Proctor appears to hint at a form of cultural decadence by depicting the white master as a depraved, promiscuous, despot. Jean Arasanayagam is yet another Sri Lankan author who has highlighted the sexual exploitation of female estate labourers and village women by the colonial masters in her novel, *Dragons in the Wilderness* (2007).

Surabiel starts to work in a gem mining pit in Ratnapura,<sup>25</sup> where he becomes a victim of child labour for almost a decade. He does not quite fit into his new surrounding because he does not belong to a gem mining family. He is once again forced to leave his job because he attempts to steal a precious gem which he finds in a pit. Thereafter, he drifts from village to village in search of work, and at the age of twenty befriends a man called Arnolis, an overseer of an estate belonging to an absentee landlord, in a village

---

<sup>24</sup> Raja Proctor is a Sri Lankan born author who has received international recognition for his works. He is not only a well-established author, but also an experienced sea captain. His collections of short stories have been published in journals and magazines in Europe, America, Australia, New Zealand and Asia, and valued for their originality and strength, as exceptionally fine Eastern stories.

<sup>25</sup> Ratnapura is the provincial capital of the Sabaragamuwa Province of Sri Lanka. The area is renowned for its long established industry of gem mining and the discovery of high quality rubies, blue sapphires, garnets, cat's eyes, and amethysts.



called Kegalle.<sup>26</sup> In actual fact, Kegalle was to become a hotbed of insurgent activity during both insurgencies in Sri Lanka.

Surabiel first works as a labourer but his abilities and his hard work ethics are soon recognized and the landlord offers him a house with a plot of land. However, there is a price to pay for all the benefits he enjoys, as the landlord, with the connivance of Arnolis, offers him as a wife, a female servant of the landlord's household, who is already pregnant. Although the author of the novel has had a Western oriented education and professional career, Sri Lankan idioms surface in the narration when describing the woman offered to Surabiel: "Slim as a bamboo shoot, creamy and ruddy as a tender young coconut, and flesh as firm and soft as a ripe mango" (45). The descriptions of the woman whom Surabiel's son rapes later on in the story are also described with similar idioms: "breasts that were then no bigger than limes now as big as oranges; a stomach which had the sag of a half-empty rice bag was now as tight as a drum" (184). These are examples of how creative writers in English mould the language to convey a Sri Lankan sensibility; through his overemphasis on idioms describing the female character using food imagery, Proctor subtly indicates that she is being treated like a commodity, for consumption.

Sri Lanka is granted Independence the year that Surabiel's first son Kiriya is born. His wife bears him two more children and dies some years later during childbirth. His children stand to benefit from the introduction of the "Sinhala Only Act," along with the enactment of the "Free Education Bill." At that time, changes are expected by the majority of people of the country; a decisive departure from the colonial past. But with free education emerge fresh problems to the village of Kegalle. The villagers copy the culture of the towns and they hanker after big city jobs. Surabiel's sons Kiriya and Rakitha are not interested in helping their father in the fields. They are interested in changing their life patterns. His grown up daughter Suramya languishes at home, after receiving primary education in one of the newly established Government central schools.

The novel thus records major political and social changes which are in the offing when the common man is gradually rising up. The rich landlord who has been politically active for a capitalist party is becoming less effective and Arnolis, his overseer is elected the Member of Parliament for the People's Party. He is regarded as a man of the people and a son of the soil. During the reign of the People's party, "The Paddy Lands Bill"<sup>27</sup> is passed, which puts an end to absentee landlordism. More prominence is given to the Sinhala language. As a result of these changes, the proletarian class largely starts to

---

<sup>26</sup> The District of Kegalle is situated between the central highlands and the Western Southern plains of the country. The district is renowned for export crops such as coffee, cocoa, rubber and spices like pepper, clove and nutmeg.

<sup>27</sup> The Paddy Lands Bill was enacted in 1958, mainly to benefit the tenant farmers of approximately 160,000 hectares of paddy land. The Bill was meant to protect tenants against eviction and an opportunity to purchase the land that they have been cultivating. For further details see K. M. de Silva's *A History of Sri Lanka* (639).

benefit but: “The free educated youth were now showing signs of frustration due to unemployment” (55-56). Although Surabiel becomes the owner of the land that he is cultivating, his major problem is that the youth of the village who have received free education would rather remain unemployed than work the fields. He bemoans: “Where’s the labour when every cultivator owns and cultivates his own fields and his sons are at school?” (57), and “there’s nobody to work the fields and the harvests are poor,” (57). Modern youth have a negative view of agrarian life and unfortunately the youth of Sri Lanka are afflicted by this obsession. They feel that manual work is beneath them and consider agricultural tasks as a menial form of occupation, once they have received an education. Surabiel sees a broad upwelling of such frustration in recent years, as livelihoods start to crumble.

Despite the efforts of Surabiel to benefit from the social, political and educational changes effected by the new Government, he still remains a solitary man, struggling alone in his fields. Due to alternating droughts and floods, Surabiel runs up outstanding debts to a local trader. In addition, his children prove to be a bitter disappointment. His son Kiriya is in love with the postmaster’s daughter and wishes to follow her to the capital city where she is pursuing further studies in nursing. Suramya, his daughter resists the advances of the local trader who offers to ease her father’s debts in exchange for sex. Instead, she gives in to the wily schoolmaster who warns her that the house that they are living in is soon going to be acquired by the Government as a residence for him and the only way to save it is to be his secret mistress. His second son Rakitha is covertly attending JVP meetings where he is being indoctrinated into guerrilla warfare in a jungle hideout. To augment party funds Rakitha gets involved in trading illicitly brewed liquor. Surabiel apportions blame to the recent lopsided Government development projects and politics of mobility, which in his view have caused the creation of the present unstable and chaotic state in the country: “Everything unsettled, everybody unpredictable. Suddenly he finds convincing relief as he blamed it all on free education! National language! Independence! But there was something wanting [...]” (70). In addition, he is infuriated by the fact that the socialist Government, which is in power, is rumoured to be corrupt, and certain Ministers and officials are lining their pockets in the way of accepting commissions and bribes. As he observes, the Western-educated inept Government officials are standing in the way of rural progress and the so-called advancement and jobs for the village-educated, promised during election times, have not materialized as yet. Here, as well as later in the narrative, the author exposes the sham and emptiness of political pretensions.

Surabiel’s rising debts are exacerbated and destitution is looming when his rice fields are in potential danger of being destroyed by heavy rain and flooding. He appeals to his sons Kiriya and Rakitha to help him in a desperate, last-ditch effort to raise the ridges of the fields in order to save his crops, while the rest of the village flee to higher ground. As the river banks and the irrigation tank burst and the village gets flooded, the

Sri Lankan Navy is sent to the area for rescue operations. As relief officials and the villagers scramble to save each other and their property, Rakitha cunningly befriends the Navy personnel and offers to assist them in the rescue operations to save stranded civilians. He insinuates himself into the favour of the Navy with a master plan at the back of his mind, which is to steal the arms and ammunition of the Navy for the insurgent activities he is involved in. Descriptions of the Navy manoeuvres and yeoman service rendered during the rescue operations and their navigational strategies amply reflect the author's knowledge acquired during his own service for the Sri Lankan Navy.

Rakitha, along with the Navy lieutenants, save Surabiel who is hanging on a tree near his fields and his sister Suramya from the roof of their semi-submerged home and also many other stranded villagers. To escape the rising waters, men climb to the top of trees but are struck down by cobras and other arboreal serpents and Surabiel himself escapes being bitten by a deadly snake. Kiriya flees before the flood-waters can do more damage, managing to save the family's cart and bull. Meanwhile, widespread looting is going on, mainly by insurgent activists, who are exploiting the opportunity during the natural disaster. The cunning village trader is robbed and shot by the rebels and the navy shoots at the looters.

The naval officer in charge of flood relief operations requires the practical knowledge of a man from the area, and therefore Surabiel's advice is sought and thus he becomes a link between the Navy and the villagers. Although Surabiel's crops and home are destroyed, he demonstrates remarkable courage. He assesses his losses and attempts to start again by building a temporary hut on higher ground and receives generous supplies from the Navy for their collaborative work. As heavy rain continues and the region gets flooded, a state of emergency is declared by the Government.

The novel registers class consciousness through Proctor's support for the peasants and the proletariat. The superiority of the linguistically privileged class and Western consciousness is brought into prominence when the simple villager Surabiel is compared with the urbanised Navy lieutenant:

The other born and bred a cultivator, one who had lived close to the earth amongst the majority to whom the country really belonged. The lieutenant, on the other hand, English educated, British sponsored, with a westernized Christian culture, living amongst a minority to whom the country did not really belong, nurtured to maintain his superior existence as a master of the majority by supporting his belief in the superiority of a foreign language, a foreign culture, a Christian way, and believing that in that way lay the salvation of the country. (126)

How a linguistic difference can widen the class division among Sri Lankans is illustrated by the passage above, while giving the tale a moral dimension. Historian Ludowyk examines the status of the disadvantaged villagers in *The Story of Ceylon*:

Socially the villager was depressed too, cut off from the possibilities of education in English which ensured the transformation of the fortunate into minor employees of the public service. The language the villager spoke, whether it was Sinhalese or Tamil, was for all practical

purposes of inferior status; the religion he professed was a disadvantage, it was not that of the ruler; and the institutions he knew were being thrown into the discard of the unenlightened and the scorned.  
(226)

Simultaneously, Proctor is highlighting the insurgent insensitivities during the disaster by his reference to the looting committed by them, even during a national calamity. The precise identity of the rebels is never revealed by the author, and instead of outwardly calling them JVP insurgents, he refers to them throughout the novel, as the “Red Roosters.” Also, instead of spelling out the names of the political parties brought into the narration, he refers to them by colours, for example “Red Flag Party,” “Brown Flag Party,” “Pink Flag Party” and so on, but the colours do not actually correspond to political colours of post-independent Sri Lanka, with the exception of perhaps the “Red Flag Party,” which might be a reference to the Communist Party.

The flood waters recede and the village returns to near normalcy, except the villagers realise that due to the floods they are completely destitute. When the Navy personnel are preparing to leave the area they discover that a carbine, two boxes of ammunition and two rifles are missing. In order to conceal their negligence and to avoid having to face a court martial, they come to an agreement that the arms were lost when a raft capsized during their rescue operations. Rakitha unearths his hidden loot after the Navy leaves. When the flood-waters have completely subsided, Surabiel is aghast as he surveys his destroyed home, crops and fields, but decides to hang doggedly on to whatever he can salvage and is determined to start anew. At this point, Arnolis appears on the scene, ostensibly to show the villagers that he is doing everything to help them but mainly hoping to garner votes at the next election.

The subject of official ineptitude is appropriately handled by Proctor and corrupt systems in use are exposed. He succinctly summarizes the situation of the hapless villagers and the cause of their deep distrust in politics and officialdom in the following sentence. “Bullied by police, harassed by thugs, cheated by landlords and businessmen, ruined by floods and drought every now and again, and forever taken for a ride by politicians” (148). The distraught and dispossessed villagers are to be provided with Government compensation to restore their lands and crops. While administrative confusion proliferates, the ignorant and illiterate villagers are sent from pillar to post in their attempt to receive the compensation from a Government Relief and Rehabilitation Scheme. This is an example of administrative inefficiency, ineptitude of Government officials and bureaucratic corruption, by no means rare in Sri Lanka. The red-tape, the bureaucracy and the copious paper work introduced during the time of the British are still being adhered to and the villagers’ poverty, ignorance, lack of literacy in English and their desperate plight are exploited by petty governmental officials and cunning politicians. It seems that the Government officers are still surveying the country through imperial eyes, which Spivak expresses in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” as “epistemic

violence” against “men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat” (25).

The novel is also a social commentary and satire on a period in recent history, depicting the hierarchical nature of the social order of the day, as in the in the narration there are strong overtones of cultural and economic subjugation, corruption of power and administrative ineptitude by high Government officials. The manner of dress and habits of the urban class, the superiority wielded by those who speak English, the greater opportunities available to the already established English-speaking, wealthy, upper class, all point out to a new cultural imperialism flourishing in Sri Lanka, at the time the novel is written and the fact that the colonial aftermath does not yield the end of colonialism. The high-handed attitude of the English-speaking officials relegates the non-Westernized and non-English-speaking rural folk as the recurring images of the “Other.” This fact is demonstrated by the power wielded by the technocratic-managerial classes over the hapless peasantry. Significantly, the frailty of the rural, uneducated villagers is sharply contrasted with the might of the influential, Western- educated bureaucrats, who adopt the same dismissive colonial attitude towards native languages. Class differences and socioeconomic dominance of the urban administrative class versus the illiterate villagers’ subjugated place in society are further contrasted when Surabiel endeavours to get flood relief compensation from the mismanaged relief schemes without bribing peons, clerks and politicians. Many other villagers who have lost all their earthly belongings become victims of the absurdly intransigent bureaucracy of Government officials. Thus the author’s satire is witheringly aimed at corrupt politicians and Government officials who have no psychological rapport with the poorer sector of the public.

The postcolonial social aspect of coming to terms with the reciprocal relationship between colonial scholarship and the former colonial power is explicitly stated by Gandhi in *Postcolonial Theory* (1998):

newly emergent postcolonial nation-States are often deluded and unsuccessful in their attempts to disown the burdens of their colonial inheritance. The mere repression of colonial memories is never, in itself, tantamount to a surpassing of or emancipation from the uncomfortable realities of the colonial encounter. (4)

In Sri Lanka, the perpetual reiteration of the norms of another culture had grossly alienated the rural population and the two insurgencies were as a result of it.

While the official blunders are going on, his son Rakitha confesses his involvement with the rebel groups and advises the father that the only way significant social changes would take place is to join the revolution and appeals to his father to do so. Rakitha intimates to his father that the rebels are “waiting for him,” as they value his support and advice and would like him to lead them. An image of a hero is bestowed on the man and it appears that he is the man capable of fulfilling the wishes of an entire community which is impoverished and disillusioned.

Meanwhile Surabiel's personal life becomes overwhelmingly intolerable, when one tragedy follows another. Kiriya, his eldest son, contracts an incurable venereal disease by sleeping with his city employed girlfriend and seeks the advice of a local, herbal physician. He is informed that there is no cure available and the only remedy is to sleep with a virgin. Kiriya, on the way home, rapes a young village girl and murders her. Realising the repercussions of his crime, he hangs himself. Surabiel has hardly had time to recover from the calamities, when Suramya, his only daughter, confesses that she is pregnant by the schoolmaster who has seduced her. Distressed by his daughter's condition, he confronts the schoolmaster who at that moment is in the company of the Member of Parliament, Arnolis. The schoolmaster denies responsibility and says that he is: "betrothed to a Colombo contractor's daughter. One lakh in cash! Property in Colombo!" (203). Devastated, Surabiel leaves the schoolmaster's house when Arnolis, his old friend, follows him up the jungle path. Arnolis offers to arrange Suramya to be a mistress to another man immediately and later arrange a marriage, just as he has done for Surabiel years ago. In a state of uncontrollable fury, Surabiel attacks Arnolis with a club, killing him instantly. When he comes home, he is informed that Suramya has visited the local doctor who has administered an herbal remedy to initiate a speedy abortion. The following morning, he finds his daughter dead on her mat, in a pool of blood. Surabiel is aware that the police are looking for him for having killed Arnolis. He is overwhelmed by his threefold loss and sees no other way but to join the rebels. He sets fire to his house with the body of his beloved daughter in it and flees deep into the jungle in search of the rebel group. The demoralized rebels are impatiently waiting for him and gladly turn to him for leadership.

Several weeks later, Surabiel storms the local hotel, along with a group of armed rebels and takes the premises over for the purpose of establishing the headquarters of the revolutionary group. Next morning, the rebels attack the local police station, killing all the officers in charge. Surabiel and the gang of rebels have a utopian dream of giving everyone a fair share by stripping landlords of their lands and dividing them amongst the community. For a while he emerges as an extremely charismatic leader, completely devoted to the cause of equal distribution and acts decisively as a heroic man with a new political and social agenda. He authoritatively organises that everyone is put to work the farms and the produce is handed to a People's Commune Store, to ensure equal distribution of a centrally controlled economy. The rebels are angry men seeking personal vengeance and wanting to penalise those who have misused their power before. Miscreants are apportioned only half or quarter rations, according to the severity of their crimes. For a short period of time, this socialist economic structure, based on the Marxist theory of class struggle of a fair and equitable social order, keeps the villagers content:

Share-and-share-alike, along with communal living and collective responsibility generated a one-big-family atmosphere, and they hoped it would never end. But the landlords, the businessmen, the westernized oriental gentry found it humiliating and constricting. They waited for what they silently called the peasants' picnic to end. (236)

Here, Proctor seems to romanticize individual heroism on the part of the oppressed and invoke the emancipation of the rural poor.

Meanwhile, rebel groups affiliated to the insurgency, attack police stations in various districts, and the Government appeals to neighbouring India to send military assistance to quell the revolt, before everything goes out of control. One morning, machine gun bullets and bombs rain all over the village from helicopters and jets, and the revolutionists speedily cremate their dead and tend the wounded. After the aerial bombing, Rakitha goes in search of his father, to find his blood-spattered, dismembered body in a bomb crater. He carries his father's body deep into the jungle and privately cremates it, giving the impression to the rebels that he is still alive. They are waiting for him to advise them with new strategies of survival and resistance. Although he does not appear, his intangible presence is felt. Here the rebels seem to turn away from reality and invest their hopes on the imaginary. After many destructive army raids, some of the villagers give up and hail the army as their liberators. But there is a modicum of community feeling still around and the majority of the rebels are silently waiting for Surabiel, investing on his image and rejecting reality.

Neither the actions of the rebels nor that of the Government bring about a political closure to the problems of the rural folk. The members of the community, instead of shaking themselves out of their apathy, invests all their hopes in the man of the day who gives a glimmer of hope that he can solve their problems. The ending of the novel, indicating that the villagers are still "waiting for Surabiel," is a clear harbinger that more uprisings are in the offing, and also draws attention to the fact that problems of the rural youth are not yet completely redressed. The title of the novel appears to be strongly influenced by Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* (1955), which is considered to be one of the most significant English-language plays of the twentieth century. Exactly as in the play, where the principal character is waiting for a message, the rebels are "waiting for Surabiel," who does not make an appearance, but they continue to assert his influence by pretending that he is still alive. The title "Waiting for Surabiel" and the concept behind it is an example which illustrates how the English novel in Sri Lanka at times establishes a dialogue with English literature.

Proctor explores the deteriorating economic situation at village level and the plight of the hapless villager. While doing so, he brings into focus the travails of the village farmers, and the violent reaction of the village youth who are recipients of free education which has lead them nowhere. In a society polarized between rich and poor, landlord and peasant, the poverty-stricken villagers and insurgents pillaging and looting during a moment of community disaster come across as desperate. Proctor unfolds a complex

web of betrayal. The insurgent who robs the Navy that has come to help during a moment disaster is described as ungrateful, treacherous, and wily. Other characters evince a wide range of ethical transgressions: the school teacher who misleads and impregnates Surabiel's daughter but opts to marry for a dowry; Rakitha who rapes a girl and murders her; the shallow and false politician Arnolis; the cunning, bribe-taking Government officials; and even Surabiel who in a state of uncontrollable anger kills a man.

The view-point of the rebels conveys the idea that given the current social inequity, economic restructuring is imperative. They are aware that capitalism creates class differences which ultimately marginalise the rural poor. The actions of the protagonist and the rebels during their short period of reign demonstrate that the heritage of colonialism and the operation of renewed colonization should be confronted by systems of collective responsibility-based ethics and equal distribution. The narrative also displays the failure of a community to unite and mobilize itself into action at a time of crisis without resorting to violence. Proctor's naval and life-saving experiences have also found powerful literary expression in the novel. The narrative also develops clear parallels between natural disasters like unprecedented floods and human violence. In reality, part of the procurement of arms by JVP rebels was obtained by infiltrating the armed forces, which is indicated in Proctor's novel.

#### **2.2.2.2 A Struggle for the Rights of the Rural Folk *An Asian Gambit* by James Goonewardena (1985)**

Among the first authors who wrote in English about the insurgency was late James Goonewardena,<sup>28</sup> in *Acid Bomb Explosion* (1978), which he expanded and revised into a new version, called *An Asian Gambit* (1985). Although today Goonewardena is invoked as a literary founder for the significant role he played in the development of the Sri Lankan novel in English, during his life-time he faced scathing criticisms, and literary isolation in Sri Lanka. His critics attacked his novels on the basis of aesthetic criteria and felt that his writing was "raw" and "unsculpted," although he told a profound truth about the world Sri Lankans were living in. The reason for the lack of recognition for Goonewardena's works was due to the nationalist fervour which began in the 1960s, when writings in Sinhalese flourished and writing in English was considered a cultural treachery by the majority Sinhalese speaking public who desired to move away from cultural collusion with the former imperial power.

Goonewardena's choice of medium for his writing, however, seems to be compensated by the fact that in his works, such as *A Quiet Place* (1968), *Call of the Kirala* (1976), *The Awakening of Doctor Kirthi* (1976) and *An Asian Gambit* (1985), the settings and characters are truly Sri Lankan of rural milieu that idolize the country idyll.

---

<sup>28</sup> James Goonewardena, a pioneer during his day in writing fiction in English during the 1960s was the first Sri Lankan writer in English to have his works published by Penguin.



Further, he has strived to explore in his novels authentic Sri Lankan postcolonial situations and indigenous culture and has evinced rapport with the rural landscape. Whilst the nationalists denounced him for writing in English, the English-speaking urban elites criticised him for his chosen themes in which he romanticised and exoticized village life, as opposed to the social ills suffered by the city dwellers, especially in his first novels, like *Call of the Kirala*. Wijesinha, in *Breaking Bounds*, examines why this early work of the author received negative critical attention: “Regrettably however the content of the story received little recognition. Instead the literary establishment responded discouragingly, as is exemplified by the review which appeared in Navasilu six years later, sharply criticizing the language of the story without considering its other merits” (30). But as Salgado contends in her collection of essays about Sri Lankan writing: “In drawing upon psychoanalytical theories for his representation of cultural evolution, Goonewardena develops a moral register that inverts rather than transcends the hierarchies of nationalist discourse” (43).

*An Asian Gambit* is rural in its setting and conveys a sense of apocalyptic pessimism of a community choked by its own debris, which in fact marks the novel. The protagonist Deva Ratnakariya is an artist – a sculptor and a painter – who decides to move from the city to an under-developed, squalid village with a disquieting atmosphere called Medatota,<sup>29</sup> to take up the post of art teacher in a village school. He is seeking mental peace and recuperation after the premature accidental death of his wife during his sojourn in England. Medatota is a village known for harbouring insurgents working for the proscribed party JVP, and the members are conducting surreptitious and seditious activities like training and work camps, lectures for the purpose of indoctrination and the use of armed violence for the cause. The setting of the novel is in impoverished surroundings with unsightly places and amidst down-and-outs and other socially marginalised individuals. Goonewardena depicts this picture of decay and decadence, bleakness and despair of the village, reminiscent of James Joyce’s *The Dubliners*:

His eyes went to the toilets, marked males and females in Sinhala – the English letters had been replaced with Sinhala inscriptions, but the change of language had made no difference – the discoloured walls, the pools of stagnant water, the filth choked drainage outside the toilet revealed an indifference and contempt for those who had to use them. (1)

By capturing the miasma of despair that hangs over the village, an appropriate ambience for an imminent youth revolt is created. Goonewardena annexes a description of the shabby part of the village and a few eating houses which are “dark, dingy places with stained walls, rotting woodwork, and a few moth-eaten glass show-cases” (2). A seemingly volatile situation in the near future is predicted, as able-bodied unemployed youth are aimlessly hanging around for a hand-out. It appears that it is the intense economic stagnation that keeps the village in poverty and dereliction. The boredom,

---

<sup>29</sup> A fictitious place-name used by the author.

despair and emptiness in the lives of the unemployed are displayed here and one can infer at once that the progress of this village towards urbanization has been non-existent or slow, as compared by the author to the other major towns:

Everyone was turning to making money, building tourist flats, setting up record bars, starting restaurants, tutorials to provide skills for jobs that had not yet started to appear. The scramble was in the cities, and the town: in the periphery there was still desolation and hunger. All this was creating a mood of desperation, and a desire for quick results. (4)

With such apocalyptic sounding language, the author foregrounds an imminent peril and creates the psychological groundwork for a youth rebellion and their armed confrontation with the Government. The author also confirms a salient fact about Sri Lankan villages, which is, that they are sunk in poverty.

Having established an appropriate setting, Goonewardena introduces the other important characters in the novel. They are Kulathileke, a conscientious but confused, old principal of the school and Hemapala, a disgruntled school teacher who has suffered a psychological trauma resulting from a broken home. He is the leader of the insurgents in the area and Rakitha, a poor, village pupil talented in art is a student of the school. Hemapala is a power greedy revolutionist who preaches a bigoted and corrupt brand of socialism, and the students slowly but gradually get brainwashed by the revolutionary teacher who uses his didactic powers to indoctrinate and influence the mind-set of the youth of the village and inform them about the desperate economic situation.

The art teacher recognizes the unusual artistic ability of Rakitha and takes him under his wing and tries his best to instruct, encourage and nurture his talents and at the same time, attempts to save him from the impending tragedy of getting involved in revolutionary acts. The old school principal openly expresses his wishes that the students should have their feet planted in the soil and not become mimic men of Western culture. Contrary to what he wants for his students, he is dressed in Western clothes, complete with tie and jacket, while most village school teachers have opted to adopt a sartorial change by wearing the “Ariya Sinhala”<sup>30</sup> dress, which is a kind of simple national wear. We are reminded here, that for decades after Independence, a man in Western clothes is believed in and to whom a certain importance and respect is accorded, and therefore the choice of the dress code of the Principal. Fanon, in *A Dying Colonialism*, makes the following observation about the significance of apparel that societies become known: “The fact of belonging to a given cultural group is usually revealed by clothing traditions” (35).

Hemapala, in an outburst of patriotic outpouring, instantly condemns Deva for being a Western educated art teacher who has nothing to offer to a community which is deprived, under-nourished and lacking in opportunity. He labels Deva as a cultural alien

---

<sup>30</sup> The national dress for men is a white cotton cloth and a white long-sleeved shirt which is sometimes worn with a shawl of the same colour.

and an imperial stooge for having been shaped by a British education, and demonstrates his disdain for globalised mass culture. Deva does not particularly present himself as representative of Western culture but nevertheless does not deny being influenced by it. Despite Hemapala's accusations and harsh judgements, the rabble-rousing man himself preaches a brand of foreign-bred ideology, Marxism, which is the bedrock of the JVP, the political organization to which he belongs. The falsity of the likes of Hemapala who are harping on the threatened traditional power structure and cultural genocide are appropriately explained by Thalagodapitiya in *Portraits of Ten Patriots of Sri Lanka*:

It has become the fashion of some self-constituted "saviour" to don on the Ariya Sinhala costume and to bemuse the people by descanting on our past glory and culture and the excellence of our religion. Behind the facade of piety there is hypocrisy; behind the facade of patriotism, the ego. With devotion's visage and pious action, they sugar over the devil himself. (125)

At first, Deva seems to be calmed by the rustic surroundings. His life abroad had been replete with trauma and disappointments, and therefore he tries to relieve his loneliness by getting to know new people. But in his new environment, he observes various mysterious under-currents, suspicious and secretive activities of young men in the village. In a nearby jungle, along with the help of some foreigners whose nationalities are not mentioned, the young men are "plotting the revolution that was to lead the way to what they thought, was a permanent solution to human misery [...]" (63). Shortly afterwards, the misguided teacher Hemapala, manages to lead the rebellion and temporarily take over the town with the aid of the youthful rebels and some radical Buddhist monks who are willing to relate to their cause. An insidious preparation of our minds for the tragedy that is to follow is forcefully represented in the following emotionally charged sentence. "There would be a holocaust, in which militant, youthful, Buddhist monks, believing in violence, would be participating in the killing and the dying" (146). Mystery shrouds the disappearances of Rakitha and other youth of the village who have become prey to the insurgents' cause and the news comes as an unpleasant shock to unsuspecting parents.

A foreign involvement in the revolution and the fact that the rebels were receiving external funding are brought to light in Goonewardena's novel. There was a mystery around the foreign aid that the insurgents obtained for their activities, as the members of the organisation were mostly unemployed and did not have independent sources of income. In actual fact, the insurgents' weapons were mainly shot guns and homemade grenades and bombs, some of which were defective because of their lack of skill in making explosives, and detonated at the wrong time killing their own cadres. There is however, a discrepancy in the story in connection to the name given to the foreigner training the rebels in handling arms and procuring them, which is Engvall. Engvall is prominently a Scandinavian name or a European one, and therefore the accuracy of this statement can reasonably be questioned. One cannot help noticing this major error, as the

sources of funding and procurement of arms for the rebel cause were suspected to have come from a Middle Eastern country and even from an East Asian country and not from Europe. Gunaratna comments on this speculation in *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the JVP* (1990):

There were exaggerated accounts of North Korean assistance to the JVP in the foreign media. Hindustan Standard of May 15, 1971 based on the London Daily Telegraph revealed that “two North Korean trawlers carrying weapons to the Che Guevara rebels in Ceylon were captured by patrol boats of the Indian Navy.” The dispatch further said “the trawlers were carrying rifles, ammunition, fuses, grenades and medical supplies” [...]. (109)

Perhaps the error of a European name could be attributed to the fact that the book is partly a fictitious creative work.

Goonewardena’s story is intended to raise a point about the plight of the Sinhala-educated youth and at the same time reject the violence and ethical standards displayed by the rebels and their lack of sense of responsibility. The portrayal of the insurgents as a wronged sector of the community who had strayed away from accepted norms of decent behaviour, illustrates the writer’s twofold visions: it shows a combination of attraction and repulsion, of empathy and cold aberration. Further, it can be said that the author is raising moral dilemmas concerning decolonization in a manner that can be regarded that he has broken new ground for Sri Lankan fiction in English. However, the English-educated literary critics during his day denounced his writings for the reasons: “not merely a failure with language, it is the larger failure of taste and sensibility [...]” (Salgado 42). Perhaps one can infer here that Goonewardena has touched a raw nerve of the urban rich, by choosing to write on a topic that is especially sensitive for the Western-educated élite of Sri Lanka. However, Kandiah who wrote a pioneering review of Goonewardena’s early work in “Inadequate Responses and the Attenuation of Creativity: Sri Lankan English Fiction of the Insurgency of 1971,” expresses an opposing view to that of Salgado. His critique of *An Asian Gambit* being quite different in scope and the criteria used by Salgado, points out that Goonewardena through his spokesmen, for instance the hero of the story Deva, the Principal of the school and other main characters: “launches a vitriolic attack on the mass of the people in his society, and, particularly, the rebels who were trying to change it, an attack that is made all the more disturbing by his frequent characterization of these people as “animals” (399). On the same lines, Kandiah examines the characterization of the anti-hero of the story Hemapala, the rebel leader, who is portrayed by the author as a man who is “mean, cruel and frustrated” (399) and following a misguided dream of being a hero using the youth of the village. The above demonstrates that the author is denouncing the JVP rebels.

Colonial scars run deep in Sri Lanka. The difficulties of transition from colonial practices to national ones are amply illustrated in the dress code of the school principal. Western attire is hardly suitable for the climate of tropical Sri Lanka, compared to the national dress of the country made out of cotton. During the time the book was written,

being dressed in European attire still created an impression of authority and advancement. The school principal, nattily dressed in Western clothes, but uncomfortably sweating it out, appears conspicuously out of place in a remote village where the youth are rebelling against Western influence. Here we can see an example of how the privilege of English education meted out to Sri Lankans and Western ways forced upon them make people strangers to themselves. Towards the conclusion of the story, the school principal is attacked by a mob of student rebels because they consider him a man who has lost touch with reality.

During the insurgencies thousands of young people met with untimely death and in the most violent ways. The village youth of Medatota are depicted as savages who have no scruples as to whom they are going to kill and rural life is not depicted nostalgically but imbued with dark and sinister shades. The novel explicitly describes a counter-culture of young people living on society's margins and the same goes for the ruthless soldiers. The much-travelled, Western-educated and Western-influenced protagonist Deva, with his rural romanticism, is contrasted with the disenchantment of the village youth. As a responsible teacher he desperately tries to save his adopted protégé from disaster, but without success. Along with many other insurgents arrested by the armed forces during the period, Rakitha, Deva's promising art student, disappears without trace. Here, the author puts into historical perspective the atrocities committed by both the armed forces of Sri Lanka, as well as that of the insurgents during the period in question. The following gruesomely detailed passage from the text, infused with horrific images, tells us of the summary treatment given to the arrested insurgents:

They shot some of the men and threw their bodies into the river. It was easier throwing the bodies into the river than trying to bury them, especially corpses that had already started to decompose. When they couldn't do that conveniently enough they poured petrol and burned the bodies. Sometimes, they threw in bodies which still had some life in them. Then they started to tramp through the streets. Now and then they ran across some teenage boy or girl who started to run as they saw the soldiers – this was a mistake they made – to run was a mistake and to stay was a mistake – and anyone who ran had to be taken in. They shot some and took the others back to the resthouse. The major had set up a special room, in the resthouse, for questioning girls. The questioning, sometimes, lasted a long time, and the girls would scream, and the screams were terrible. It was heard all over the resthouse and it lingered in the air like the dying of a siren, and even the soldiers knew the girls were having a bad time. (195)

It is imperative to mention here that those who are recruited into the armed forces in Sri Lanka, especially into the lower ranks, have minimum qualifications and often little training. More often than not, they are also the unemployed youth of the countryside, who opt to be drafted into the forces to escape poverty. It is ironical to note that such men torture others who are in a similar economic situation.

Western consciousness and elitism are apparent, as the insurgents as well as the soldiers are seen as violent, irrational, sex-ridden, mindless beings, when compared to the sensitive and Western educated protagonist of the tale. The art teacher is a man of

finesse who attempts to kindle a sense of responsibility in his protégé. By bringing out the failings of both the insurgents and the armed forces, the author, however, brings into focus an uncomfortable nationalist discourse, the very discourse that directs the evaluations of his critics. Nevertheless, Goonewardena's work should be valued for its honesty and the author for his forthrightness and courage, for exploring a theme related to injustice and disharmony created in the society by political opportunists, as well as the so-called urban-educated upper class against the rural classes who are lacking in English literary skills.

A pioneer Sri Lankan writer of fiction, Goonewardena's initiative of writing about an uncomfortable subject has paved the way for other novels on the subject. The setting of the novel is unsettlingly bleak and hopeless and evokes the world of the unemployed youth devoid of a meaningful future. The novel contains features of special significance in relation to the times and is prominent in its capacity to reflect an aspect of the socio-political environment in historical terms. Goonewardena is drawing a suggestive inference that the rebels' impetus gets voiced in violent protests because of the State's lack of interest for the needs of the youth. The economic grievances of a deprived sector of the community are seen as reason enough to foment a revolution and the tension, frustrations and ultimately violence produced by marginalization. The poor and the unemployed fall forever prey to unscrupulous agitators who are aware of the acute poverty and the hopelessness that surrounds them. The revelations in the novel stand for an essential social morality, whilst the author distinguishes himself as a shrewd observer of a sociological kind. He also records the intimate conviction, the stubborn prejudices and hysterical hatred towards Western influence of the Sinhala-educated rural folk of his day. The pervasive influence of the rebel movement in their methods of recruitment and indoctrination of youth of an impressionable age, who are unaware of the wiles and pitfalls of the world are also clearly illustrated. This thought-provoking novel appears to appreciate and sympathize with the problems faced by the rebels, although Goonewardena gives an impression that he is unable to accept the violent methods adopted by them. The novel also deals with the dichotomy of the urban-rural divide and issues of modernity and Western influence.

### **2.2.2.3 The Caste Factor and the Newly Bestowed Voting Rights *Out Out Brief Candle* (1981) by M. Chandrasoma**

M. Chandrasoma<sup>31</sup> wrote his first novel, *Out Out Brief Candle* (1981), where he dramatized the 1971 insurgency, which tragic historical phase of the country he

---

<sup>31</sup> M. Chandrasoma had a long and illustrious career as a public servant in the Ceylon Civil Service during which time he was transferred from job to job at the whim of various Governments under which he served. Frustrated at being pushed around, he resigned and joined the commercial sector, in which he held important positions in international oil trade, port operations and shipping. He penned his vast experiences in public service in *Vignettes of The Ceylon Civil Service* (1991).

witnessed first-hand as a public servant. The novel is also set at a time when sectarian tensions like caste and political rivalries were rampant in Sri Lanka, and maps out innumerable aspects of life in Sri Lanka at the time of the conclusion of British rule and reflects the prejudices of the time and the ways that colonial culture and language were imposed upon the colonized people. The setting is at a time when caste, one of the most sensitive marks of social identification remained an important denominator. One significant aspect is the societal transformation and the decline of the feudal social order. Other aspects are the attendant economic factors due to social changes and the growth of the middle class.

The tale is narrated by the main character, Sidath Lionel Fernando, who is the eldest son of a middle class family belonging to the fisher caste, but his family members are actually landowners and entrepreneurs. Here, the author is subtly indicating the inherited power and wealth and the moral blindness of the privileged due to entrenched attitudes towards caste. The narrator's family being strong believers of astrology casts his horoscope shortly after his birth. An astrologer, consulted for this purpose by his great aunt Sarah, predicts that the alignment of the planets during his birth portends a very short life. The family panics and holds an elaborate devil-dancing ceremony to dispel the evil spirits hovering around the new born infant. By the inclusion of an age old practice of exorcism prevalent in rural Sri Lanka and the reliance on horoscope predictions, the author draws upon local colour for the narration.

When the narrator is around ten years old, significant historical changes are taking effect in pre-Independent Sri Lanka: "About this time, Commissioner Donoughmore, as if to compensate for lean times gave us a new constitution and every adult, irrespective of sex, worth or literacy, a vote. There was jubilation, for the British had given us more than we hoped to get" (13). The Donoughmore Constitution<sup>32</sup> was in effect during the years 1931 to 1947. It was a period of experimentation in participatory democracy in Sri Lanka, a preparation for future self-rule, during which time the Government was run by executive committees, under the strict control of the British Governor. A number of splinter political groups evolved during this period, headed by influential, wealthy, urban-educated personalities whose vision was too limited to encompass the problems of the rural poor and those of the minorities.

Sidath's parents, his extended family members, including great aunt Sarah, consider the historical move of granting universal adult franchise with apprehension, caution and circumspection. Since the caste systems of the Sinhalese and the Tamils are strictly adhered to in the social structure of the country and are directly related to the way people

---

<sup>32</sup> The Donoughmore Constitution was created by the Donoughmore Commission and served Sri Lanka from 1931 to 1947, when it was replaced by the Soulbury Constitution. Under the Donoughmore Constitution no one ethnic community could dominate the political arena. Due to the above stipulation, the Tamil representation was very strong and out of proportion to the population of the Tamil community. For further details, see K. M. de Silva's *A History of Sri Lanka* (516-30).

earn their living during the period, the family expect a social upheaval with this new development:

As soon as the vote was given to all and sundry, everybody immediately knew that caste would play a decisive part in how it was used. Among the Tamils, caste was embedded in Hinduism and hence the observance of it was rigid. Emotions could be roused on caste issues based as they were on religion and blood piously shed. (14)

The paragraph demonstrates the apprehensions of a society trapped in caste-based prejudices, despite economic growth in certain sectors and Western knowledge gained in others.

According to Chandrasoma, in addition to the malaise of colonial subordination which left no room for vaulting ambitions, the divisions of labour conditioned by one's caste forced each person to fit into his own niche without complaint. It is that which made people live their lives in amity and peace. Even in politics, leadership of political parties formed right after Independence was ostentatiously legitimized by caste inclusiveness and superiority. For centuries those belonging to the low castes<sup>33</sup> have endured civil disabilities and have been forced to withdraw to the fringes of society. The authority of the upper castes was legitimized by colonial intervention as well.

By articulating special political views through his characters, Chandrasoma attempts to assess the changes the country is going through over a period of time, and simultaneously explores caste and communal prejudices. The narrator's paternal uncle Francis, who is a lawyer by profession and a politically canny subaltern, decides to come forward at the first ever democratic elections in the country. Francis's experiences during his elections campaign are more than bizarre:

He early realised that success in an election depended on two crucial factors quite unconnected with the intrinsic worth of a man or his party policies: the ability to buy up the votes of neutral minority castes resident in the electorate and effectiveness of one's machinery to impersonate voters of your opponent's caste. (16)

The narrator's father, who is the owner of a rubber estate which yields a substantial annual income, throws himself into his brother's election efforts and recklessly gets into debt in order to finance the campaign. His great aunt Sarah feels that the granting of the vote is going to create not only chaos within the family, but also make people lose their sense of proportion at large, because they are all fired up in competitive politics of a pervasively, feverish and corruptive nature.

To the utter dismay of the family, Francis loses the election. Around the same time, landowning families, producers and traders are severely affected, as price of agricultural products like rubber, coconut and cinnamon drops because it is still the British who are controlling the trade of the island. Here, the author is exposing the unbridled greed of the

---

<sup>33</sup> For further information on caste structure and caste prejudices see K. M. de Silva's *A History of Sri Lanka* (200-03, 223, 251-52, 268-69).



colonizers and their strongly protectionist economic policies, and the fact that the mundane goals of the imperialists were essentially to extract labour and resources from the indigenous communities. This essentially colonial economic stranglehold throws the poorer people and the lower working classes into dire straits.

Sidath receives a somewhat Western influenced education in a missionary school in the Southern city of Galle, a city steeped in colonial history. On passing his London Matriculation, he procures a clerical post in the Chief Secretary's office in the capital city of Colombo, where he gets an opportunity to work alongside mainly British and Burgher staff, who are in his opinion brilliant men. Ludowyk examines the success of the Burghers in the colonial administrative service in *The Story of Ceylon* (1961) and obliquely throws light on the British "divide-and-rule" policy: "On the whole the Burghers benefited most from English education. Their European origins and their work as an urban minority in the Dutch administration secured them British patronage" (220).

A strict dress-code is demanded by Sidath's British superiors and the narrator finds it imperative to equip himself "with linen suits, shirts, ties and so on to wear to work in the Chief Secretary's office" (Chandrasoma 36). Here we can observe the insistence of the colonizer to follow their ways, if a Sri Lankan is to benefit by them in obtaining lucrative employment. We also observe the colonizer's attempt to make Englishmen out of Sri Lankans but at the same time treat them as suppressed subalterns. Sidath's British superiors stand for the dominating presence of imperialism and as representatives of constraint and power and his own subordinate position is as a direct consequence of the racial structure of the colonial administrative system. Chandrasoma makes a scathing attack on the British for their rapacious economic motives in colonization which impoverished the indigenous people:

Everywhere the conquering British had gone, from Ireland on their doorstep, through Cyprus to the vast heartlands of tribal Africa, north, south, east and west, and on to the sub-continent of India and Burma, they had laid for their temporal gain a sure foundation of hate and despair, of poverty and wretchedness, disease and starvation. (134)

The colonial administration trained Sri Lankans to facilitate its exploitative machine and finally to take over the affairs of the country during a specific period close to Independence. During the colonial period, the natives of the country were exploited and nurtured simultaneously, involving both the colonizer and the colonized subject. This mixed relationship is explained by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin as "ambivalence." "The concept is related to *hybridity* because, just as ambivalence 'decentres' authority from its position of power, so that authority may also become hybridized when placed in a colonial context in which it finds itself dealing with, and often inflected by, other cultures" (1998: 14). A certain sector of the population of Sri Lanka found upward class mobility by obtaining British education and following the culture and the ways of the colonizer. Bhabha criticizes mimicry as, "the narcissistic demand of colonial authority" (1994: 88) and describes the reason behind this aspiration as, "colonial mimicry is the

desire for a reformed, recognizable Other” (1994: 86) and further points out that, “mimicry repeats rather than represents” (1994: 89). In Sri Lanka, the most popular sport cricket, Western form of dress and seeking proficiency in English are part of this mimicry.

Sidath becomes a lodger in the house of James de Hoedt, a Dutch Burgher who is a senior officer of the customs. Instantly, a romantic involvement develops between the Sidath and de Hoedt’s attractive daughter Norma, and he in turn is quick in getting acclimatized to the easy-going ways and the party culture of the Burghers. By displaying hard work ethics and diligence in his official duties, he is soon promoted to an executive post in the imperial administration where the locals are usually awarded only minor positions. In 1942, the effects of World War II are felt in Sri Lanka, when contingents of British-lead foreign troops established themselves in strategic points to retaliate any attacks from Germany and Japan.

Norma is highly enamoured by the foreign officers and spends time with them without the knowledge of the narrator. He has agreed to get engaged to her shortly, unaware of her other romantic affiliations. Suddenly he is informed about the shocking news of the untimely death of his father. Leaving a letter to his boss to be posted by Norma, he rushes to his home village to be in time for the funeral. A week after the funeral, he reports to work to be severely reprimanded by his British boss for having taken leave of absence without prior permission. It later comes to light that Norma had failed to post the letter. The rigidity of the British administrative system is illustrated in Sidath’s sacking. In a state of dejection he visits Norma’s father in his office. He is informed that the officer with whom Norma has been having a secret, romantic alliance has been killed in an air raid in Colombo by the Japanese, and since she is three months pregnant by the officer, she has left for the hill country with her mother to rest and recuperate, and categorically does not ever wish to have any contact with Sidath. Devastated for having lost his love and his job, he leaves immediately for his home village Godagama, as he sees no purpose or prospect in hanging around in the capital city.

Sidath takes over the running of the family owned properties, much to the relief of his widowed mother. Six acres of cinnamon, ten acres of rubber, five acres of rice fields and four acres of coconut, keeps the narrator occupied. However, the prospect of becoming financially self-sufficient by the sales of rubber is blighted because, “the British cussedly controlled its price for their advantage without a care of how badly it affected us” (62). During the period of British colonization, the colonizer had complete control over the produce of the country and thus asserted an economic stranglehold on its subjects. The empire was won and maintained by the sword, and one was a mean to the other, and vice versa. Raymond Betts, a well-known colonial authority states the following in *Decolonization* (1998), in which he analyses the methods adopted by the British imperialists to establish economic control over the colonized countries:

“Imperialism, in this global scheme of things, was rapacious capitalism expanded overseas in a desperate search for new markets and resources to command, other people to oppress, all motivated by the desire for investment opportunities and subsequent profit” (13). In addition, during the Great Depression there were serious dislocations of market arrangements and there was not sufficient remuneration to keep the rubber industry buoyant. The situation in other colonized countries was similar, if not more complicated because of the continuing foreign control of raw material by profit-seeking corporations based in Europe and America. Albert Adu Boahen, the Ghanaian historian, in *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (1987), explains this phenomenon in terms which merits quotation:

Thus, during the colonial period, Africans were encouraged to produce what they did not consume and to consume what they did not produce, a clear proof of the exploitative nature of the colonial political economy. It is lamentable that this legacy has not changed materially in most African countries. To this day, they have to rely on the importation of rice, maize, edible oil, flour, and other food stuffs to survive. (102)

Nicholas B. Dirks in *The Scandal of Empire*, points out the seemingly devastating economic effects of British colonial trade and commerce policies, “monopolies were good only for a few unscrupulous individuals rather than for national economies” (136), and “this not only disturbed the invisible hand of market forces, but worked against the public interest as well” (136). Dirks also points out the hypocrisy of the trade autonomy practised by the British imperialists on their subjects:

While free trade and open markets became the most important ideological pillar on which empire consolidated itself, empire itself made free trade impossible for the colonized. (139)

It is at a time like that the narrator becomes engaged in black-market. Francis, the lawyer uncle of Sidath, offers him the job of political secretary, as he is coming forward for the next elections in support of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, which is headed by the legendary Oxford-educated but strongly nationalistic S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. Sidath’s duties include feeling the pulse of the people. He discovers that: “Caste was still the biggest single factor in deciding which way a man voted [...]” (94). Therefore he resorts to covertly investigating how each caste would cast their vote.

The fundamental principle of social organisation in India is caste, but to a lesser degree in Sri Lanka, as the spread of modern institutions and technologies has weakened the hold on caste. Yet, caste rivalries and the relevance of caste as a determinant of elite status have undoubtedly impeded the growth of a sense of unity among the indigenous people of Sri Lanka, during the first decades after Independence. This is evidenced by the findings of K. M. de Silva, and as enumerated by him in *A History of Sri Lanka* (2005): “The divisive forces were religion and caste, especially the latter, and these caused divisions among the Sinhalese themselves rather than dividing the Sinhalese from the other ethnic and religious groups on the island” (463).

Sidath sets about his undercover work with vigour and enthusiasm. Since the political leaders of both major parties belong to the same highly respected Goigama caste (farmer's caste), Bandaranaike, who promises a place for the common man, is voted by the hitherto marginalised lower castes. With the landslide victory of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party,<sup>34</sup> Bandaranaike is elected the Prime Minister and makes good his boast of making Sinhala the language of the country, giving little forethought to the dangers that might be ahead because of its transitory political advantage. The ravage which followed was unprecedented:

The cauldron of Sri Lanka simmered for a while and then erupted with a violence that nobody would have thought possible in this lotus-eating land. Sinhalese in Tamil areas and Tamils in the rest of the country were rounded up and wantonly maimed and murdered with gruesome and senseless ferocity. (103)

Since then, smouldering hatred and suspicion continued between the two ethnic groups, eroding the racial amity which had lasted for centuries.

Uncle Francis is elected the Member of Parliament for Galle,<sup>35</sup> and is subsequently awarded high Government posts and gradually he rises to the position of Minister of Justice. All turns out well for his family, except for his youngest son Bandula, who is a born rebel. He is expelled from Royal College,<sup>36</sup> the most prestigious boys' school in Colombo, for stealing a school-book in order to finance his drug addiction. Uncle Francis sends Bandula to England, where he turns over a new leaf for a while, and qualifies as an engineer. But his self-willed, mercurial and rebellious qualities surface again when he meets a fellow Sri Lankan called Dharmasena Piyaratne, a final year student of the London School of Economics, in a coffee bar which he often frequents. He is charmed by Piyaratna, who is a fervent adherent of the People's Liberation Front, and Bandula agrees to return to Sri Lanka and carry out "certain tasks."

Chandrasoma clearly spells out the mismanagement and corruption of ruling political parties since Independence. Each successive Government in Sri Lanka had played the game according to the rules laid down by the rich and the powerful. Despite election promises, many simple villagers had fallen prey to the urban shark. There were stark geographical disparities in education, health care and employment, and whatever improvements that were made in the cities, made no special impact on villages. As a result, low caste youth and the unemployed involved themselves in revolutionary

---

<sup>34</sup> Sri Lanka Freedom Party was founded by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in 1951 and since then it has been one of the two largest political parties in Sri Lanka. It first came into power in 1956.

<sup>35</sup> Galle is a city situated on the South Western tip of Sri Lanka, 119 km from the capital Colombo. Before the arrival of the Portuguese, Galle was the main port of the island. The city reached the height of its development during the Dutch colonial period in the 18th century.

<sup>36</sup> The Royal College of Colombo, a model of Eton College, was founded in 1835 by the British colonizers. The College is the country's oldest and the best public school for boys and has produced many distinguished alumni, presidents of two countries, a Sultan and three Prime Ministers of Sri Lanka.

activities, since they saw this as the only way to pressurize the state and the ruling class to gain equal rights.

Bandula arrives in Sri Lanka and travels to Peradeniya to meet his cousin Laila, who is the narrator's daughter. She is a student of Oriental Studies at the Peradeniya University. Along with her, he meets other members of the revolutionary group who are mainly students from the same university and other leading universities and a few lecturers who are actively involved in the JVP cause. Bandula is informed that in the name of free education, knowledge has been crammed into students, which finally does not ensure gainful employment. During their meeting, he categorically states his views and concerns for his participation in the revolt:

But I joined it on the understanding that we are a revolutionary body with a complete realisation that socialist power can be won only by revolution and not through the democratic process. Like all of you, I think the leftist politicians in the country, the socialists, the Trotskyites, the communists, have all betrayed the working classes by taking the facile, dishonest and impossible way of deciding to fight capital with the ballot. We have seen to our cost through the years that this does not and cannot work. It only helps their leaders into comfortable niches in the capitalist set-up while leaving the workers where they were. (122)

With his anti-poverty rhetoric, Bandula establishes his credentials as a powerful champion of the poor man's rights. He is immediately given the responsibility of establishing and running the biggest training camp in the Southern part of the country. The revolutionary members are to go through informative lectures about their ideology, receive practical training on use of arms and methods of attack, guerrilla warfare, unarmed combat and commando tactics. There are others assigned to engage themselves in: "the smuggling of arms, liaison with friends abroad, manufacture of firearms, bombs and grenades, the making and launching of rockets, the gathering of intelligence and carrying out of raids and robberies to obtain funds for the front" (126). To his enormous surprise, Bandula is informed that the narrator's great aunt Sarah who is an ardent sympathiser of the revolution has offered to be a housekeeper for the down South camp in Gonawila. An English woman, who goes by the pseudonym Pixie, also joins the Gonawila camp, which is situated in a jungle patch. In time, more comrades come into the fold and dormitories, assembly halls and residential areas are built, and an adjoining farm is established to provide food. Bandula is assigned duties at the camp, which are more of an advisory capacity than that of a combative nature. The son and daughter of Uncle Francis are also among the enthusiastic, youth participants of the revolution.

As months go by, the political chaos in the country intensifies, as the incumbent President of the UNP attempts to postpone the oncoming elections and instead establish a military dictatorship with a view of staying on in power indefinitely. Amidst an enormous public uproar, elections are held and a coalition government comes into power, partially due to the protests of the revolutionaries. Three months have gone by but there are no signs of any changes made to redress the educational and the economic problems of the youth of the country. This solidifies the resolve of the rebels and a co-

ordinated effort is planned by them to attack all police stations in the country, on the same day, at the same time. Along with that, the main Army headquarters in Panagoda, situated in the Southern part of the country, is to be attacked and weapons seized. Finally the city of Colombo is to be invaded with the intention of forcibly taking over the Government within the same day. Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike,<sup>37</sup> the Prime Minister of the country, is to be overpowered in her own residence and taken hostage. During the rebel meetings, not all district leaders are present but messages giving directions and accurate plans of attack are sent to them.

On the day of attack, a rude surprise awaits the rebels. The police stations that they attack are practically empty of officers and the usual arms and ammunition that are stored in the stations have been removed. Army battalions, which are on the prowl, seize rebels who are on the rampage and mete out on the spot punishments. The author confirms the brutal crackdown and the extra-judicial killings committed by the Army and the police during the 1971 insurgency in explicit terms. As reported by a rebel:

The cemetery keeper had provided four spades and the trench was soon dug. My comrades were lined up beside the trench and the three constables methodically shot them three at a time. Finally all three aimed at the leader and fired. Three by three they tumbled into the trench. (161)

The reason for the speedy deployment of the army is the prior knowledge of the Government about an imminent attack by the rebels:

A curfew had been declared throughout the country at dusk. It appeared that the government got prior warning of our plans because there had been a serious mix-up in Wellawaya, where the police station had been attacked at five in the morning instead of eleven thirty at night. This is what had given the game away. (159)

Within days, the Army invades the camps of the rebels and takes thousands of insurgents into custody. Many insurgents die in ensuing battles in various skirmishes throughout the country. The leaders are killed and during one of the army attacks the narrator's daughter gets shot. Captured female insurgents are raped by the army officers before being executed. The narrator's son kills a close relative who had acted as an informer to the forces and disappears into the jungle, along with some other rebels who were quick enough to evade the army attacks. But only death awaits them in the forest, either by starvation or at the hands of the army. Some of the rebels surrender and are jailed, depending on the severity of their crimes. General Cyril Ranatunga of the Sri Lankan Army whose Rifle Regiment conducted operations against the rebels during the first insurgency reports the following:

---

<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike was the widow of the previous Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike who was assassinated by a Buddhist monk. She took over the leadership of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party in 1960 after her husband's untimely death.

Cordon and search' counter insurgency operations and fighting patrols with large bodies of men were the most effective means of counter insurgency at this stage. This meant that the fighting patrols went searching for insurgent groups and once found, eliminated them. (40)

This passage evokes a public doubt as to whether legal requirements were adhered to in capturing insurgents and handling surrendered insurgents.

The uprising is over. The rebels have lost. They succumb to the anti-rebel thrust by the armed service and they never come close to capturing absolute power during the 1971 insurrection. But the survivors and their sympathisers are convinced that their cause for the revolution is not lost and they have to leave it to another day for another generation to fight. Thus the novel ends, with a pipe dream of building up the movement once more.

Political overtones connected to the volatile situations of the pre- and post-Independence atmosphere fraught with problems are rampant in Chandrasoma's *Out Out Brief Candle*, and the newly acquired voting power wielded by the lower classes and the lower castes in their struggle for equality is amply illustrated. The novel touches on caste fundamentalism and political chicanery. The author also demonstrates that class and caste are the more fundamental and pervasive influences for division in Sri Lanka. The novel shows an awareness of the differences between the classes, the social distinctions between the castes and the economic inequalities between the rural and the urban, and maps out an ironic interpretation of caste based politics. In view of this, the novel has to be valued for its pedagogic capacity to disseminate political information during the time in question, with respect to the cruelties of caste and poverty, which the adherence to the system entails. There is a kind of symmetry between the importance of caste in Sri Lanka and that of class in Britain and the intense snobbery of the English during the colonial period.

One of the main intentions of the rebels was to break the caste and class barriers. The lack of faith in politicians in general, because of their insensitivity and disinterest to respond to the needs of the suppressed classes is evident in the novel, which acts as an incitement to self-examination and a stock taking of national values at political level. Chandrasoma elucidates the fact that, the denial of literacy in English to the rural youth through the 1956 language policy of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, had driven the frustrated Southern youth whose government bestowed free education but left them bereft of jobs, dignity or hope, into a suicidal insurgency. As the village youth construes, English is the language of authority and power and since they are not proficient in it, it has become the language of victimization. The youth rebels' desire to wipe out colonial influenced systems and language is in line with the rhetorical posture assumed by Jean-Paul Sartre in the Preface of the book *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon: "The European elite decided to fabricate a native elite; they selected adolescents, branded the principles of Western culture on their foreheads with a red-hot iron, and gagged their mouths with sounds, pompous awkward words that twisted their tongues" (Sartre xliii).

For a considerable period after Independence the English urban élite of Sri Lanka, derided the antiquated attitudes and the lack of English knowledge of the rural folk. Today with the prominence given to the Sinhala language, these attitudes are fast diminishing.

Thus the novel exposes the fact that the education system has failed the very students, depending on it to escape poverty. Standing in their way is the urban-educated ruling class who gives preference to Anglo-centric education and owing to the import of the English language, the personal and social status of the urban class has been elevated. The author exploits to the full, the failings of each post-independent Government leading up to 1971 which caused the disillusionment of Sri Lankan youth. As further elaborated by Sartre, in the Preface of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), these differences and disillusionments are born out of colonial history: "In some places the metropolis makes do with paying a clique of feudal overlords; in others, it has fabricated a fake bourgeoisie of colonized subjects in a system of divide and rule [...]" (Sartre xlvi). *Out Out Brief Candle* is a historical testimony of the Southern region's social turbulence, arising out of similar causes as stated by Sartre.

### **2.2.3 Exposure of State Terror**

#### **2.2.3.1 The Violation of Journalistic Freedom *Of Terror and Trials* (1998) by Tennyson Perera**

The major part of literature of Sri Lanka has been and is being written in the Sinhala language. Tennyson Perera's creative writing demarcates the turning points in the annals of Sri Lankan history, as they are a vista into the socio-economic transition within the country. Perera's <sup>38</sup> novels *Thunder* (1993) and *Terror and Trials* (1998) are both considered close to political propaganda due to their subversive contents, which expose shortcomings in Sri Lankan society to the author's potential readership. From a literary point of view, his works have displayed a subtle artistic development in the art of local story telling.

*Of Terror and Trials* was first published in Sinhala under the title of *Satyawadeenge Marana Manchakaya* and was not initially targeted for a significantly highbrow, English readership. Subsequently the novel was translated into English by a distinguished Sri Lankan writer in English and well-known translator, Vijitha Fernando. The setting of the novel is during the period when governmental opposition to JVP activities faced fierce repression, as the rebel organisation became increasingly organised and militant. The Government insisted that their operations were not acts of aggression but merely protective measures to safeguard the general public against terrorism. However, during

---

<sup>38</sup> Born in 1940, Tennyson Perera is a prolific writer in Sinhalese who entered the literary scene in the 1950s. Up to now he has written twenty novels and six collections of short stories in Sinhala, and some of his writings have been translated into English.



this period the position of the courts and the legal system deteriorated sharply, and opposition newspapers, political rivals and insurgents were subjected to an increasingly brutal regime of extra-legal violence. It was a time when governments restricted journalism of a distinctive critical category and only general news category was allowed. Unlike Goonewardena's *An Asian Gambit* (1985) and Wijenaiké's *The Rebel* (1979), Perera's novel places greater emphasis on the prevailing volatile situation of the country during the time, and the purpose of the novel seems to be a forum to expose the atrocities committed by the armed forces of Sri Lanka who took hasty, draconian action to quell the youth revolt.

Looking on Perera's novel from a political and a historical point of view, it is evident that he is not fighting shy to write about a significant aspect of the country's recent violent past or to reveal uncomfortable facts about a contemporary issue of Sri Lanka, which many would like to brush aside and let be forgotten. In that respect, there is a broad distinction to be made between Perera's *Of Terror and Trials* and other novels written on the subject. During the JVP insurrection of 1987-89, The Sri Lankan Government was accused of committing wide State terrorism. These acts of terror included massacres of civilians who were clandestinely interned in mass graves, the employment of potentially lethal procedures of torture, unlawful incarceration of members of the public and civilian disappearances. Perera's novel is a kaleidoscope of the macabre, as it is a narrative which exposes those repressive measures adopted by the authorities, like cold blooded killings, instilling torture, pain, fear and shame, in the most gruesome and cruel degree. It is an exposure of brutal massacres which beggars belief, and a damning accumulation of facts of state-directed human rights abuses against insurgents and suspected insurgents, on an extraordinary scale. In the novel, these atrocities are seen from the eyes of a journalist who is stoically searching for the truth and is arrested on the suspicion of being a JVP sympathiser.

The setting of the story is 1989, during the height of the second insurgency. The narrator who is the main character is a journalist. He is writing news reports and a serial children's story about a magician, which are being published weekly in a local newspaper. Embedded in the text of the novel is a tale within a tale; primarily, the first person narration of the journalist and, secondarily, the tale about the magician living in the times of the Sinhalese kings. In the secondary tale, in creating his characters, Perera has borrowed from a long oral as well as a literary tradition of Sri Lankan morality tales told to children. At various stages, the tale moves from realism to myth and fable, and the text is suffused with surrealistic images from the Sinhala folk tale tradition, which is not particularly Eurocentric. Here, the author creatively depicts tradition with a contemporary resonance.

The journalist is vehemently against Government sanctioned killings, and is in the process of preparing an article about the mysterious disappearances of people. On previous occasions, he had written in controversial political columns against certain

Government Ministers and his writings have brought him into conflict with political authorities. As a consequence, his name has got into a list of forthright journalists who are currently under surveillance. The narrator's wife, Ramani, is apprehensive of what her husband might write and the repercussion that can come in its wake. Both of them are aware that the brutal regime in power is seeking to crush all opposition in a violent fashion and writers will be penalised or imprisoned if their works are considered to be of a subversive nature. Matrimonial harmony gets eroded because of the constant fear that the couple is living in. Their fears are further aggravated by the events that they witness in their neighbourhood:

After a while the soldiers took the handcuffed men to the open ground opposite our house. The growls of the soldiers, the death cries of the other men and the sound of the shots shook the whole neighbourhood. I felt fear wrapping me up in flames in the ensuing silence. My hands and feet turned cold and my body became inert as a corpse even without my sensing what was happening. For a moment my mind and my body were both lifeless. I did not even know if I stayed in that position till the vehicles went away. I cannot remember if my wife and I exchanged even a single word for a long time. (6)

Next morning, a message is found pasted on the front wall of his house, warning him to be careful, as death is imminent. Haunted by the gravity of this message, his wife pleads with him to destroy the manuscript of the story and to stop altogether with the news reports that he is writing. A few days later, when he returns home from work, he finds that army officers had broken in and ransacked his house and all his documents and books are in a complete mess. The gravity of the situation gradually sinks in:

I walked about the house and my room and I knew, looking at the devastation, that my death was close at hand. Everyday there were increasing numbers of corpses floating down the river. Everywhere men were being burnt on tyres. I don't know why I did not think of the kind of death that awaited me. I knew that I must choose the least painful one. (9-10)

With stark images of carnage, the author makes visible the brutality during the tumultuous era. The journalist discovers that the manuscript of his story about the magician and a picture of Karl Marx have been taken away by the foraging army officers. Soon, he is summoned to the headquarters of the secret police for interrogation, as the magician in the story that he is writing about is interpreted as the actual leader of the insurgents by the police investigators.

*Of Terror and Trials*, as the title of the book suggests, is an unvarnished account of the atrocities of state terror in Sri Lanka, during the insurgencies. While the "terror" part is obvious, the "trials" are but kangaroo courts where the suspects are executed with no legal representation whatsoever. Intimidation of journalists, poor information management, a culture of secrecy, lack of accountability, coupled by various Governments' anxiety to wield power to suppress the freedom of the press and condone attacks on journalists are frequent realities in Sri Lanka. On the subject, Perera is informing the reader about the actual, horrific facts about the fate of journalists in Sri

Lanka, who dared to write about the gruesome massacres during the insurgency and the politically motivated murders of the subsequent civil war in Sri Lanka:

Lurking in my mind was the news of a well-known reporter snatched from his home and murdered on the beach...and churning in my mind was the news of a female singer who sang revolutionary songs fleeing to India. It was a couple of days earlier that I heard that a news item I had written about the loathsome act of displaying the heads of about thirty young men outside the main entrance of a University was under scrutiny by the secret police. (11)

The novel intermittently points out the political dangers attached to the pursuit of truth. Whilst confirming the adverse consequences that forthright journalists have to endure when pilloried for seditious libel, the author brings into focus an actual, tragic event in Sri Lanka. “The well-known reporter” that Perera is referring to is none other than Richard de Zoysa, the Sri Lankan journalist, author, human rights activist and actor, who was abducted and murdered early in 1990. A man of immeasurable courage, de Zoysa’s commitment to social responsibility was immense in his writings and was known for outspoken journalism. He was allegedly killed by a death squad linked to elements within the Government, and his body which was washed ashore on a beach South of Colombo, revealed that he had gone through gruesome torture before he died. De Zoysa, who was of mixed ethnicity (his father a majority Sinhalese and his mother a prominent Tamil medical surgeon), at the time of his murder was the head of the Colombo Office of the International Press Service. He became a confounding enemy of certain Government officials, as a forthright journalist who dared to expose the ugly truth about Government atrocities. He was a fearless activist for justice in a land of thugs, and for his bravery – for precision in his investigative style of reporting – he paid with his life. Wijesinha, in *Declining Sri Lanka* (2007), attributes the murder of de Zoysa as a reason for an attempt to restore normalcy:

What finally brought the process to a halt was the murder of the journalist and human rights activist Richard de Zoysa in Colombo. He was taken away from his home in the middle of the night by a posse led by Senior Superintendent of Police Ronnie Gunasinghe, long known as a hatchet man, not only for the Jayawardena government, but in Mrs. Bandaranaike’s time too. (162)

De Zoysa’s killing shocked the Sri Lankan public and stirred worldwide outrage from journalists. As a result, public faith in Government forces diminished. During this period, the country was in a desperate shape, and human rights violations ranked among one of the world’s most abysmal. Even the judiciary failed to act as a curb on official and military excesses. De Zoysa’s mother was able to identify one of his abductors and despite threats to her own life, fought till her death seeking justice. Ironically, a wall of secrecy descended around the whole incident and the perpetrators were never caught. Wijesinghe blames State-condoned persecution as the reason for this gross miscarriage of justice: “But the contortions it went through, which included palpably illogical opinions by the Attorney General so that Ronnie Gunasinghe was not produced in court

as the inquiring magistrate had ordered, made clear that the government had been responsible and was protecting its own” (163). Nevertheless, the subsequent public outcry against his murder became a reason to call a halt to the killings carried out by the death squads, and a greater awareness developed about the many human rights abuses committed during the Government’s counter insurgency operations. His death has also caused considerable soul searching among politicians, military personnel and Government officials. In a society that is infused with the culture of martyrdom, de Zoysa is regarded as a hero up until today.

Despite revelations of State terror, the author is restrained when reporting events during the period, when the rebels ran amok and caused widespread mayhem in the country. During the insurgencies, the rebels’ chokehold on the public left the country in a state of disarray and the labour strikes organised by them disrupted the economic life of the cities. The JVP encouraged rebellion in every sphere and over every political and economic issue. Perera records only very few of those illegal activities and the terror tactics of the insurgents which led to the chaotic situation in the country, in the form of questions in the narrative, like how they forced commercial activities to come to a halt and disrupted economic life in the city. The question can be raised as to why Perera mentions only a few of their threats and a bank robbery committed to augment their funds while the insurgent acts of violence were innumerable and far more severe. Examples of these questions as presented in the text are: “How did all the shops and stores in the town close the day a young man rode around with a red band in the spokes of his cycle?” (14), and “Didn’t a group of three wheelers drive around the town at a speed of about twenty kilometres just about an hour before a band of young men in red broke into the main banks in the town in broad daylight?” (15). These instances in the text are very few, in comparison to the immense coverage of the state terrorism which the author presents, using fierce language, along with a display of disquieting images of torture. The insurgents’ savagery in indiscriminately killing army and police personnel and members of their families, heads of educational institutions, politicians who opposed them, and village headmen whom they suspected as informers have been conspicuously left out. There was also the impromptu mob justice, when an apprehended suspect became the sacrificial culprit for a thousand grievances the rebels had against the Government and the armed forces. Further, the insurgent leaders were responsible for even sacrificing thousands of innocent lives of their own cadres, on an ill-conceived and futile venture. It was those very crimes that decreased the strength of the rebel movement and destroyed their image. The second JVP insurrection, between 1987 and 1989, was in actual fact more violent than the first rebellion of 1971, and was repressed by the authorities with even greater brutality. In view of these facts, it appears that Perera’s prime aim is to expose the brutality of the authorities, as practically every chapter is full of raw, gory details of torture meted out to captured rebels and suspected insurgents.

The novel is full of stomach-churning imagery of victims being subjected to harsh interrogating practices like receiving electric shocks, being hung by their toes for lengthy periods, severe beatings, burning of genitals and beating of the soles of the feet with iron rods, etc., all of which convey the cruelty of the dire deeds committed during the period by the security forces. Though Perera can be regarded as a firebrand, it is evident that he is labouring to depict the truth about the situation in the country during the period of the second insurgency, despite his overt sensationalism. The book was originally written in Sinhalese and targeted for the Sinhala readership, to which the youth rebels belonged. Perhaps the author is displaying an open partiality towards the rebels by inordinately elaborating on state atrocities. A rare, but a conspicuous presence of Western consciousness is however evident in the novel, in respect to the desperate and ineffective struggles of human rights groups.

During the period of the journalist's incarceration he is daily interrogated. In neighbouring torture chambers, he can see and hear others being tortured. He is immensely traumatised with what he observes:

I felt that the place was becoming more fearsome than a meat stall with a guillotine. In almost every room with an inch wide mesh barring the windows it was a common sight to see several men and women, blindfolded and their hands tied. The surroundings resounded with unbearable cries of agony and fear and there were shadows with large bloody spots. (14)

The investigators having read the journalist's book accuse him that his materials are extracts from Karl Marx's books. His pleadings that the aim of his book is actually a light-hearted story for the enjoyment of children fall on deaf ears. His book is scrutinized and analysed thoroughly, and his interrogators come to the conclusion that there are cryptic lines and coded messages couched in the text, addressed to the insurgents. He is accused of being the master planner of the insurgent activities, and while being repeatedly and intensively interrogated, he attempts to fabricate plausible answers to every question fired at him. He desperately hopes that the various explanations that he is giving about the plot and the characters of his book will help him to pull through unscathed. But there is a possibility that the journalist's children's story is cast in the form of fiction or allegory, to avoid violation of harassing seditious libel laws. Due to the stringent restrictive laws applied to journalism during the troubled period, it could be a journalistic strategy on his part to use a covert method of conveying to the public his criticism of flagrant state atrocities.

Since human rights groups have inquired about the journalist from politicians, the treatment given to him is mild for the moment, although the possibility of subsequent gruesome torture to make him speak lingers in the air: "I had heard a story that a lawyer suspected of rebel activity had a huge nail driven to his head. There is the kind of activity that goes on in a blacksmith's smithy with burning iron wires driven into the stomachs of suspects" (28). With incidents of torture inflicted on suspects and raw, macabre imagery, the author highlights signs of profound distrust of the Government

forces that went on a bloody rampage during the insurgency. Deaths and disappearances during the period have been severely undercounted and in the absence of an independent legal system, victims' families were deprived of the opportunity to take their grievances to the courts.

The journalist is incarcerated in a detention camp with other suspects. His wife is brought into an adjoining room where he hears her being harassed, tortured, raped and finally killed by her interrogators. Meanwhile he goes through extreme psychological torment, knowing he cannot do anything to save her. With her heinous murder, he almost gives up hope, when one night a band of rebels breaks into the camp, freeing those who are locked up. He is fortunate enough to be able to run away with them towards a rubber plantation. His own house has been burnt down and therefore he has nowhere to go. He is aware that the rebellion has been unsuccessful and the powers of the surviving insurgents have temporarily diminished. He takes refuge in a hut with three dirty vagrants but knows that they will be captured soon. Rebels and monks who have led the insurrection but managed to escape are disguised as beggars and are taking refuge along with him. His hopes are slim in his new environment, and here the author dramatizes the narrator's isolation, as well as the mutual dependence of victims facing a similar plight.

The novel also mentions the involvement of Buddhist monks in the revolution, whose bugbear is the encroachment of decadent Western modernity, which pits against Sri Lankan traditions and spirituality. They preach that procedures of Western knowledge and Western materialism are an intrusive malaise which breed angst and despair and attract greed instead of aiding spiritual advancement, which they fear will ultimately endanger the very fabric of Buddhist-Sinhala culture. The monks as well as a considerable nationalist sector of the country expected that Independence and decolonization would provide the people with an opportunity to restore traditions and indigenous culture. But the Western-educated consider the monks far too conservative and orthodox and clinging to outmoded thoughts and outworn habits.

Perera's novel stands poised between two main currents, the national and resistance to the new local colonizers. One can envisage that the nationalistic-minded desire of the rebels and monks to assert an independent role for the country is by reacting to colonization and to desperately attempt to hold on to the traditions of the past and revive ancient culture already altered or influenced by Western cultural intrusions. Such apprehensions and fears are reiterated by Arun Mukherjee, who points out in *Colonialism: My Living*: "One of the claims postcolonial theory makes is that English language and literature played a major role in destroying indigenous cultures" (151).

In the tale, the brutal regime has succeeded in its primary aim, which is to silence subversive elements by killing and extreme torture. The conclusion is somewhat apocalyptic towards those who are still under suspicion. The main character is still a prime suspect, and is aware of the occupational hazards of being a candid journalist in a country which possesses a dismal human rights record and also having the dubious

distinction of the world's highest number of journalists abducted and killed during the turbulent years. The main character's silent resolve and a desire for a dignified death and respect for the truth, prevails throughout the narration, despite the author's not so sanguine view of execution of justice in the country.

The grim details of Sri Lankan Army reprisals, the extra-judicial killings, the inhuman methods of torture resorted by the armed forces and the overall gross violations of human rights by a brutally repressive regime are the main concern of Perera's fiercely worded novel. Violence is embedded in the novel's very title, *Terror and Trials*. There is a broad distinction to be made between this novel and other written on the same subject. The distinctly harsh vocabulary and the savagely asserted and skilfully challenged manner of expression of State instigated atrocities against rebels and, and extreme physical maltreatment to incarcerated rebel suspects, distinguishes Perera's book from other novels written on the same topic. Other authors seem to take shelter in a more conservative approach in dealing with the abuses. The overwhelming exposure of State atrocities relegates Perera's work to a subversive novel. In that sense the novel has great symbolic importance, as the author portrays Sri Lanka as a despotic State which is distinguished from Western democracy. Considering the ideological trends that have marked the genre in question, Perera's approach is a stark deviation. The author's indignation at the infringement of human rights is sustained throughout the novel and it is easy to recognize a dissident voice within the text. There is also a hint of antagonism towards the armed forces by the very non-flattering descriptions about the methods of gruesome torture inflicted on suspects and their fanatical ferocity. The rebels on the other hand are depicted as courageous opponents of military suppression. Yet, there is a doubt about certain moral limitation in the attitude of Perera. He downplays the horrendous acts of violence of the JVP by shifting the focus on to the security forces.

Another special feature of the novel is that the horrendous contemporary events are juxtaposed with a tale of a magician of the distant Sinhala past, and as such imbuing the work with a special, national flavour. Also, it is a narrative in which the story-teller is constantly swallowed up by the story. We also recognize here the authorial disavowal and cultural confusion, which is in fact a safety measure used by the journalist who is the protagonist of the tale, to avoid being arrested and charged for libel. Perera uses a shrewd tactic to avoid pledging his writing strictly to fact, fiction, news items or a children's story. Here, the author portrays the art of writing as a form of protest or social critique. With this example, he also elucidates a true fact of life in Sri Lanka, which is the eternal danger and intimidation that pursues investigator journalists who are on fact-finding missions, with the intention of exposing Government corruption and graft. The novel is a fictitious example of the evils of censorship but it is also an explicit cry for journalistic freedom, a liberal media and a tolerant justice system in a country which has a dubious track record for human rights violations. The extent to which the press is free to criticize incumbent Government and politicians in power is still a pressing concern,

and the use of seditious libel laws to suppress opposition writing is yet in force in Sri Lanka. Organisations such as Amnesty International and Reporters without Borders, note that disappearances and intimidation of journalists continue unabated in Sri Lanka.

### 2.2.3.2 The Task of Identifying the Perpetrators

#### *Anil's Ghost* (2001) by Michael Ondaatje

Michael Ondaatje<sup>39</sup> is a remarkable example of a multiply-positioned diasporic writer, being born in Sri Lanka, having grown up in Britain and migrated to Canada, where he has achieved recognition as a member of an elite circle of English language writers. It was during his years in Canada that the author was inspired to discover the themes and concerns that mark his oeuvre as a whole and have given him impetus to understand his own roots. Some of his collections of poetry and works of prose are considered sensuous and surreal, as they bear a definite Sri Lankan character, like his collection of poems *The Cinnamon Peeler* (1990), the novel *Anil's Ghost* (2001), the semi-autobiographical work *Running in the Family* (1983), and *The Cat's Table* (2012), which also displays autobiographical roots. The latter two novels depict an eloquent yet humorous search for his family connections in Sri Lanka, which shades into reflections on self and identity. Ondaatje's ability to write fiction based on war and to craft cross-cultural engagements in narratives are demonstrated in *The English Patient* (1992) and in *Divisadero* (2008). *Anil's Ghost* is also set against a background of violence and is an expatriate representation of the civil war in Sri Lanka, which bears a unique structure.

The setting of *Anil's Ghost* is from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s in Sri Lanka, and straddles the critical period of the second insurgency and the heightening of the deep and protracted conflict of the Tamil-Sinhala ethnic war. The narrative is divided into eight separate sections, each section dealing with a subject or character related to the story. By framing his in novel this way, the author offers a deep insight into the characters of the tale. The main character, Anil Tissera, an experienced, expatriate, forensic expert, commissioned by the United Nations Human Rights branch in Geneva, on a special seven week mission, to team up with local Governmental officials and archaeologists in a Human Rights investigation. Born in Sri Lanka, Anil had left the country fifteen years earlier to pursue studies in the United States. She looks upon the turmoil of Sri Lanka from a cosmopolitan, elite position and also inevitably with the psychology of an immigrant. The country she was raised in is perceived to suffer from

---

<sup>39</sup> Michael Ondaatje (born 1943) is by far the most internationally acclaimed English author born in Sri Lanka, and has distinguished himself in academic life both at home and abroad. Of a family of Dutch Burgher and Tamil mixed parentage, he migrated as a youngster along with his mother and his siblings to England, after Sri Lanka obtained Independence from Britain. Later he moved onwards to Canada in the 1960s, where he became a Canadian citizen. He has won the prestigious Canadian Governor General's Award four times, the Giller Prize and the Prix Medicis, and was named for the Order of Canada in 1988. Along with other famous authors like Margret Atwood, his poetry and prose have fuelled the new Canadian literary blossoming.



intolerable inadequacies and limitations while her host country seems to be free from these failings and offers a more fruitful way of life. The author himself appears to be plagued by the moral concerns of the virulent situation and the ungraspable man-made calamities in the land of his birth, which he expresses throughout the novel.

Although Anil's journey to Sri Lanka is mainly for work, she also wishes to establish contact again with various extended family members and friends. Her visit can also be seen as a nostalgic investigation of the lost roots of her own identity, besides conducting an investigation into a forward-looking contemporary cause, a search to reveal an uncomfortable truth. Anil is somewhat masculine in character: she has acquired a masculine name and even wears somewhat masculine clothes and goes about her business with the confidence of a man. Her personality is well suited to the mission she has undertaken, and with determined resolve she sets to work. The character's Western influence is apparent by the fact that she is addicted to smoking, which is not usual among Sri Lankan women who are generally conservative. Ondaatje confers an all-embracing Western identity on Anil by the fact of her education, her sexual behaviour, her dress habits, and by the way she handles her given assignment.

Western forms of knowledge emerge on more than one occasion in the novel. Whilst examining the skeleton, Anil makes a pertinent comparison: "She began to examine the skeleton again under sulphur light, summarizing the facts of his death so far, the permanent truths, same for Colombo as for Troy" (64). The author suggests that the physical consequences of death are the same no matter whether as a result of a war in Colombo or in Troy. Although Anil has been years away from Sri Lanka, she has followed the tragic developments in the country, but once she is back there she is hit by the pervasiveness and extravagant display of violence: "Yet the darkest Greek tragedies were innocent compared with what was happening here. Heads on stakes. Skeletons dug out of a cocoa pit in Matale [...]" (11). In her mission, Anil has to navigate the complexities of a country profoundly touched by sporadic political violence. Her first shock is during her visit to the Kynsey Road Teaching Hospital, where she joins forensic students to examine the broken body of a recently killed young male. She meets an archaeologist, Sarath Diyasena, with whom she has to collaborate in her work, but she clashes with him immediately although Sarath tries to be friendly. Anil is briefed on the merciless civil war and the volatile situation in the country. A sense of extreme mystery is immediately introduced by the author when Anil becomes aware of indiscriminate killings which are committed by the insurgents, the Northern separatists and the Government forces, as bodies keep turning up without anyone neither knowing who the real culprits are, nor the identity of the victims. The narration is heavy with foreboding of the protracted turbulent period in Sri Lanka, raising the question of personal safety even of the main character Anil, who is on a potentially dangerous mission.

Ondaatje, in his position as an expatriate writer and as a detached observer of the racial conflict is prompted to include a series of disturbing images:

There had been continual emergency from 1983 onwards, racial attacks and political killings. The terrorism of the separatist guerrilla groups, who were fighting for a homeland in the north. The insurrection of the insurgents in the south, against the government. The counterterrorism of the special forces against both of them. The disposal of bodies by fire. The disposal of bodies in rivers or the sea. The hiding and then reburial of corpses.

It was a Hundred Years' War with modern weaponry, and backers on the sidelines in safe countries, a war sponsored by gun-and drug-runners. It became evident that political enemies were secretly joined in financial arms deals. *'The reason for war was war.'* (42-43)

Here, Ondaatje fearlessly exposes the fact that the diaspora is financing the war and covert foreign aid is received to continue the armed conflict.

Anil feels that the purpose of her assignment is a mere gesture because she is prevented from going into the right offices to investigate disappearances. Along with Sarath, Anil discovers the skeleton of a recently burnt victim, found in a cave in a Government-owned region. Unable to pinpoint his identity, they nickname the nameless victim "Sailor." His remains are simply those of countless victims of the on-going conflicts but they are the only evidence within Anil's reach to implicate the Government in horrific crimes. She believes that by identifying "Sailor," she will know who the killers are of the rest. She is also in possession of three other reconstructed bodies, which she names Tinker, Tailor and Soldier. It is evident here that Ondaatje is influenced by the English detective thriller *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1974), the first novel of the *Karla Trilogy* by John Le Carré. According to Antoinette Burton in "Archives of Bones: Anil's Ghost and the Ends of History," the nomenclature of the bodies bear a specific purpose:

Ondaatje thus draws our attention to the obvious parallels between forensic science and detective fiction, a link which effectively marks the escalation of dramatic tension *and* underscores the shared methodologies of science and espionage at precisely this point in the novel. (39-56)

At first, Anil is apprehensive about Sarath's intentions, as during their investigations he displays personal traits which she finds incomprehensible. She is confused as to whether he is a friend or a foe because of his ambiguous official and political affiliations. He appears to be caught in the cross-currents between Anil's determination to identify the perpetrator of horrific atrocities of a brutally repressive regime and the Government officials' anxiety to suppress the truth. While conducting her investigations, Anil is operating with Western idealistic assumptions about state institutions' responsibility for the citizenry. But her assumptions are repeatedly thwarted during the course of her investigation. Despite collegial differences, she makes an attempt to get to know Sarath better and finds out that the reason for his behaviour is a personal trauma connected to the untimely, suicidal death of his wife. She feels empathy for his situation, as she herself has lost her parents in a car crash.

Along with Sarath, Anil travels to the hill-country and then onwards to the dry-zone of the North Central Province to seek the expert advice of an epigraphist called Palipana,

who is a former teacher of Sarath. Palipana has retired from his active and illustrious official life and is now living the life of a hermit in a hut in the forest in the former Buddhist capital of Anuradhapura, surrounded by ancient Buddhist culture. Here, the author is drawing attention to a geographically and historically significant location, Anuradhapura, the ancient seat of the Sinhalese kings situated in the North Central Province.

Palipana lives there with his orphaned, young niece who had witnessed the killing of her parents during the civil war. Since he was the only remaining relative, he had taken the trauma-ridden child into his care. Palipana recommends the guidance of a sculptor-cum-painter named Ananda to recreate the face of the burnt body, in an attempt to yield the secrets of the circumstances of the death of the victim. Ananda himself is a victim of the civil war because of the disappearance of his wife. As a result of his uncontrollable grief, he has resorted to excessive drinking. Anil and Sarath travel to the gem-mining town of Ratnapura in search of the artist Ananda.

Ondaatje mentions the assassination of the President<sup>40</sup> of the country during the troubled period, which is a tragic crime which actually took place, but he has altered the name of the President. The political nature of the novel is further evident as the author places great emphasis on the exact place names of the locations where mass graves were actually discovered during the troubled period, namely, Suriyakanda,<sup>41</sup> Ankumbura and Akmeemana. The terrifying murderous atmosphere is conveyed through grisly images of mass graves, body heaps and bloody rivers as illustrated in the following searing account: “The country existed in a rocking, self-burying motion. The disappearance of schoolboys, the death of lawyers by torture, the abduction of bodies from the Hokandara mass grave. Murders in the Muthurajawela marsh” (157). In the quoted passage above, the author’s meticulous concern for detail and accuracy is also amply demonstrated.

Ondaatje gradually introduces Anil’s past life and connects it with the present. The narration is interspersed with flashbacks to Anil’s work-experience in Guatemala, another war-torn state, and her failed marriage and another personal relationship with a married named Cullis. This jagged disruption in the narrative structure constantly forces the reader to re-evaluate the protagonist’s life and re-identify with her fears and love life. This retrieval of certain facets of her past life also serves the purpose of informing the reader about her comparative experiences and observations of communal violence and bloodshed in another country. It is against a backdrop of brewing civil war that the protagonist is forced to come to terms with her own inner demons. During Anil’s

---

<sup>40</sup> President Ranasinghe Premadasa was the third President of Sri Lanka and was in office from January 1989 to May 1993. He was assassinated during the May Day celebrations in Colombo by an LTTE suicide bomber.

<sup>41</sup> The mass graves unearthed in Sri Lanka were a macabre pointer to the clandestine nature of the State counter-insurgency operations carried out during the troubled period.

extensive official travel in Sri Lanka, she is informed of the obvious evidence of unspeakable crimes and events which filled the public with mortal fear and dread:

We have seen so many heads stuck on poles here, these last few years. It was at its worst a couple of years ago. You'd see them in the early mornings, somebody's night work, before the families heard about them and came and removed them and took them home. Wrapping them in their shirts or just cradling them. Someone's son. These were blows to the heart. There was only one thing worse. That was when a family member simply disappeared and there was no sighting or evidence of his existence or his death. (184)

Thus with horrifying images Ondaatje establishes the grim mood of the novel and simultaneously he graphically exposes the actual blatant human rights violations in the country during the period.

Anil is consumed by her avid interest in identifying the victim, which she does with scientific objectivity, and in the process there are constant clashes between Anil and Ananda. She bases her conclusions on forensic investigation and logical reasoning, as she becomes aware that questioning and interrogating Government authorities will take her nowhere. A study of the skeleton and bone analysis reveals that the victim has worked in a graphite mine. The artist finishes the assigned work of recreating the face of the victim, but he gives the body a peaceful face, in the memory of his wife who disappeared during the critical period. By interviewing villagers in various graphite mining villages, Anil and Sarath are able to identify the victim as a man called Ruwan Kumara who had been abducted from the mines on a specific date by unknown men. Their next step is to find out whether his name is "in a list of government undesirables [...]" (269). The severely mentally disturbed artist attempts to commit suicide after finishing his assignment but is rescued by Anil and Sarath.

During the course of her work, Anil meets a highly dedicated physician, Dr. Gamini, who is Sarath's brother, working in the affected areas. Some weeks later it is to Dr. Gamini's immense shock that among the dead bodies which keep turning up at his hospital, he discovers the body of his own brother Sarath. His body reveals that the bones in his hands have been crushed due to extreme torture, and it is left to the reader to surmise the reasons and the circumstances leading to his death. Bones and skeletons are powerful metaphors in the novel to signify state-sponsored violence and the irrefutable reality of a society cruelly fragmented and shattered by an unsettling political environment. The tale does not disclose what happens to Anil in the end, except that she returns to her host country without being able to conclusively prove the identity of the perpetrators, but carrying with her in her mind, Sarath's ghost and the evidence of man's inhumanity to man.

*Anil's Ghost* is a testament that Ondaatje is still in touch with his roots and that the tragic state of affairs in his land of birth weighed heavily upon the author. He dwells at length upon the atrocities committed during the troubled period in this thoroughly and conventionally researched novel, which amply displays the author's extreme exasperation

with the country of his birth. The characters have experienced the trauma of violence connected to the civil conflict. Ananda resorts to alcohol to drown his sorrows after the disappearance of his wife. Gamini faces the traumatic anguish of discovering the body of his brother who is killed under mysterious circumstances. Palipana's niece has no living relatives except her uncle who raises her in the middle of the forest.

Closely reading the novel, one can also notice that there is a constant dialogue between native traditions and foreign literary trends. The astute observations and deductive reasoning, of the forensic anthropologists and archaeologists on a quest to find the killers are thwarted by inefficient bureaucracies. As such, the plot fits well into the mystery genre, creating the investigative air of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. On the other hand, the description of Buddhist traditions and culture infused into the narration gives the novel significant local grounding and an exotic context.

The novel's setting and historical context are rife with symbols of Sri Lanka's hybrid and inter-cultural and past and Ondaatje is explicit in his commitment to hybridity. The juxtaposition of the expatriate protagonist and the real-life situations in Sri Lanka has a significant implication for the author's negotiation of his own hybrid position and migrant identity. Despite his geographical distance from the country of his origin, it is evident that he maintained critical awareness of the consequences of national events and possessed a rigorous understanding of Sri Lanka's volatile politics. A mark of modernity that finds articulation in the novel is the culturally grounded way in which the personal voice of the author makes its presence felt. There is a powerful presence of Buddhist culture, and the author seems to contrast Eastern spirituality linked to the image of a golden age in the historical past of Sri Lanka with Western materialism, with respect to the situation of the decline in the present. The involvement of tradition in the text enables Ondaatje to move beyond social critique and draw upon the aesthetic power of the unique Sri Lankan-Buddhist cultural heritage. He boldly endorses and explores the tropes of artistic talent and potency.

However, literary critics were quick to identify contradictory impulses in the novel and note lack of harmony between its aesthetics and the theme of violence. In response, Chelva Kanaganayakam comments in "In Defense of *Anil's Ghost*" on the combination of provocative subject matter and the cultural aspect: "[...] Ondaatje's novel charts new territory by establishing a careful balance between political engagement and aesthetic distance" (6). In order to call attention to aesthetic values, Ondaatje brings in an important artistic practice associated with Buddhism, which is the ritual attached to the painting of the eyes of a Buddha statue at an auspicious time. Thus the novel conforms to the concept of theorists who proclaim that cultural hybridity is an irretrievable condition of post-colonial modernity. As Salgado points out in *Writing Sri Lanka* (2007), "The cultural grounding of the aesthetic values promoted in *Anil's Ghost*, reveals the heterogeneity and hybridity underpinning the text's diasporisation of knowledge [...]" (137-138).

With his descriptions of the Buddhist practices, rituals and ceremonies, Ondaatje captures distinct cultural markers in his novel. It is this subtle use of iconography and of Buddhist cultural traditions that inspires the story's aesthetic elements. He also makes equally valuable connections with Culavamsa,<sup>42</sup> which is a historical record and a legitimate national chronicle written in the Pali language<sup>43</sup> by Sinhalese Buddhist monks of Buddhist religious events from the fourth century to 1815. Thus, Ondaatje juxtaposes political abuses with important cultural investment connected to the Sinhala Buddhist heritage of the country. Milena Marinkova, in "Perceiving [...] in one's own body' the Violence of History, Politics and Writing: *Anil's Ghost* and Witness Writing," argues:

the novel does not reduce its critique to facile essentialist juxtapositions such as West vs. East, Christianity vs. Buddhism, local vs. foreign. *Anil's Ghost* neither envisages a solution to the crisis in Sri Lanka, nor does it sublimate the crisis into a cathartic artistic creation. On the contrary, Ondaatje's novel carries out an act of witness, which maps the violent encounter between the public and the intimate and which testifies to the irreparable corporeal inscriptions of this encounter, without adjudicating through a final verdict or offering a lasting cure. (107-125)

It is in a way very unusual among Sri Lankan novelists to lay stress in their writings on aesthetic values at the expense of political and social problems.

Ondaatje appears to appeal to the Orientalist trope of the "paradise island," which has always held a specially compelling place in Western imagination and in colonial discourse, the idyllic landscape serving as foil to complicated conflicts and violence which lend themselves to ambivalent interpretations. The novel draws out the nostalgic element in Ondaatje's romanticism by a conspicuous interplay between tradition and modernity. Although the author nurtures a sense of appreciation of ancient Buddhist culture, he does not ever mention that the on-going violence and killings in Sri Lanka are against the very tenets of Buddhism. On the whole, by presenting Sri Lanka as exotic and savage at the same time, Ondaatje is, in Saidian terms, orientalisising his narrative. Perhaps the author is attempting to recreate Sri Lanka from abroad for a dual audience. As Ondaatje is an internationally reputed author, it is inevitable that the uncomfortable facts such as the destructive penchant for blood thirst and revenge revealed in the novel are brought to the height of international awareness, although he himself does not recommend or foresee a solution.

*Anil's Ghost* has invariably provoked the ire of Sri Lankan literary critics who consider Ondaatje primarily as an expatriate writer. In the words of Salgado:

Ondaatje's status as, first, a distinguished Canadian writer and, more recently, an international celebrity has complicated and compromised his positioning as a Sri Lankan writer to the

---

<sup>42</sup> The historical record Culavamsa is considered to be a sequel to the Mahawansa, the Great Chronicle written in the sixth-century by the Buddhist monk Mahanama.

<sup>43</sup> The Pali language belongs to the Prakrit family and is a Middle Indo-Aryan language, which is best known as the medium in which the early Buddhist scriptures were written. Pali is different from Sanskrit for its dialectal base.

extent that one notable Sri Lankan critic has felt impelled to insist that ‘Michael Ondaatje is not a Sri Lankan, and has not been a Sri Lankan for years’ and maintain that the politically situated *Anil’s Ghost* is in fact ‘a highly wrought orientalist text.’ (2007: 129)

From the Sri Lankan viewpoint, Ondaatje is invariably perceived as slighting a society that conceals damaging realities and there are anxieties that he may harm the country’s international reputation. This fact is confirmed by Kanaganayakam in “In Defense of *Anil’s Ghost*”:

Ondaatje’s failure to satisfy many local Sri Lankan readers is also based implicitly on the premise that novels such as *Anil’s Ghost* have the effect of producing meaning. Such novels become the window to the outside world, but they do more than reveal or reflect local reality. Their power lies in their capacity to generate meaning. (8)

However, we can also observe that Ondaatje (part Burgher, part Tamil) is writing and thinking from the vantage point of being of mixed descent, which is partly perhaps what enables him to recognize the futility of the killings that have taken place in Sri Lanka in an unbiased manner, both in connection to the insurgencies and the ethnic war.

Despite the truth of the observation that Ondaatje has not been resident in Sri Lanka for a long time, it is an indisputable fact that he has based his novel on historically true facts by researching the volatile period in Sri Lanka and gathering extremely disturbing and uncomfortable information. He confirmed in an interview that he had obtained information from reliable sources for the purpose of accuracy: “It was a dark time for me, immersing myself in the information I was getting from Amnesty International and a centre for research on missing people in the Sri Lankan conflict [...]” (*The Sunday Times International*, 29 July 2007).

Nonetheless, although there are Eastern cultural sensibilities present in the novel, Western or external consciousness overrides as the protagonist Anil displays Western-oriented qualities in her quest for truth, throughout her investigation, whilst risking physical dangers from a brutally repressive Government for seeking the truth. Anil possesses a rational, empirical type of thinking, perhaps conditioned and trained by her Western education. Here we can also observe that Ondaatje has invested the protagonist with considerable measures of wisdom and love for justice. Apart from that, Anil’s very characterization is essentially that of a highly Westernized woman. Although born in Sri Lanka, like the author, she does not share the same ideals and values as those with whom she interacts. Her knowledge of Sinhalese is scant due to a lengthy period of residency abroad. Born into a conservative Sinhalese-Buddhist culture, in which incest is a known taboo, the transgression involved in Anil acquiring a masculine name by having sex with her brother somehow seems extremely incongruous and farfetched. An international element is also introduced into the narrative by the fact that she is permanently resident abroad and is working for a reputed international organisation. This inter-cultural aspect is further evident in references to atrocities against mankind in Guatemala, all of which point to the fact that Ondaatje is an international novelist whose works leap over national

borders and cultural barriers. According to Marlene Broemer in “Duelling Chronotopes: Pre-colonial and Postmodern/Postcolonial Time and Space in Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*,” Anil is an icon of cultural hybridity: “In examining Anil’s world first, it is obvious that she is a creature of the late twentieth century, no matter if she visits places that seem fixed or stuck in other time periods; she is an archetype of the postmodern” (343-354).

The novel offers a forensic examination of the lived experiences of abuse and state-sanctioned violence during the turbulent period. The emotional wounds of families who have lost their loved ones by indiscriminate killings and disappearances are ensconced in the main theme, which the author illuminates by lending voice to the horror and the terror faced by the people of Sri Lanka during the second insurgency. The novel’s grotesque images of terrifying horror, like “severed heads mounted on stakes,” “rivers of blood,” “mounds of dead bodies,” and “tyre pyres” would tend to appear horrendous in Western eyes and shine an unwelcome light on Sri Lanka. One can, however, observe that Ondaatje is self-consciously negotiating the politics of writing about these deeply disturbing national events, from which he himself has been absent, drawing upon the Buddhist cultural aspect. His evocation of an exotic vision of Sri Lanka, although exoticism in Asian postcolonial literature has attracted negative connotations, is achieved through these descriptions. The novel falls under different genres of writing as well: war, detection, exotic travel, art and culture.

The novel has apparently elicited far more sustained critical attention than Ondaatje’s other novels because of the accusation that he directs an irresponsible, apolitical gaze on the devastating civil strife in Sri Lanka. This omission raises some interesting questions concerning the fraught politics of the country during the time of the setting of the novel. Teresa Derrickson, analytically calls attention to the elusive nature of Ondaatje’s narrative in “Will the ‘Un-Truth’ Set You Free? A Critical Look at Global Human Rights Discourse in Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*”:

Claims that Ondaatje’s novel holds its political views at arm’s length are not altogether unfounded. After all, the novel famously repeats the assertion throughout that “*The reason for war was war*,” a statement that conveniently takes the author off the hook from having to offer a less simplistic analysis of why the two major ethnic groups of Ondaatje’s homeland are locked in a gruesome political dispute that involves daily disappearances, mass graves, torture, fear and cover up. (131-152)

Perhaps the reason why Ondaatje refrains from engaging in explicit political discussion is to avoid hurting the sensibilities of the Sri Lankan people or causing a furore precisely by including scathing political comment. On the other hand, Derrickson’s article, far from detracting from Ondaatje’s insight and literary talent, adds to the reader’s appreciation of his imaginative depth, as later in the article she points out:

After all, if the ending of the novel does nothing else, it demonstrates that what is “responsible” and what is “not responsible” with respect to the politics of another country cannot always be determined through a Western perspective. Identifying an appropriate



course of action, like identifying the meaning of “truth” and “justice” is at least partially dependent on context and culture. For this reason, Ondaatje takes a more sophisticated approach to his account of the civil war. (148)

However lamentable his subject, Ondaatje is indebted to the country of his birth for the theme he has picked for his novel, in which he cleverly manages to link the insurgency with human failures. It appears that the geographical displacement of Ondaatje has released in the writer an exuberant, generic talent of an exiled soul, as it is evident that he is attempting to establish a tension between his representation of the migrant within the novel and his negotiation of his own migrant position. The author’s own exilic consciousness is represented by the main character, who is an expatriate visiting Sri Lanka for a short spell, on a special, fact-finding mission, although Anil’s abortive official and familial pilgrimage to her birth country has in no way strengthened her sense of where her roots are.



### 3 The Sinhala-Tamil Ethnic Conflict

#### 3.1 The Colonial “Divide-and-Rule” Policy

The British colonists did not build strong links between themselves and the local communities. During the colonial period, different ethnic groups living in Sri Lanka learnt to survive and coexist with the rulers, as well as with each other. Such cohabitation was imperative in order to achieve individual and collective welfare in the overpowering presence of colonial power. Conflicts that emerged were resolved through negotiations. De Silva comments on the amity between the races in *A History of Sri Lanka*: “At this stage in the island’s development ethnicity was not a divisive factor. A local journal commented in 1899 that ‘among the different races to be found in Ceylon, the existing relations are perhaps far more cordial than... in any other British dependency in the East’” (463). He also notes: “What distinguished elite politics in Ceylon in the first two decades of the twentieth century from succeeding decades was the harmony that prevailed between the Sinhalese and Tamil leadership” (480). Sri Lanka did not go through an extremely turbulent transition period like India and Pakistan right after Independence. The British colonists did, however, to a considerable degree destroy the peaceful co-existence between different ethnic communities living in Sri Lanka by favouring the minorities, on account of the British “divide-and-rule” policy. Another reason for the favouritism was because very few members of the minorities<sup>44</sup> fought the British in the cause of Independence. Also, an English educational system developed in Jaffna<sup>45</sup> long before it was started in the rest of the country. Owing to the colonists’ highly discriminatory policy of “divide-and-rule,” the majority Sinhalese was comparatively disadvantaged and a disproportionate number of places in the administration came to be held by the Tamils. Under the British, many Tamils established themselves securely in the Southern parts of the country. This situation remained the same until Independence and for some time after. However, a number of Sinhalese Mudaliyars<sup>46</sup> and merchants made good in the South during the British period.

In Sri Lanka, the minorities took shelter under the colonial umbrella and offered collaboration in return for employment. As pointed out by the Ghanaian historian Albert Adu Boahen in *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, the distinctively imperialist

---

<sup>44</sup> During the last quarter of the nineteenth-century, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and his older brother Coomaraswamy displayed immense political maturity. The former opposed British rule and tried his utmost to get jailed Sinhalese political agitators released, using his influence as a representative of the Legislative Council.

<sup>45</sup> Jaffna is the capital city of the Northern Province located on a peninsula of the same name.

<sup>46</sup> “Mudali” or “Mudaliyar” is a Tamil name used for someone endowed with wealth, which became a colonial title and office during the Portuguese period in Sri Lanka. The Dutch and the British colonial masters continued the “Mudliyar” class and titles.

strategy of “divide-and-rule” policy was no more conspicuous than in Africa where: “the most important reasons for the partition and occupation of Africa were the need for raw materials to feed the factories of industrial Europe and the need for markets for the sale of manufactured goods” (58). As is evident in a multi-ethnic country like Sri Lanka, it was the “divide-and-rule” policy that made imperialism possible.

Since ethnicity became a decisive factor in competition for leading posts, Burghers and Tamils enjoyed powerful positions in the British administrative system and they were in turn rewarded for their loyalties to the colonizers while the majority Sinhalese were irrevocably alienated. In general, the Sinhalese were excluded from avenues of advancement available in trade, commerce, plantation activity, education, and in the professions, as an inevitable result of colonial interference. The British colonial administrators saw the ethnic groups of Sri Lanka as inherently separate, and as Asoka Bandarage, the author of *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity, Political Economy*, categorically states that: “The fault lines between the Sinhala and Tamil communities that show up in the modern Sri Lankan conflict were drawn during the period of British colonization from 1815 to 1948” (29). Malinga H. Gunaratna, in *For a Sovereign State*, gives a detailed account of Sri Lanka’s separatist war and its causes and apports considerable blame to the British:

We are today, paying the most supreme penalty for the British policy of ‘Divide and Rule.’ India and Pakistan were divided by the ruling power after a bloodbath of the most horrible magnitude. The Tamil people of Sri Lanka were given preferential treatment by the British just in order to suppress the majority Sinhalese. (278)

The Tamil historian A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, however, expresses an opposing view in *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism* (2000), regarding the “divide-and-rule” policy of the British:

The suspicion between the two communities was mutual: the Sinhalese felt that in the centuries of foreign rule they had been deprived of their proper share of the national pie. This was especially true of the British rulers whose supposed preference for Tamils in the public services, the Sinhalese regarded as part of their ‘divide and rule’ policy. This was a useful stance for Sinhalese communal politicians, but Britain had not in fact pursued such a policy: selections to the public service were based on merit and the Tamils had fared well because they had attended superior Christian secondary schools. (116)

The colonial regime failed to foster a sense of common nationality and bring about better understanding and unity among the several ethnic groups on the island. The practice of granting special privileges caused considerable unrest and intermittent violent outbreaks of inter-communal antagonism in post-Independence years. It is imperative to mention, however, that the Tamil-Sinhala conflict is also as a result of centuries of old hatred and hostilities and notions of ethnic superiority; inter-ethnic tensions therefore predate colonialism. But it is safe to say that the ethnic conflict was exacerbated by colonialism.

### 3.2 Minority Disenchantment

Independence<sup>47</sup> for Sri Lanka came in the shadow of the Indian Independence when the Indian nationalist conflicts against the British brought the subcontinent into the international arena to a considerable degree. India vehemently fought for Independence, paving the way for Sri Lanka to obtain it through negotiations and partly due to indigenous nationalist pressure. During the past sixty-five years, in the wake of postcolonial nationalism, Sri Lankans have attempted in different ways to deal with the complexities that emerged during colonial rule which have shaped their collective identities. As Fanon powerfully evinces in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), the time of liberation is a time of cultural and political instability. Various forms of socialism, democracy and nationalism were being presented both by national leaders and their opponents in Sri Lanka and some of these ideologies have developed out of the interaction between the colonial and nationalist heritages. As explained by Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*: “When nationalist thought becomes enshrined as the official dogma of the postcolonial State, its exclusions are enacted through the legal and educational systems, and often they simply duplicate the exclusions of colonialism” (198). The exercise in nation building in Sri Lanka has been replete with numerous failures and problems, and in general, a united nation that was hoped for after independence was not realised. Instead, the more militantly articulated ethno-cultural identities, like Tamil, Muslim, Burgher or Sinhala, have become firmly entrenched in national politics, and even in individual thinking in routine matters. The Tamils living in the North and North Eastern part of the country felt that they had made very little socio-economic progress since Independence. Post-Independence governments had failed to adopt a new political culture to fulfil the aspirations of the minority ethnic groups. According to the historian Wilson:

three Sinhalese prime ministers (S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Dudley Senanayake), all of whom reneged on their promises. The Tamils were being subjected to increasing discriminations from the Sinhalese state over employment, admission to the universities (the last straw) and discrimination in the allocation of land in the Tamil homelands of the Eastern Province in particular. There was increasing evidence of such policies amounting to deliberate hegemonism. (2000: 116)

The Tamil minority encountered the language issue, the Government educational policy and State sponsored colonization of Tamil areas by the Sinhalese, as impairments of their own status.

### 3.3 British Colonial Culpability

The historic role that the British colonizer played in determining situation that led to the social unrest in post-Independence Sri Lanka is undeniable. The motivating force of the

---

<sup>47</sup> India received Independence from Britain on the 15th of August 1947 and Sri Lanka on the 4th of February 1948.

British colonizer was economic, and the changes that took place as a consequence of the colonial impact had effects on the socioeconomic structure of Sri Lanka. Pre-colonial Sri Lanka was mainly an agricultural society. The British put into practice forces which eventually undermined the agricultural economic system of sharing the produce between the cultivators and the landowners. The changes in the agrarian economy during British rule were mainly the introduction of new cash crops such as tea, coffee and rubber. The use of modern agricultural implements and improved technology resulted in increment of production and transport systems were constructed to facilitate the export of the agricultural commodities. A welcome development in creating new occupational opportunities, as it may have seemed, but the labourers and the rural producers were not adequately compensated. Despite substantial economic growth, the rural economy remained stagnant. Rural exploitation was in the form of plantation and extractive industries. The plantation industry was designed for the needs of the colonial economy and did not bring wealth or prosperity to the cultivators and the imported Indian labourers were virtual serfs during the time of their employments contracts. Although it was obligatory on the part of British rulers to repatriate the Indian labourers at the time of Independence or award them citizenship, the colonizers disassociated themselves from any responsibility, leaving many of them stateless. Their presence contributed to employment problems as well, and as Neville Ladduwahetty in *Sri Lanka's National Question* (2010) points out: “[..] Indian labour was seen as competitors that deprived the indigenous labour of gainful employment” (38).

The agricultural labour of the rural class was the direct advantage secured to the colonizer. The net flow of resources from Sri Lanka to Britain impoverished the indigenous people and led to the pauperization of the peasants and an increase in the number of landless labourers. This unrequited drain of resources, the forcible extraction of agricultural produce and the effects of discriminatory policies were strongly felt in the villages where the rural class remained exploited, underprivileged and impoverished. Even the indigenous landowning class was affected as land revenue was accrued to the colonizer. The falseness and the irony of the so-called moral and cultural mission of the British rulers become further obvious, when the profit motive of the colonizer is evaluated. Albert Memmi in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965) perceptively examines the privileged condition of the colonizer compared to the colonized:

If his living standards are high, it is because those of the colonized are low; if he can benefit from plentiful and undemanding labour and servants, it is because the colonized can be exploited at will and are not protected by the laws of the colony; if he can easily obtain administrative positions, it is because they are reserved for him and the colonized are excluded from them; the more freely he breathes, the more the colonized is choked. (8)

The colonial education policy was established to produce trained Sri Lankan cadres who occupied middle and lower levels of the state apparatus, and thus enable mediation between the rulers and the local population. Good command of the English language

became a standard by which secular prestige was gauged and the urban upper classes endeavoured to imitate the colonizer's prestigious style of life. They became loyal to the British because of the benefits they were reaping, while the aspirations of the rural folk were overlooked. Still, the urban elite classes were not a strong force and were thus unable to make the colonial authorities subservient to national interests like rural development during the pre-Independence decades. Some of the members of the elite class realized that they were not equals and passed on to a stage of revolt, vigorously condemning the colonizers. However, many members of the elite English-educated ruling class, showed interest in the continuation of British policies even after Independence, as more power had accrued to them at that time. But with time to come, there was tension between the urban leadership and the rural power bases.

The British administrators made no special attempt to spread Western education or the English language to the villages, and their endeavour to improve the economic well-being of the rural class was scant, especially as they were acting in their self-interest. It suited the rulers to keep the peasant class poor, ignorant and uneducated, and engaged in farming, plantations work, food production and other manual labour, rather than getting educated and clamouring for city jobs. The neglect of rural areas resulted in lopsided development which was to produce serious consequences during post-Independence years. The village folk were not beneficiaries of the urban development that was taking place in the form of education, employment and health care. Without English, the socioeconomic mobility of the rural class was limited and this realization created its own dynamics. Due to the lack of proficiency in English, the provincial people were unable to engage in urban trade and the newly opening import and export markets. The twofold rejections, rural impoverishment and the resultant social instability were aspects of colonial reality that were the core issues for the insurgencies by a recalcitrant rural class, in an attempt to escape from an oppressive status of a renewed colonial condition. As Jean-Paul Sartre explains in the Introduction of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* by Memmi, the colonized finds courage to oppose continual exclusion: "The excluded human beings will affirm their exclusivity in national selfhood. Colonialism creates the patriotism of the colonized" (1965: xxviii).

The British rulers did not set values by which a well-functioning community could thrive in harmony, nor did they attempt to establish a common bond among the different ethnic groups. They did not even broaden their own sense of community to mix with their subjects and to include the interests of all ethnic groups and social classes. The disproportionately large number of Tamils who obtained higher and privileged positions denied to the Sinhalese during British rule became a bone of contention. The dynamics of the situation were that in the long-run the "divide-and-rule" policy stood to benefit the colonizer and this shortfall in the British administrative arrangement was a source of irritation and discontent to the majority Sinhalese community. Efforts to correct these injustices imposed by the British rulers were regarded as discriminatory by the Tamils.

They found it unacceptable that in Independent Sri Lanka the majority Sinhalese would rule, which gave expression to a separatist ideology. The British rulers took advantage of the divisions within the society created by them even in India. Irreconcilable conflicts between Hindus and Muslims resulted in the division of the sub-continent into India and Pakistan after Independence, during which process millions died due to ethnic clashes.

Since English teaching was confined to the urban schools and the spread of the language did not reach the rural class, there was no way for people to meet on a truly common platform irrespective of their regional tongues. In other words, there was no lingua franca by which all communities could communicate. Since ethnic relations suffered due to communication difficulties, the value of a common language is assessed by Ladduwahetty in *Sri Lanka's National Question*:

A common language enables the different communities to overcome the barriers of language and reach greater understanding of each other's concerns. Multilingualism, on the other hand, compels communities only to the opinions within each community. The opportunity to listen first-hand to the other's point of view is denied. This is a serious impediment to participation without which democracy cannot flourish. (7)

The British colonizers did not plan the future welfare of Sri Lankans, except to guard their own immediate benefits. They were blinded by the economical perspectives, and did not lay aside some of their privileges and genuinely concerned themselves with the problems of the colonized. The repercussions stemming from British colonialism which Sri Lanka has to urgently deal with are to address the grievances and aspirations of the minority ethnic groups, solve language issues and restore the rights of the rural poor, including the Indian plantation labourers.

### **3.4 The Birth of the Tamil Insurgency**

Colonization bears a different implication to the Tamil community that feels enslaved by "Sinhalese imperialism." The North and North-Eastern Tamils feel the need to carve out an independent homeland after having been deprived of linguistic recognition, cultural freedom, equal opportunities of employment, education and economic life, as well as self-identity and territorial control. Since language became a pressing concern, and in order to defuse a racial clash by an amendment to the Constitution in 1987, Sinhala and Tamil were granted equal status as official languages of the country. As a result, English was relegated to tertiary position. However, Tamil being elevated as an official language did not heal the cleavages that had occurred in national unity and they still felt incompatible due to a linguistic separation. The feelings of the Tamils on the question of the lack of status given to their language have run high. Therefore, the Northern Tamils found it a burning necessity to fight for a separate state within the country, in order to shed their feelings of insecurity as a racial underclass. In addition, the grim life of eternal poverty in the North provided a hotbed for radical activity.



Several groups of ethnic Tamils organized themselves to take up the cause of the Tamils, and predominantly among them were the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE),<sup>48</sup> who managed to internationalise their movement with the moral and financial support of the Tamil diaspora outside Sri Lanka. The leader of the rebels in Sri Lanka, the deeply reclusive and autocratic Velupillai Prabhakaran, proved to be a ruthless and despotic tyrant, who was responsible for giving orders to kill most of the moderate Tamil leaders and also murder his own deputies who had posed a threat to his leadership and goals. In order to augment their funds, the movement was involved in illegal activities both at home and abroad, such as: “Trading in gold, laundering money and trafficking narcotics bring the LTTE substantial revenue that is needed to procure sophisticated weaponry” (Gunaratna, 1997: 24). In order to procure sophisticated weaponry the LTTE members were also known for extorting money from Tamils living abroad under death threats. As the LTTE became stronger, they claimed to be the exclusive representatives of the entire Tamil population and those moderate Tamil leaders who disagreed with their radical views and refused to join hands with them were brutally assassinated.

Volatility between the Tamils and the Sinhalese aggravated in July 1983, after thirteen Sinhalese soldiers were killed in an ambush by the LTTE in the North of Sri Lanka. The killings stoked the rage of the Sinhalese people and there was an immediate reprisal by Southern thugs and criminal elements, partly instigated by JVP sympathisers and propelled by other extreme nationalistic politicians into racist and discriminatory acts. The mobs went on the rampage in Colombo and other Southern areas, killing Tamils and burning and looting Tamil owned properties. While unprovoked violence and hate crimes were unleashed against Tamil innocents in the South, law enforcement officials were blinded and were slow to react. The assailants and leaders of the political parties which propagated pogroms to stir the worst racial feelings were never caught or identified, and thus legal action was never taken against the perpetrators. Even nothing tangible came out of parliamentary committee inquiries into racial incidents. The only action taken, as confirmed by Chandraprema, the author of *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror* was:

The JVP was proscribed in July 1983 on the pretext that they instigated the anti-Tamil riots. Considering the facts, it does seem possible since by the time the riots took place, a large and influential block in the party had decided to take a hard line against the Tamil struggle in the North. And the main objective of this exercise was once again to win the public support among the Sinhalese. (60)

Consequently, the Sinhalese were accused of de-humanization of the Tamil people and of genocide. The vicious ethnic rioting steeled the resolve of the Northern Tamil rebels and became the focal point for seemingly bottomless rage. As a result of the Tamils slaughtered by the berserk mobs in July, Tamil movements gained substantial support

---

<sup>48</sup> “Eelam” in Tamil means “separate State”.

from the Tamil community in Sri Lanka and from the diaspora. The Tamil-Canadian academic Kanaganayakam analyses the reasons for the Tamil uprising in “*Things Fall Apart* from a Sri Lankan Perspective,” published in the journal *Postcolonial Text*:

I would attribute the rise of the LTTE as a militant organization in Sri Lanka to be at least in part a consequence of the process by which the Tamils were made out to be cowardly, compliant and incapable of physical combat. The leader of the LTTE, V. Prabhakaran, fashioned himself as a hero in precisely opposite terms. He was seen as a self-made man, totally fearless, determined to recreate the glory of the Tamils in precolonial times. (1-11)

As observed by Wijesinha, who analyses terrorism and the ethnic conflict, Prabhakaran, the LTTE supremo: “[...] had pursued an aggressive single-minded approach that enabled him after the crisis of 1983 to emerge as the strongest terrorist leader” (2007: 105).

Negotiations or compromise never reckoned with the determination of the leader – whose main aim was a separate state. To the end he proved to be a ruthless and tough fighter with no political or negotiation skills. It was difficult for the Government to break the clandestine network of the LTTE as they were hardy and skilled fighters. The Indian Journalist, Narayan Swamy, assiduously sought to discover the man at the epicentre of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and for that purpose conducted research in Sri Lanka, India, Canada, Britain and elsewhere. In the preface of his meticulously researched book *Inside an Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran* (2003), the author analyses the intentions of the LTTE leader: “Prabhakaran’s appetite for bloodletting shows no signs of abating over a quarter century after he entered the macabre world of separatist violence” (xv).

The LTTE’s aim for a separate state is inextricably connected to economic equality, territorial claims and the question of language. The Tamil conviction is that they are in many ways cut off politically, linguistically, professionally and culturally from the South and therefore subjected to officially unacknowledged repression. The Northern part of Sri Lanka is a politically strategic region due to its proximity to predominantly Dravidian Tamil inhabited South India and the Tamil Nadu politicians have played a significant role in the ethnic politics of Sri Lanka. The India-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987, to ensure peace in the island by sending the Indian Army, also disintegrated into a vicious battle between the LTTE and the Indian troops. On the whole, India’s involvements at various stages of the ethnic problems have conditioned the geo-political realities of Sri Lankan foreign policy.

Although a large segment of the Tamil population accepted Prabhakaran as their leader in the Northern and North Eastern parts, there were others who questioned the use of LTTE force and intimidation because they were personally, adversely affected. But the majority of Tamils living in the North and North Eastern regions felt that the Post-Independence Governments in power had failed to impose an impartial system of justice and correct gross moral and social abuse. The rebels felt that official and peaceful channels were exhausted. In time to come, their intentions expanded to near maniacal proportions and they became the most ruthless, efficient and dreaded terrorist outfit in the world. In one fell swoop they decimated hundreds of civilians, and regularly bombed

economic centres, attacked army headquarters and police barracks. As the rebel organization gradually became stronger, the LTTE turned out to be a determined and ferocious group, with an attitude and willingness to fight a protracted war of attrition, right to the bitter end. The continued aim of their armed struggle was to achieve a separation from the sovereign State and to establish an independent state in the Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka, covering approximately one third the area of the country. During their bloody sectarian upheaval that ripped the country apart, those opposed to their call for separatism were summarily eliminated, even among the LTTE cadres. The rebel held areas were run by the rule of fear and obedience. Increasingly, Sri Lanka became an ethno-racially ordered society with the Aryan/Sinhalese/lions battling the Dravidian/Tamil/tigers.<sup>49</sup> Young men and women in the Northern and Eastern areas were voluntarily or forcibly conscripted and armed combat continued, with the use of suicide cadres, particularly women suicide bombers and child soldiers, the latter who were used as cannon fodder in the frontline of combat. Geopolitics as well as domestic compulsions led India to support the Tamil insurgents in Sri Lanka. Prabhakaran demanded the sole representation of the Tamils of Sri Lanka and in order to achieve that, he crushed other Tamil political parties who did not support the LTTE decree. He even jealously guarded his leadership within the organisation and did not particularly groom a successor.

### **3.5 Reconciliation Attempts**

Various non-governmental organisations like the International Council of the Red Cross and the SLMM<sup>50</sup> played a major role in the conflict in the 90s and tried to facilitate ceasefires and peace talks with the aim of securing a truce in the bitter ethnic war. The Cease Fire Agreement violations by both warring sides were the least compatible for building measures of confidence for a final negotiated settlement. The Government of Sri Lanka, armed with proof, accused various foreign organisations of being biased towards the LTTE. Jon Oskar Solnes, the Icelandic Chief of Staff of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission which supervised the Norwegian-brokered ceasefire between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka, highlights LTTE violations of conventional warfare ethics in *A Powder Keg in Paradise* (2010):

The LTTE or the Tamil Tigers, an organisation branded both in the USA and EU as one of the deadliest terrorist outfits in the world, acquired an aura of both fighting efficiency and enormous brutality. It honed to perfection asymmetric and unconventional warfare skills such as the widespread use of child soldiers and suicide bombings through its venerated Black Tigers. (xv)

---

<sup>49</sup> For further information on the Aryan and Dravidian controversy, read K. Indrapala's *The Evolution of an Ethnic Identity* (2007) Chapter 3.

<sup>50</sup> The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission was established in February 2002 under an agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. The purpose of the Mission was to monitor the Cease Fire Agreements and violations of them by either party. Members of the Mission were drawn from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland. The Mission terminated its operations in 2008.

The LTTE eschewed peaceful forms of agitation and compromise and refused the changes that the politicians were advocating, and remained a stubborn block to a negotiated settlement. In the words of Solnes: “However, the head of the LTTE, who was also its founder, Mr. Velupillai Pirapakran [sic], has been a very difficult interlocutor in quest for peace” (2). Instead, he endorsed an armed conflict and transformed Sri Lanka into a terror-racked country.

During periods of ceasefires, the LTTE stockpiled arms and the Sri Lankan military upgraded their arsenal. The ethnic strife, which has lasted for nearly 30 years, caused the loss of thousands of lives, limbs, and property, as well as causing displacement, which is still the main reason for Tamil mass migration to foreign countries. During the years of the war, successive governments attempted to bring the rebels to the table for peace negotiations and ceasefires, which lasted at a time for several years. When delegations from each group met, there were fiery clashes and the negotiations came to nothing. Various Ceasefire Agreements were signed at various times and they became a platform for bickering for both the LTTE and other politicians in the country. The Muslim community living in the Northern and North Eastern parts abstained from taking sides in the conflict and had to pay dearly for their stance. The Tamil insurgents drove them out of the areas that they have been occupying for generations.

Asoka Bandarage analyses in detail the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka in *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka* (2009), in relation to the influences of leading politicians of neighbouring India: “Unlike Indira Gandhi, who had encouraged the Tamil insurgency, her son, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, began to take a harder line towards the Tamil militants and began to favour a federal solution to the Sri Lankan problem” (128). Prabhakaran orchestrated the killing of the former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on the eve of the Indian elections on 21<sup>st</sup> of May 1991. Bandarage suggests that the assassination was prompted by LTTE fear that “he would reintroduce Indian troops to Sri Lanka if re-elected” (154). A number of Sri Lankan Ministers, leading politicians, Army Generals, Navy Commanders and Admirals, police officers, and even Tamil moderates, were also killed during the conflict, and Prabhakaran became a wanted criminal, many times sentenced in absentia. According to the Sri Lankan journalist, Subash Wickramasinge, in *Under Attack: A Collection of Articles on Political Activities in the Face of LTTE Terrorism* (2007): “The irony of it is that Prabhakaran had launched his so-called ‘liberation’ struggle by killing his fellow Tamils. He had started his killer acts by personally assassinating the then Mayor of Jaffna, Alfred Duraiappah. Since then the Tamil ‘Liberator’ has killed more Tamils than Sinhalese and Muslims” (xi).

For decades Prabhakaran became a wily and elusive target, hiding in the highly fortified, vast Wanni jungles<sup>51</sup> in the North-Central Province of Sri Lanka which the Sri Lankan Army had great difficulties in penetrating. The Northern areas had been under

---

<sup>51</sup> Jungle hideouts situated in Kilinochchi and Mulaithivu in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka.

LTTE control for more than two decades and they had their own civil administration systems, a police force, a justice system and kangaroo style courts. In reality, the LTTE had a state within a state, and throughout the length and the breadth of the country the terrorists were feared because of their unflinching resistance and vehemence. They levied taxes, issued visas to go out of the area controlled by them, and under threat to the families they forcibly recruited women and children to fight the war. Kidnapping children and sending them to the frontlines earned the LTTE international condemnation and isolation, especially after the 9/11 Twin Towers debacle in the United States when countries were pressurized to join in the global war against terrorism.

Various leaderships in the country shuffled from one costly blunder to another in their attempts to cope with the terrorist problem. For many years, elected Governments attempted negotiations which lost credibility owing to the continuation of hostilities between the Government and the LTTE. The Sri Lankan Army, as well as the LTTE, time and again broke conventional rules of military conduct, which fed negative sentiments of distrust between the two ethnicities. The security forces had no real prospect of achieving a military victory, because the terrorists had become strong in their guerrilla warfare methods and suicide bombings. But the current President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapakse, sought a uniquely Sri Lankan solution to the nation's problems and the contemporary realities of war with determination and conviction. That was to disregard international pressure for a negotiated settlement and to throw his full weight and power to defeat the rebels militarily. Sigmund Freud, who has much reflected upon the psychology related to war in *Character and Culture* (1963), does not find it unusual that ethnic conflicts are finally settled militarily:

But a glance at the history of the human race reveals an endless series of conflicts between one community and another or several others, between larger and smaller units – between cities, provinces, races, nations, empires – which have almost always been settled by force of arms. Wars of this kind end either in the spoilation or in the complete overthrow and conquest of one of the parties. (138)

A decisive factor to the military end of the conflict was the supply of arms to the Sri Lankan Government by China. It was the disparity of fire-power that clinched the victory for the Sri Lankan Government. A breakaway group of the LTTE headed by a regional leader called Muralitharan alias Karuna, provided the Government with crucial inside information regarding Tiger positions and strategies which helped the security forces to locate the rebel bases. The three decade long conflict has now reached an end after the Sri Lankan forces quelled the Tamil rebels and finally decimated their bases in the North and the North-East during the months of April and May in 2009. The LTTE's feeling of self-confidence bordering on a complacent assumption of invincibility has been shattered after the military defeat.

For the Northern based Tamils and their supporters abroad, the loss of the physical presence of an iconic figure, Tamil interlocutor and savvy leader like Prabhakaran, was a

blow hard to face. But he was the conscious manipulator of his role and he himself had supplied the blueprint for his own destructive death and that of others in his ethnic community and other ethnic groups living in Sri Lanka. The end of the war does not mean the end of the conflict, as the febrile atmosphere has not calmed down completely, especially with diasporic agitators. Although the Tamil Tigers suffered a crushing blow within Sri Lanka, their international network still remains intact and they could revive hostilities again. In order to garner acknowledgment for their efforts, even now the Tamil diaspora are fiercely campaigning in foreign countries for international recognition for their need for a separate state. Although their leader is dead, the Tamil aspirations are not completely subdued and just beneath the present, uneasy calm, run a deep vein of bitterness, especially among those who have lost their loved ones during the terrorist bombings and army forays. The question whether the separatists have left the battle field for ever and whether the Northern Tamils are still vying for a separate state and whether the government has finally come to grips with the problem are candidly discussed topics. Several foreign countries have, however, disrupted the terrorist financial activities, although they go on surreptitiously.

Today there are vociferous criticisms from Western countries and human rights organizations regarding violations and atrocities committed during the war and demands for accountability, despite the fact, that these very countries harboured, trained and allowed terrorists to fund themselves in their host countries. The Sri Lankan journalist, Don Wijewardana, who wrote *How LTTE Lost the Eelam War* (2010), is especially critical about the stance of the international community which sympathised with and supported the LTTE:

The three decade history of terrorism in Sri Lanka is not only a history of so much bungling by so many elected leaders of the country, but also a history of how so many Western governments, international organisations and NGOs were fooled for so long by LTTE. International community which promoted LTTE and persecuted Sri Lanka on the basis of false information needs to bear part of the responsibility for the havoc created by them for so long. (304)

### **3.6 The War Ends but What Next?**

There is hardly any inhabitant of the country who can dissociate him/herself from the devastation caused by the continuous situation of civil war and unrest instigated by the LTTE and people are overwhelmingly relieved for the moment that the war is over. The war has caused a huge economic wound from which the country will take considerable time to recover and the emotional cost is staggering. The Northern areas are impoverished as a result of the war and need enormous amount of rehabilitation, which should be regarded as an urgent national priority. The average peace-loving citizen of Sri Lanka is sickened by war and the chronic instability caused by the conflict, and has little sympathy for the Tamil rebels who are widely regarded as a menace of communal disorder. Now that the war is over, the time has come to put weapons aside and pick up

the tools of construction to ensure social stability. There are still major steps to be taken to heal the wounds of war, which might cement enduring peace and appease the just anger of the Tamil people. Despite deep animosities, both sides are compelled to become aware that they are the aggressors, the victims and the persecutors. Ripples of the past have impact on the present and these are postcolonial hurdles faced by the Sri Lankans today. In order to deter terrorism and to find an eventual resolution of the blood quest, it is imperative to improve the economic circumstances of the Northern and North Eastern people and act with understanding and compassion, towards ethnic reconciliation. General Cyril Ranatunga who has long served the Sri Lankan Army in the Northern region has become reluctantly aware that: “The government should have dealt with the problems faced by the Tamil people rather than intimidating them” (2000: 69) and should have strived to “win the hearts and minds using special confidence building measures” (2000: 36). As long as major economic and social disparities exist between the two communal groups, conditions are present for a communal conflagration that could once again engulf the country in another war. Therefore, it is important to maintain a democratic, decision-making apparatus which encompasses all contemporary ethnic groups inhabiting the land, and to recognize the aspirations of all of them and allay their legitimate fears. In the light of the danger of a recurring war, efforts should be made to placate minority ethnic groups to solve their problems politically. It is imperative that the quest for peace should be the principal aim on the national agenda. Racial differences could be bridged under propitious circumstances by exchange of culture and being respectful towards each other’s religious sensitivities. With a view of strengthening bonds, all communities should recognize kinship among each other.

Today the Government of Sri Lanka is saddled with the immediate responsibility of resettling the refugees of the war, redressing problems by improving the living conditions of the Tamils in the Northern and Eastern areas and preventing the re-emergence of the terrorist movement which could inflame sectarian tensions, which could in turn escalate into a protracted war again. It is also the responsibility of the Government to rid Tamil Tiger proxies by ballot, which is to facilitate the holding of democratic elections in the affected regions. Sincerity in understanding the needs of the minority ethnic groups and recognition of their lawful and just aspirations will invariably constitute a viable nationalism for the future. In order to do so, as a society, Sri Lankans must emancipate themselves from narrow ethnic prejudices and bigotry and recognize the fact that identity and language are still vital issues for every community. The above should be very urgent items on the political agenda of any Government – items requiring objective analysis and immediate programme of action – which should not be delayed due to theoretical scepticism of political opponents.

### 3.7 Novels on the Ethnic Conflict

The economic, social and political consequences of the ethnic war are still palpable in myriad ways across the full spectrum of Sri Lankan society. The war had a profound effect on Sri Lankan novelists because the conflict has created divisions and therefore themes connected to the conflict have occupied a central role in Sri Lankan writings. Terrorism has loomed particularly large in the national psyche during the last thirty years when people were living in fear of being blown by wayside bombs. Thus, the ethnic problems between the majority Sinhalese and the Tamil communities and the civil war that ensued, have produced imaginatively poignant results in the field of creative writing where contemporary war time realities are recorded by authors of different ethnic origins.

The 1990s and 2000s saw a surge of novels on the subject of the ethnic war by established writers, like Shyam Selvadurai, Nihal de Silva, Jean Arasanayagam, Punyakante Wijenaike, Michael Ondaatje, Edward Gunawardena, A. Sivananthan, Romesh Gunasekera, and many others who explored from different angles, the communal differences that tore apart the social fabric of the country. A recent collection of short stories about the shattered lives of those affected by the ethnic conflict is Shirani Rajapakese's *Breaking News* (2011). The war has also inspired a considerable body of writing in diverse genres by resident, as well as expatriate authors who extend an insight into present-day Sri Lanka. Ondaatje's and Selvadurai's novels on the subject are quintessentially diasporic writings, based on observances from a long, distant gaze, but based on thorough research on the subject. The significance and power of the diasporic novels lies in their capacity to attract international attention to the conflict, as well as to generate universal condemnation of the atrocities committed against the Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. An example would be the short autobiographical novel *Gorilla* (2008) written by Shobasakthi,<sup>52</sup> a Sri Lankan Tamil Refugee and a former LTTE child soldier, who only finds it possible to write the truth as a diasporic writer. The poignancy of such stories are aimed at provoking much thought on the need to move away from the path of terror and restore peace by negotiated settlement. However, the root of the literary endeavours of authors of Tamil ethnic origin appears to be an opportunity to highlight atrocities committed against the Tamil community. For this purpose, they bring into conjunction a number of interrelated themes that deal with the ethnic issue to buttress their arguments, and to demonstrate the ambivalent identification of love and hate that bind a community together or tears it asunder.

The analyses of the chosen six novels dealing with the ethnic conflict are thematically arranged into two sections. The narratives of the two novels in the first

---

<sup>52</sup> Shobasakthi, born Anthony Thasan, was 15 years old when he joined the LTTE like countless other youth of the North. His novel, based on personal experiences, details torture and near death experiences suffered at the hands of the LTTE, the Indian Peacekeeping Forces, and the Sri Lankan Army.



section, mainly deal with the colonial and the political implications of the conflict, besides other aspects of the ethnic disunity. These two novels are written by Tamil diasporic writers and bear certain similarities in their thematic treatment of the conflict, especially the reference to social and economic alienation. The last four novels analysed in the second section are about terrorism, and how the ramifications of the violence connected to the ethnic conflict affect civilian lives. Different viewpoints of the conflict are expressed by writers of both Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic origins in this section; their narratives illustrating aspects of terrorism which have seared into the national memory.

### **3.7.1 The Colonial and Political Implications of the Conflict**

#### **3.7.1.1 Coming out of the Closet**

##### ***Funny Boy* (1994) by Shyam Selvadurai**

*Funny Boy* (1994) is Shyam Selvadurai's<sup>53</sup> first work and is one of the first diasporic novels to articulate a sustained response to the ethnic riots, which was a backlash in the Southern part of Sri Lanka after thirteen Sinhalese soldiers were killed by the Tamil terrorists. This is an event which marked the most significant shift in the relations between the Sinhalese and the Tamils that later transformed itself into an internecine civil war in the island. The tale insistently tells the reader about abuses, the shattering effect of losing loved ones, the existential anguish of the uprooted and the alienated, during the racial riots. The conditions in Sri Lanka and other economic factors caused an influx of Tamils to Canada, Britain, Australia, and other parts of Europe and to South India.

The novel also reflects details of Selvadurai's family background and the life he knew intimately as a child in Sri Lanka. He possesses first-hand knowledge of the traumatic effects of the excessive brutality of the riots and the vicious orgy of race-driven killings of his close Tamil relatives, which has largely inspired his writings. It appears that he has written the novel to register his protest at the manner by which innocent Tamil civilians were treated during the orgy of violence in July 1983. It was the prevailing situation of the country at that time that led to his departure to a safer country.

The novel is deeply autobiographical and in many ways a confessional one and this is an aspect of its modernity. Further, the characters derive from the experience of the author. His compelling narrative records horrific recollections of the past of an aggrieved

---

<sup>53</sup> Sri Lankan born Shyam Selvadurai of Tamil descent is a prominent South Asian diasporic writer from Canada. A novelist, essayist and script-writer for television, Selvadurai immigrated to Canada at the age of nineteen, after the 1983 racial riots in Sri Lanka which deeply affected his family. The author received international acclaim for *Funny Boy* when he won the First Novel Award from W. H. Smithbooks and the Lambda Award for Best Work of Gay Fiction. His other novels, *Cinnamon Gardens* (1999) and *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* (2006), also won accolades, such as the Governor General's Literary Award in 2005 and Young Adult Canadian Book Award in 2006.

community that has suffered loss of life, displacement and dispossession, and it appears that Selvadurai is a writer who is acutely sensitive to such extreme racial abuses and refuses to be silenced. In his relentless dwelling on the past, his work movingly investigates and questions whether it is possible for the Tamil community to live fully and freely in present day Sri Lanka. The novel develops along an established trajectory which guarantees verisimilitude but is also a social satire, as the author reveals ridiculous teaching methods at school and the hypocrisy as law enforcement authorities fail to protect Tamil civilians.

Selvadurai's other novels, *Cinnamon Gardens* (1999) and *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* (2006), are also set in Sri Lanka and share thematic preoccupations connected to the inherited legacy of the British colonial past. A strong postcolonial aspect is depicted in *Cinnamon Gardens*, in which he illustrates the shifting political and social order in the country after the arrival of a high-level delegation of the Donoughmore Commission. The author's Sri Lankan background has remained the single most influential factor in these writings, which are sharply critical – cynical even – about Sri Lanka. He brings to the fore the post-Independence ethnic and religious divisions which are partly lingering effects of colonisation. But what is most distinctive about Selvadurai's writing is the subtle yet masterful inclusion of gay issues into his narratives, without ever mentioning the terms “gay” or “homosexuality” in the text.

As an author, Selvadurai has been formed by an immense weight of the inherited traditions of Northern Sri Lanka. He writes about the quaint family and domestic customs of the Colombo Tamils who have moved from Jaffna. His novel is a scrupulously observed record of the space that lies between groups, races and individuals in Sri Lanka. In particular, he writes about the Tamil upper class because he is a member of it and it is the only class he understands completely, and as a result his writing has limitations of perception. Also, his novels show how the life of the extended family provides rich material for his works such as its size, complexity, rituals, and the combination of formality and intimacy. They are overtly directed by Western ideas of education and discipline, which prompts him to bring in gay issues into the narrative.

*Funny Boy*, an innovatively structured novel of six stories, is narrated by a sensitive, idealist young man of Tamil ethnic origin named Arjun Chelvaratnam, who is referred throughout the story as “Arjie.” The narrator, who is also the protagonist of the story, is presented as a member of the upper class milieu. The character “Arjie” appears to be built up from recognizably genuine elements within the author, and he seems to glamorize the high-society life of the upper class in Colombo, the social strata to which he himself belongs. Autobiographical fiction of this intensity invites the reader's curiosity about the author's early life, which appears to be intimately tied to harrowing memories of a personal crisis that the author invokes in combination with aspects of his own private life.

Arjie recalls, the contented, extended family life he enjoys as a child, and the eagerness with which he anticipates festive occasions when aunts, uncles and cousins get together for family celebrations. During his childhood he does not participate in cricket or other games which boys prefer, but opts to join his sister and female cousins in games of fantasy, like dressing up as Cinderella or Thumbelina, which gives him the opportunity to wear female clothes. His favourite game is to be attired as a bride: “by the sari being wrapped around my body, the veil being pinned to my head, the rouge put on my cheeks, lipstick on my lips, kohl around my eyes” (4). One can identify the most obvious instances of cross-dressing employed by the author in the descriptions of saris and cosmetics used in the games. It is evident that “Arjie” is a character who stands for aspects of the author’s personality. Thus, at a very early stage in the narrative, the author reveals the character’s sexual affinities and in a subtle manner, his own.

Arjie’s preference for female clothes and games predominantly engaged in by girls earns him the scorn of boys of his age and the disapproval of his family elders, which makes him feel confused, rejected, and a dejected misfit: “And then there would be the loneliness. I would be caught between the boys’ and the girls’ worlds, not belonging or wanted in either [...]” (39). He is obsessed with something which he cannot name but which is surely his burgeoning homosexuality. He deals with his real and imaginary world while his complex inner processes virtually isolate him from the rest of the world:

Lately, I had found that I looked at men, at the way they were built, the grace with which they carried themselves, the strength of their gestures and movements. Sometimes these men were present in my dreams. I felt the reason for this sudden admiration of men had to do with my distress over the recent changes in my own body, changes I had witnessed in Diggy a few years ago when he, too, was thirteen. (161)

Other characters in the novel also appear to be people whom Selvadurai has encountered in the course of his life and he seems to draw heavily on his boyhood memories in Colombo, betraying to a large degree that the novel is autobiographical.

The incomprehensible behaviour of Arjie, however, finds empathy between him and his Auntie Radha, for whom a traditional marriage is being arranged to an engineer. The details of this nuptial arrangement are a matter of enormous interest to Arjie. Radha on the other hand, has developed a friendship with a Sinhalese young man called Anil, and this alliance is instantly frowned upon by the family elders because of ethnic differences. Radha who has been living abroad for a considerable period in her life, finds the objections obnoxious and old fashioned. Even Arjie, young as he is, cannot comprehend why things should be the way they are, when in Colombo the Tamils and the Sinhalese are living side by side. The elders are quick to remind the young of the atrocities committed against them in the past, and one of the unfortunate victims of the 1958 racial riots being the narrator’s great-grandfather. “You were too young to remember when they brought the body home. You should have seen it. It was as if someone had taken the lid of a tin can and cut pieces out of him” (59).

Arjie's historical awareness of violation of Tamil rights and aspirations comes through by delving into the past, and he hears about events that belong to a period before he was born from his parents. The evocative and poignant account of the circumstances that led to Selvadurai's own great-grandfather's death strengthens the position of the author as an advocate for the cause of Tamil victimization. The official impassivity of a supremely indifferent Government to the plight of the Tamils is thus overtly emphasized. The author's own disillusionment is clear when referring to the racial riots of the 1950s that exploded over the language issue, which is an event of injustice deeply embedded in the psyche of the Tamil minority. He presents a perspective on the politics of language and subjects the assumption that the "The Sinhala Only Act" would serve a larger sector of the population to disturbing interrogation and extreme suspicion.

From snippets of conversation among the family elders, the narrator, who is still a child, surmises that the situation between the two ethnic groups is not a harmonious one at all. As explained by the narrator's father: "The Sinhalese wanted to make Sinhala the only national language, and the Tamils did not like this. So there was a riot and many Tamils were killed" (61). This statement is pregnant with implications. First and foremost, the author is signifying that the laws of the nation are not binding on all ethnic groups equally. He depicts the Sinhalese mobsters who killed unarmed innocent Tamils during the riots as marauding hooligans. He lays the responsibility on Government neglect of the political and linguistic rights of the Tamils by conspicuously foregrounding the 1958 riots in his novel, and casts severe aspersions on the guardians of justice in the country. He also demonstrates that language is not merely an instrument of communication, but also the means to express the identity of a community, and hence it is understandable that people take pride in their language. The quality of duplicity and bias which run through the "Sinhala Only Act" is thus subtly revealed.

Selvadurai makes us aware that people's cultural values are inscribed in their language, and traditions move forward on the tracks of language. The majority Sinhalese use of nationalist sentiment to control, suppress and discriminate against minority groups living in the newly independent country is strongly recorded by the author. As the author implies, the Tamil protestations are partly an endeavour to obtain linguistic freedom, as their language is a creative force to sustain the Tamil community, as Sinhala is for the Sinhalese people. A rhetorical question posed by Sneja Gunew on multi-culturalism during a recorded discussion with Gayatri Spivak in August 1986, seems to lend considerable credence to the above:

What is very much a question for me at the moment is that if you are constructed in one particular kind of language, what kind of violence does it do to your subjectivity if one then has to move into another language, and suppress whatever selves or subjectivities were constructed by the first? (1990: 66)

The language issue being one of the crucial contentions for the Sinhala-Tamil conflict, Selvadurai brings to the fore several instances pertaining to language. He subtly suggests

that one of the reasons why the Tamil community need a separate state is to gain linguistic freedom. The reluctant acceptance of Sinhalese as a language of power required for one's survival is indicated in the text by Arjie's father sending him to a Sinhalese class to learn the language as "Sinhalese was the real language of the future" (61). As if eager to plant the alienation-marginalisation theme deeply in the reader's mind, the author throws in another variant on it and that is the racial discrimination and bullying of Tamil students by the Sinhalese students at Arjie's school. This is his first personal experience of a sense of linguistic division and the reality of Otherness. The importance of proficiency in Sinhalese is further reiterated by the inclusion of an ugly incident on the train where Radha escapes being fatally wounded by attacking mobs, when the Tamil friend who is accompanying her intervenes and wards off a tense situation by speaking in perfect Sinhalese. Simultaneously, Selvadurai highlights the dangers involved in speaking Tamil, as exemplified by Arjie's mother's comments, "One doesn't feel safe speaking Tamil these days" (190) and her expression of legitimate fears that her children are compelled to "always having to watch what they say or do" (190). With the above, Selvadurai is suggesting a society in paralysis, deeply divided by racial and linguistic differences in which human rights to ensure basic freedom no longer apply. With these statements the author highlights a sense of menacing Otherness which confirms that Sri Lanka is a country that has not developed a set of legal doctrines to ensure personal linguistic freedom where individuals are able to act or speak freely without fear and compromise.

Although highlighting the above linguistic contradiction to a certain degree, the novel appears to maintain a rhetorical balance as regards the ethnic issue. This impression is achieved by alternating between radical and moderate views regarding racial distress and injustice: "Amma, even though she was a Tamil, thought the Tigers were wrong, that they were nothing but terrorists and they were giving other Tamils a bad name. Daryl Uncle said that he understood why young men were joining the Tigers. He spoke of torture" (110). Thus, the author examines tangled emotions and thoughts and the psycho-drama of the pain connected to the communal tension.

Selvadurai further reinforces his view that the two communities are unable to integrate, that coexistence is fraught with rupture, and that the ethnic differences have strongly influenced the Sri Lankans' perception of one another, which he does by the inclusion of his aunt Radha's romantic involvement with a Sinhalese young man. Radha faces vociferous opposition from her family members. They warn her about the impossibility of success in a mixed marriage because of the prevailing situation in the country: "[...] things are getting worse between the Sinhalese and Tamils. These Tamil Tigers in Jaffna are very serious about a separate state. They're determined to get this Eelam, even if they have to use violence to do it" (79). Despite parental and family pressure, Radha's alliance with Anil matures and they decide to get married surreptitiously, disregarding familial warnings from all sides. Radha is sent away for a

month to Jaffna by her family, hoping that she will get her “crazy ideas” out of her head. Unfortunately, on her return journey to Colombo, the Jaffna train is attacked by a mob at Anuradhapura, which is a predominantly Sinhala area, in retaliation for the killings of Sinhalese people in the North. She is one of the victims of the attack but her physical injuries do not prove to be as serious as the psychological damage. The incident opens her eyes to the fact that there is no way that the two communities can live together, and the opposition to a mixed marriage no longer seems absurd, but a reason for genuine apprehension. Gradually she is able to understand that the racial mistrust that her family is promulgating and the severe objections of Anil’s father to their alliance; the country is becoming polarized along racial lines. Meanwhile, Anil desperately tries to communicate with Radha, but she does not respond with equal ardour, as an insurmountable mental barricade has developed between her and Anil. Instead, she half-heartedly gives in to the arranged marriage, suggesting that the Tamils are a community psychologically scarred by their victimization.

The novel is full of true accounts of atrocities committed against the Tamil population, some of which were carried out with the explicit knowledge of the Southern Sinhalese politicians and the security forces: “The Jaffna library was burned by the police this morning. Ninety-five thousand books were set on fire” (122). The library was a centre of international distinction because of the unique collection of irreplaceable books contained therein and a place where antiquity and modernity coexisted in an ethos of scholarship. It occupied a special place in Jaffna’s cultural life and the destruction of it contributed to the violation of the dignity and knowledge of the Tamil community worldwide. As commented upon by Narayan Swamy, “The incendiary act further soured relations between Tamils and the government. Among the hundreds of shocked Tamils who saw the library burn down was Prabhakaran” (2003: 60).

In Selvadurai’s world, the guardians of the legal system of Sri Lanka tend to be as guilty as the people they prosecute or defend. Therefore, the novel is a powerful representative, of not only the author’s views on the conflict, but also an account of extremely accurate and uncomfortable facts that offer the reasons for the community friction which has contributed to widen the gulf between the two ethnic groups. These facts are also clear explanations why the Tamils flee from Sri Lanka. The exodus of the Burgher population is also linked to linguistic reasons, as explained in the narrative: “When the government made Sinhala the national language in the 1950s many of them left because they only spoke English [...]” (116). Here the author is demonstrating how the “Sinhala Only Act” institutionalised Sinhalese nationalist sentiments whilst causing deep social cleavages and marginalisation of other ethnic groups. He also indicates that it is not only the Tamils who were subjected to mutual racial suspicions and discrimination: “Some Sri Lankan people thought Burgher people were too white to marry their children and some Burgher people thought Sri Lankan people were too

brown to marry theirs [...]” (116). The above also illustrates the colonial legacy of the notion of superiority born out of skin colour.

Daryl Uncle, a family friend of Burgher origin, is visiting Sri Lanka from Australia on a fact-finding mission. He is a journalist and is investigating the torture of Tamils and disappearances. He makes a trip to Jaffna in order to gather first-hand information but gets inordinately delayed. The narrator’s mother reports his absence to the police who take her complaint lightly at first. After a while, she is informed that his body has been found by some fishermen when it got washed ashore on the beach of a fishing village. The state of his body indicates that he had been tortured and killed and then thrown into the sea. Here the author is drawing a parallel to the circumstances of death of the famous human rights investigator and forthright journalist, Richard de Zoysa.

Selvadurai sets the protagonist’s secure childhood against the violent changes wrought by the ethnic conflict and at various junctures he interrogates the atrocities committed against the Tamil population. He questions the professionalism and sincerity of the Sri Lankan security forces who failed to maintain order when the riots started. They stood by while the hoodlums burnt and killed indiscriminately. For instance, this mockery of justice, the state of despair and the suspicions of the Tamil community are surmised by the following questions: “But where does one turn when the police and the government are the offenders?” (138). “What has this country come to, where a man can be murdered and nothing must be done?” (142). The above rhetorical questions lend minimum credibility to the incumbent Government while revealing the widespread mood of pessimism and cynicism of the thoroughly demoralised Tamil population. The reader is made conscious of the overwhelming background of the war in Northern areas. The tragedy of the loss of the protagonist’s grandfather and an account of the events of that fateful day convincingly testify to the guilt of the Sinhalese thugs and the politicians who instigated them. The gravity of the situation is further reiterated in the novel’s epilogue, which is in the form of a diary chronicling the horrific events from July 25<sup>th</sup> to August 27<sup>th</sup> 1983 that led the author and his family to flee Sri Lanka.

The self-reflexive occasions in the novel are quite numerous. Selvdurai is juxtaposing autobiography and fiction, as if to foreground his identity and to mirror the inner workings of a selective memory through which he exposes the atrocities that his family suffered. Through this self-conscious narrative ploy, he has highly allegorised the meaning of space in his novel. In Bhabha’s terminology, frequently cited in *The Location of Culture*, uncannily, home can become “unhomely”:

The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. (9)

Bhabha reiterates the position of the “Other” in his introduction to *Nation and Narration*: “the unheimlich terror of the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social

belonging, the hidden injuries of class” (2). Further on the question of space, Sharanya Jayawickrema examines the “spatialization of identity” in “At Home in the Nation? Negotiating Identity in Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*”:

Throughout the novel, Selvadurai presents identity through various spatial configurations, such as the children’s spaces of play where the partitions between boys’ and girls’ domains mimic the conflicts over territoriality in the larger space as both a gendered and racialized terrain and particularly his persistent conflation of personal and national levels allow us to read these spaces as parallel to the state of the nation. (123-139)

The above examination of the spatial aspect of the novel is particularly pertinent, in view of the increasingly violent space of communal history in Sri Lanka, both the violation of the home space of the Tamil community by Sinhalese mobs and the subsequent demand for demarcation of a separate territory by the rebels, which are inscribed in the novel.

The violation of home space, as well as of the region of Arjie’s birth, is further explored along similar lines by Tariq Jazeel in “Because Pigs Can Fly: Sexuality, race and the geographies of difference in Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*”:

*Funny Boy* explores the problematic relationships between Arjie, his home and family. While home offers Arjie warmth and comfort from the racial discrimination he witnesses in Colombo’s public spaces, it offers little of that emotional reassurance as he struggles to discover and come to terms with his own same-sex desire. Arjie struggles to cope with a double marginalisation throughout *Funny Boy*. (231-249)

It is a deeply revealing moment in Selvadurai’s novel when Arjie confesses his sexual union with his friend Shehan Soyza and expresses his subsequent sense of guilt and legitimate fears. “I thought of Shehan and myself. What had happened between us in the garage was not wrong. For how could loving Shehan be bad? Yet if my parents or anybody else discovered this love, I would be in terrible trouble” (273-274). Here he is recounting his past in the form of a confession, which invariably brings about a particular ambivalence to the book’s moral stance. After all, the novel partly focuses on the life of a young boy who is considered “funny” because he is different from the mainstream society of his birth country. Arjie’s search for self- and sexual identity, home and freedom, is the major concern in the novel and his confessions are in most part a coming-of-age narrative. This search also mirrors the ethnic Tamil community’s struggle for identity and freedom and their exodus because of communal conflict. In other words, the main protagonist reflects this greater historical dislocation in psychological terms, which appears to be an unforgettable and indestructible past. The Tamil apprehension of being regarded as “outsiders” and their position depicted with Otherness, are prominently presented in the novel: “We cannot live like this under constant threat from the Sinhalese, always second-class citizens in our own country [...]” (176). The quality of Otherness is also stressed as early as when the protagonist confronts discrimination in the school he attends. The narrative is potently juxtaposed, whereby the violence of the 1983 racial riots is brought against the lesser confrontation



of the protagonist's inner turmoil of discovering himself as "funny," and as an outsider within a specific social hierarchy. We also observe that the author is attempting to locate the protagonist's "Otherness" within the interior workings of self. As much as he is displaced from his immediate family circle, he is also displaced from the society he lives in, including his immediate family:

My eyes came to rest on my parents. As I gazed at Amma, I felt a sudden sadness. What had happened between Shehan and me over the last few days had changed my relationship with her forever. I was no longer a part of my family in the same way. I now inhabited a world they didn't understand and into which they couldn't follow me. (284)

With the above confession, Arjie seems to exorcise his worst fears of rejection. It is also evident, that through his self-referential discourse above, which is within a more private and intimate context, the author configures the complex rhetoric of Otherness. Arjie is defeated by his society's traditions and does not possess the strength to break loose from its constraints.

The protagonist's engagement in self-interrogation and self-discovery leaves him perplexed about his own desires and propensities. But it also gives way to a more profound awareness of the conflicts going on in his immediate surroundings. Arjie's entry into a state of heightened consciousness of violations and abuse of Tamil rights leads him to grapple with his inner crisis, which proves to be a source for his strength. Like other expatriate authors, Selvadurai has translated his pursuit of artistic freedom into a personal aesthetic. The deeply felt act of self-exile seems to demand meaning and form to the novel and also lends itself to thematic dichotomy throughout the narrative. Although the author is successful in establishing a credible rapport between political engagement and ethnic violence, the ideological position in the novel gets somewhat blurred because of the importance assigned to his personal revelations and connection between him and the geographical space of his childhood. The focus on confession, personal and social memory, invariably bears a distinct mark of modernity, sensibility and aesthetic.

Although, the narrative is on the subject of the ethnic conflict, it subtly tugs towards a secondary theme of homosexuality. The narrator's memory and experiences are brought to the reader's attention and thus gently and subtly drawn to his inner world, while connecting it with the external world where ethnic violence is rife. As Jazeel confirms in "Because Pigs Can Fly: Sexuality, race and the geographies of difference in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*": "The novel itself explores a Tamil boy's struggle to negotiate life in Sinhala-dominated Colombo while also coming to terms with his emergent same-sex desire" (231). The questioning perspective of the novel is developed through the examination of the socio-political situation of the country during the period of the ethnic crisis. What is distinctive about his novel is the continuing thread of remembered loss, of melancholy, which surfaces regularly in the narrative. It is also a record of important political crossroads in Sri Lanka's history during which there was a

tense standoff between the two ethnic groups. Selvadurai's achievement in creating a credible representation of the ethnic conflict is obtained through the citation of two spasms of horrific sectarian violence, which reignited racial friction, during which Sinhalese politicians have been accused of fomenting violence and egging on mobs that rampaged through the streets, indiscriminately killing Tamils. He cites incidents that are specifically related to the language issue and the 1958 racial riots and Tamil terrorist violence, to name a few. Thus, the author amply demonstrates the complexity of abuse and conflict.

### **3.7.1.2 A Subaltern Consciousness**

#### ***When Memory Dies* (1997) by A. Sivanandan**

*When Memory Dies* (1997) is a politically driven epic novel. The narrative spans three generations of a mixed family Sinhalese and Tamil written by a postcolonial migrant writer. A chronologically sound and factually dense novel, it is a monumental social inquiry and a historical examination of a time period spanning from the British colonial period of several decades prior to Independence, including the crucial period of Sri Lanka's freedom struggle and five decades after Independence. It is also an introspective analysis of British colonial exploitation and atrocities, and the post-Independence social and ethnic upheavals of Sri Lanka. The novel is situated within a more extensive historical context and differs vastly in content and scope from other novels written on the subject of the ethnic conflict by Sri Lankan authors. Ambalavanar Sivanandan<sup>54</sup> draws upon social and historical processes to write about humanity and society. The novel is in three parts and covers a wide time span. The idea of utilizing a family history as a structuring device for the interpretation of contemporary political history of Sri Lanka is achieved with remarkable fictional deftness. The central characters which dominate the narrative share a common trait: they are rebellious by nature and demonstrate a love for social justice. The chief chronological division of each principal section contain different thematic treatments. The first details the colonial exploitation, and the second and the third depict the political and social upheavals after Independence. Sivanandan employs chronological telescoping to convey how colonial conditioning determined the political future of Sri Lanka. The novel stands out because of the multiplicity of perspectives that it offers on racial issues.

During the politically volatile years, having become disenchanted with the political developments, especially the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, Sivanandan, who is of Tamil origin decided to flee to England with his family. He and his Sinhalese wife were deeply traumatised by the ethnic riots of 1958, when close relatives were set on fire by

---

<sup>54</sup> A. Sivanandan's novel *When Memory Dies* won the Commonwealth Writers' Best First Book Prize (Eurasia) in 1998. He is the founder editor of the journal *Race & Class* in which he served as an advisory editor. He is a man who has an unshakeable conviction of the moral significance of human action, as evidenced by a number of articles he has written for *Race & Class*.

Sinhalese mobs driven by racial hatred. The desperate need to live in safer environments and the impossibility of retaining a sense of personal integrity in a country beset by ethnic conflict and bloodshed, Sivanandan, like Selvadurai, left the shores of Sri Lanka to become an author who would write about the atrocities. In an impassioned speech made on 3rd of July 2009 at the 'Marxism 2009 Conference' in London, which was published with the title "Ethnic cleansing in Sri Lanka" in *Race & Class*, Sivanandan painfully but evocatively reveals the horrendous situation of ethnic war:

It's difficult to talk dispassionately about what is going on in my country, when the horror of what the government is doing to a civilian Tamil population – already shelled and burned out of their existence and now herded into concentration camps and starved of food and medicine – revisits me to the pogrom of 1958 when my parents' house was attacked by a Sinhalese mob, my nephew had petrol thrown on him and burnt alive, and friends and relatives disappeared into refugee camps. (59-65)

Sivanandan's experience and extensive research that he has conducted on the subject of racial relations in Sri Lanka, prompts him to be outspoken about the atrocities against Tamils which he boldly terms as "ethnic cleansing."

The time span covered by Book One is from the early 1920s up to the time just before Sri Lanka gained Independence and establishes the atmosphere for the impending social upheaval after Independence. The narrative makes explicit, a paralyzed society in which a frustrated and disenchanting generation of Sri Lankans encounter endless postcolonial problems. Therefore, it is an essential sociocultural induction to the two books that follows and a fictional backward glance of the colonial era and its impact, which makes the book a watershed. The narrator is a man of Tamil origin and he begins the tale by describing the austere and hard life of the Northern people and the wonderful opportunity his father Sahadevan gets to break away from the hardships of agrarian toil, when the headmaster of a school in Jaffna makes arrangements for him to attend an established Catholic school in Colombo. Sahadevan's father who is a simple Jaffna peasant is relieved. The final goal of a metropolitan, elite education is to secure a post in Government service:

A clerical job, hopefully, in the service of the central government in Colombo. There were openings there for bright young Tamils, the British seemed to favour them, and a government job carried the type of prestige that would restore the respect in which Pandyan's family had once been held. And then there was all that security. (11)

Sahadevan is nineteen years old when he manages to get a coveted clerical job in the telegraph department in Colombo. He values his newly found independence and therefore prefers to be boarded with a Sinhalese family in the city rather than stay with relatives. Though he works hard in the office, during his spare time he spends his earnings on "the pleasures of the city" (12). Sahadevan's father is expecting him to send a considerable part of his earnings to Jaffna to help to make it possible to get his two unwedded sisters married with a reasonable dowry. During a visit to his home in Jaffna

to see his family, he is gravely made aware of his responsibilities. Therefore, on his return to Colombo, he radically changes his former extravagant lifestyle and becomes frugal. He gives up his present lodgings and moves into a cheaper accommodation, which he shares with others. At work he befriends Tissa in whose uncle's house he lodges later on. Tissa's uncle Mr. Wijepala, better known as S. W., has lost his job after forty years of service to the Department of Railways because he has become a union agitator and "one of the prime movers of the rail strike of 1912" (21). The colonial authorities charge him and force him to retire for "racial and religious bigotry he had laid against his employers before the Royal Commission of Inquiry the following year" (21). But he is regarded as a hero by his colleagues for having dared to call the commissioners of the inquiry into his rebellious activities as "white bastards" (22). Agitators are shot down during demonstrations, giving the impression that the colonizers are callously impervious to the grievances of the workers. The British valued democracy and labour laws in their own country but demonstrated apparent disregard to those values in colonized countries. Bhabha gives credence to the colonial scene in *The Location of Culture*: "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (70). This lack of sensitivity and fairness of colonial administrators invariably puts into doubt the ethics and the sanctity behind the purported "civilizing mission" of British colonial rule, which the author seems to be subtly questioning.

While Sivanandan depicts a gloomy view of the colonial predicament, the reader can observe rare examples of a narrative being employed to expose past colonial excesses. They are the tense interaction between the colonizer and the colonized, the injustices and abuses endured by the colonized and the colonial subject's attempts to break free from colonial rule. Sivanandan appears to be filled with righteous anger when he perceives that deeply entrenched and systematically institutionalised racism is to be found everywhere, in every sphere. Admirably, the novel, which is replete with fiery denunciations of colonial atrocities, was written while he was resident in England and in it he is challenging the past colonial authorities in their own territory but on his own terms.

While staying with S. W., Sahadevan gets acquainted with the old man's avid enthusiasm in union protests, his involvement in resistance activities and his growing ideological orientation. He learns that: "the new Governor was deliberately setting the workers against each other. Tamils against Sinhalese and Sinhalese against Muslims" (27). The author exposes the "divide-and-rule" policy of the colonial authorities who laid the foundation for future hostilities and animosities between the different ethnic groups living in Sri Lanka. Although the British pretended that Sri Lanka was an exemplary colony, what S. W. bemoans to Sahadevan is to the contrary: "There were rebellions going on all the time. He paused. But your school history books wouldn't tell you that,

would they? After all, they are written by the English. Soon no one will know the true history of our country” (40). The fact that the early history books about British colonial rule have excluded or misinterpreted the greed that motivated economic exploitations is categorically recorded in *The Scandal of Empire* by Dirks: “Yet the scandals that came from both private profiteering and imperial aggrandizement were the necessary features of a system of conquest, expansion and exploitation that has not only been seriously underplayed in imperial history but virtually erased from the history of early modern Britain” (26). Sivanandan writes with passionate empathy for the sufferings of the working class during the British colonial era, and he sees the struggle against imperial domination as primarily a fight by the poor and the oppressed to protect the workers from labour exploitation. He refers to the strong-arm repressive rules of the colonizer and about demonstrators killed during labour protests.

From a historical point of view, there are urgent political messages embedded in the narrative, as Book One of the novel is a commentary on imperialism and authoritarianism and those who have fallen victim to them. Sivanandan constantly exposes the suppressed history of racial discrimination and exploitation at the hands of the colonizers. He focuses on a generation of pre-Independence indigenous intellectuals who are determined to face the colonial challenges and stand up for the rights of Sri Lankans. Significantly, he brings into the narration characters that the British authorities have come down hard on for union activities, for promoting nationalist sentiments and for opposing the unjust laws imposed upon the ringleaders. Demonstrations are quelled by shooting the dissenters or taking the agitators into custody, all of which illustrates the silencing of the natives, as one of the means to establish a menacing colonial authority. Prominent among those who are jailed is A. E. Goonesinghe, who belonged to a political organization called the Young Lanka League. According to the historian de Silva in *A History of Sri Lanka* (2005): “This organization had been established in 1915, the first ‘radical’ and ‘nationalist’ political association to be formed in Sri Lanka with a political programme which was overtly and defiantly opposed to the continuation of British rule on the island” (476). Sivanandan’s novel records the penalty of hard labour that the protestors are sentenced to for having started a civil disobedience campaign against “the two-rupee head tax that the government charged every adult male” (47). Here, as elsewhere, we can observe the author highlighting imperialism as a system of financial enslavement as well as a physical one. Chatterjee confirms in *The Nation and Its Fragments*, the hegemonic power of the colonialists:

To the extent that the persuasive apparatus of colonial ideology necessarily and invariably fails to match the requirements of justifying direct political domination, colonial rule is always marked by the palpable, indeed openly demonstrated, presence of physical force. (56)

On this subject, Sivanandan goes into length about mounting anti-colonial resistance in the form of strikes that incapacitate the essential services, which subsequently force the British administrators to revoke stringent labour laws. In order to authenticate the

historical truth about labour exploitation, the author refers to actual events and personalities. He is somewhat cynical when he speculates about Goonesinghe, and attributes the inefficacy and the lack of clout of the labour unions to him, who is not a worker but a man trying to organize workers “from the outside in” (56). The author’s disillusionment about Goonesinghe is further corroborated by K. M. de Silva, in *Reaping the Whirlwind*, who exposes him for his discriminatory practice against the Indian labourers:

The plantation workers were seen – to a greater extent than in the past - as a privileged group, and trade union leaders like A. E. Goonesinghe, who had earlier worked with their Indian counterparts in the island and championed the cause of the underprivileged workers, indigenous and Indian alike, turned against the latter. (276)

Perhaps, Goonesinghe’s change of heart might have been because the cheap immigrant labour, deprived employment opportunities for the local people.

Sivanandan also brings into the narration the Indian National Congress leaders<sup>55</sup> as well, like B. G. Tilak and Sarojini Naidoo whose concerted fight for Independence in neighbouring India were far more effective than the weaker struggle put forth by the Sri Lankan freedom fighters. Besides citing the names of burgeoning political celebrities in the region, the author seeks to establish the earmarks of real events through glib references to newspaper articles which carry an: “eloquent indictment of the government for the horrendous conditions that government workers were forced to live in” (81). Newspaper articles and other published literature were an intrinsic part of a developing anti-colonial politics during this period. Due to published protests and criticisms, subsequent articles published in the “Times” by the colonial administrators, warned labour leaders not to intermeddle in government affairs.

As is typical of anti-colonial writing, Sivanandan does not move away from the banal colonizer-colonized paradigm. The anti-imperialist struggle is powerfully injected into his language with energy that has been scarcely visible in mainstream English writing from Sri Lanka. One of the obvious facts emphasized in the novel is the metaphor of colonization, which is concretely embodied in the novel, and illustrates how repression has been employed to trap the colonized subjects into a dependency culture. The novel is dense with colonial atrocities and numerous other prominent colonial exploitations. The Indian plantation labourers who are indentured workers imported from South India are depicted as an over-worked, under-paid and largely neglected labour force, compelled to live in appallingly squalid circumstances: “Filthy, unclean. They live like pigs, these people. Have you seen the drains? Shit everywhere” (102). South India was in a state bordering precariously on famine throughout the nineteenth-century which enabled the British colonizers to exploit cheap labour. Some of the Indian

---

<sup>55</sup> For further details on Indian National Congress leaders, see page Nos. 457, 479 and 481 of K. M. de Silva’s *A History of Sri Lanka*.

workers perished during their trek through the jungle to the highlands, when they first came to Sri Lanka from South India. They were to become historical ghosts because no one will admit they existed. The author bemoans the fact that the revenue out of the export of tea and rubber is funnelled out of the country while the peasants and the labourers work without dignity, knowledge, comfort or joy, or any hope for the future. Indian plantation labour has long constituted an impoverished underclass and it continues to be so even today. Later in the text, the author, who strongly empathises with the Indian plantation workers, further reiterates that they do not benefit at all, as they are paid starvation wages and treated like animals and deprived of opportunities of getting on to a road to a future life. It is imperative to mention here, how the colonists' rapacious acquisition of up-country land for their plantations disturbed the traditional agriculture of the indigenous people. However, while reproaching the colonial administrators as wielders of oppressive power, the author displays gratitude to the British Labour Party for having mooted the idea of awarding Sri Lanka the much awaited franchise, which he considers eminently fair.

Book One acts as a foundational text for the entire novel. It is an exemplary case study or a synopsis of the pre-independence historical background of the country and how the colonized subjects opposed and rose up against the complex demands of colonial existence. The period covered is the time when there was a considerable upsurge in Sri Lankan political activity. The critical touchstone of the novel is the harking back to the colonial period in order to analyse the political issues and administrative systems responsible for the future disintegration of communal harmony in the country, and determining the culpability of the British colonizers for the situation. This was a period when there was no common platform between the ruling class and the indigenous people. Somewhat forcefully, the author details the insensitivity of the colonial administrators towards their subjects, especially to Government servants recruited from remote villages in the North, who never see their families again because of the nature of duties imposed upon them. They are sent "to serve the British Raj in some God-forsaken part of the country, opening up roads and railways and post offices" (19). Here, the author is boldly pointing towards the fact that the colonial authorities had been derelict in their responsibilities and the deleterious effects of colonial intervention to family life.

Referring to the relative power and authority of the English language and religion in the colonial society, Sivanandan mentions that there was no other way to get an education essential to get into Government service, unless one converts to Christianity. S. W. who is overtly anti-Imperialist and very much pro the working class, expresses his anger that the roads and railways were built, not for the love of the indigenous people but to facilitate the transportation of the wealth of the country to England. It was out of self-interest that the teaching of English was also promoted in the urban areas and not

out of charity. S. W. accuses even the religious leaders of being accomplices in the colonial oppression and comments sarcastically on the hypocrisy of the clergy:

Your friends, the priests, the mission schools, the churches? They forced the Catholic workmen to go back to work, and when the government was looking for the ringleaders, to sack them or to send them off to godforsaken parts of the country, the Church forced those workmen to give the names of the trouble-makers to the government. (39)

From the relevance of Sivanandan's novel to actual life during the period that the narrative covers, and its engagement with political experiences being at a realistic and deep level, one can infer that most parts of the novel are not intended to be taken as fiction. It is in fact a critique of colonialism's effect on the local society, which displays a clear subaltern consciousness and a desperate struggle to share political power with the colonial rulers.

The narration has multiple points of view; each main character contemplating the same reality from different standpoints at different points of time. Sivanandan does this by taking into consideration the characters' inner lives, their dreams and their thought processes. The novel, besides being anecdotal, is concerned with the profound moral colouring of the colonial endeavours, racial and class inequalities, and is overt in its social messages from contemporary history. The agonized interrogation of the past and his worldly examination of the present are intended to speculate about and to envisage solutions for the problems of the future. He constantly reminds the reader of various public scandals that people tend to forget, most of them seeming like political admonition. The novel helps us to understand British colonialism as a cultural, historical and political phenomenon and also to interpret what takes place after colonialism, as a reaction to it. Sivanandan, who is a proud literary outsider, published *When Memory Dies* in the 1990s, which is his first book and in which he tackles contentious social issues connected to colonization that other writers tend to avoid. Neither does he shrink from political confrontation and wittily captures the atmosphere of impending social upheaval. To use Sartre's terms in the Preface of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sivanandan presents the time period after Independence as when "The power struggle has been reversed, decolonization is in progress" (1x), and in Fanon's words "Decolonization is truly the creation of new men" (1963: 2) and "decolonization reeks of red-hot cannonballs and bloody knives" (1963: 3).

Sivanandan points to the extent to which urban education systems have been heavily influenced by the colonists and the linguistic polarities introduced by them. Thus, the cultural significance of the colonial social underpinnings of the apparatus of British imperialism, and as a result elite English education becoming the great divide is stressed in the novel, by the reference to different types of schools. Growing up and attending St. Joseph's College, a middle class school in Colombo, Rajan realises that the sons of the upper echelons of the Government, attend elite and exclusive schools, such as Royal College and St. Thomas's College. These schools are fashioned after the English public



schools where students are inducted into European cultural knowledge and systems and groomed to be members of the future ruling class. In reality, they are “mimic men,” raised through the colonial type of English schools, which were designed to sustain a tradition of English cultural authority. As described by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, these schools which are the preserve of the metropolitan, elite society where modern European modes are implanted “fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence” (86). The school which the protagonist attends produces members of the public who are employed in mediocre jobs, like clerks and petty officers. This is an unmistakable allusion to the discriminatory practices and the colonial cultural differentiation. The author highlights the sense of social and cultural superiority encouraged by the British rulers and illustrates the people’s powerlessness to change them.

In Book Two as well, Sivanandan displays a critical motive, keeping alive the trauma of recent history. The narrator is Rajan, the son of Sahadevan, who as a child befriends children of poor estate workers. He forms a special bond with Sanji, who belongs to an extremely impoverished, low caste estate coolie family. The author’s profound experiential rendering of history and his sharp critical awareness of political implications are evident by his inclination to use literature as an instrument for social and political debate and for having preserved the historical accuracy of the novel with scrupulous care. The latter is reiterated by bringing to the fore, grave problems which are corroding contemporary society, and the narrativization of the historical past and the interpellation of people and subjects influenced by ideology. Although Independence promised a radical break from the past, the nation’s decolonization and the postcolonial imperative of nation building are fraught with problems. According to the narrator’s father, politicians right after Independence were only interested in holding on to the privileges they had received. “They did not care about ordinary people, and the people in turn did not have a say in their country’s independence: it was all being done somewhere above their heads” (146). Here the author is foreshadowing post-Independence dissatisfaction and mass discontent. Some admiration for the post-Independence Minister of Education C. W. W. Kannangara is shown in the text, for having made education free for everybody from kindergarten to university.

One of the important racial aspects narrated at some length in the novel is the ethnic mixed marriage of Rajan to a Sinhalese woman called Lali, and the attitudes of the families and acquaintances towards the couple:

There were a few of course, who openly disapproved of us, but Lali soon won them over. Only the postmaster and his wife, or perhaps the postmaster because of his wife, had little but contempt for the “*parra demmala*” (Tamil bastard) and his “low country Sinhalese whore.” (200)

It appears ironic that just after Independence, in a climate of growing nationalism and rising communalism, insulting the Tamils was apparently becoming a part of a patriotic duty.

As a liberal and westernized writer, Sivanandan treads carefully in his representation of national languages, as opposed to English. Subtly he provides opposing perspectives on the crucial linguistic issues affiliated to the ethnic problem. He stresses that the English language was the important cognitive structure for future economic, administrative and educational potential for Sri Lanka, just after Independence. He also reveals his own ambivalent feelings towards language and the values of ethnic groups living in Sri Lanka. The salient question Sivanandan poses regarding the English language is: “Sixty, maybe seventy per cent of the people can’t speak it. Have they no right to run the country? Become doctors, teachers, whatever?” (202). His loyalty to his own national language Tamil is also evident, as he points out that Tamil which is an ancient language is: “spoken all over the world, not just here and in India, but in Malaya, Fiji, Africa even. Where is Sinhala spoken except here in Ceylon among a handful of people?” (206). Yet, the author concludes, that as Sinhala is only spoken in Sri Lanka, it is imperative to preserve it, despite the fact the “Sinhala Only Act” is dividing the people. Sivanandan is also subtly attempting to demonstrate the jingoistic attitudes of both communities. In his frank appraisal of the linguistic problem, it appears that he is insisting on the preservation of all three languages for the advancement of the country and is trying to figure out how best to live our lives in peace in multi-lingual Sri Lanka. Perhaps he is suggesting a trilingual nation, as the recipe for unity. The above demonstrates the fact that he is an extraordinarily idealistic and committed thinker.

Also in Book Two, Sivanandan depicts the gradually darkening communal hatred. A full catalogue of horrendous and ferocious images are included to illustrate the extreme harassment dealt by Sinhalese hooligans to Indian second and third generation estate labourers, who have long severed connections with India and have had no connections with the Jaffna Tamils whatsoever:

They went to the government sugarcane farm two nights ago and drove the Tamil coolies out of the line rooms into the cane-fields. And then... they set fire to the cane ... and when they ran out, children, mothers with babies ... when they ran out, they waited on the other side ... like a game ... and hacked them to death. (226)

Petty vindictive communal campaigns of a lesser criminal degree in the North resulted in: “Sinhala sign boards were being defaced and Sinhala letters blacked out on the number plates of government vehicles” (218). The ugly mood of communal hatred extends tragically into the lives of Rajan, the narrator and his wife, Lali. They are travelling in van driven by the narrator, and his wife and son Vijay are seated at the back. A group of Sinhalese marauders waylays them in village area, assaults and ties Rajan to a tree. They interrogate them and once they suspect that Rajan is Tamil, they gang rape Lali, and then kill her.

The protagonist of Book Three is Vijay, the only son of Rajan and late Lali. In horror and disgust, Rajan leaves the country entrusting his parents to care for his only son, at that time, seven years old. Witnessing his wife's killing had made him mentally ill. Vijay grows up with guilt that he was not old enough to save his mother's life, during that horrendous event. He finds a letter that his father had left behind which reveals how his father is feeling and the reasons for his exodus: "I cannot bear the people who murdered my wife. I cannot bear the politicians and the priests who solicited it. I cannot bear the intellectuals who connived at it with their silence" (283).

It is as if revolutionary blood is running through his veins, because Vijay joins the rebel movement JVP at the age of sixteen, and he goes through training in a camp in the middle of the jungle. His irregular behaviour is a cause of major worry to his grandparents who are aware of young activists being rounded up and slaughtered. Disturbing images surface again in the narrative: "it was so horrible, the bodies floating down the Kelani river, young kids, boys and girls, murdered by a government led by a woman, a mother ..." (240). The mother referred to above is the first woman Prime Minister of the world, Sirimavo Bandaranaike whose Government issued orders to quell the rebellion by summarily killing the dissenting youth. Vijay's collaboration with Students' Unions at the Peradeniya University which have connections with the People's Liberation Front, better known as JVP, does not last long as the Union members find out about his Tamil background, though he has a Sinhalese family name. He later finds himself a job for a short time but gives it up to get involved in social work in an upcountry tea plantation area. He is particularly concerned and appalled at the crass unjust treatment meted out to the Indian Tamil estate workers by the Sinhalese hooligans.

Very few novelists make an effort to highlight the historicity of plantation slavery and oppression of the British colonizer in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, we may take heart that recent history books, sociology texts and other literatures do most accurately record these atrocities. The author's deployment of the theme of exploitation is somewhat pointed, because it is couched in the language of socialism, class struggle and working class solidarity. The plantation workers were inhumanely treated both by the colonizers and by post-Independence Governments: "And somewhere in between in a break in the bushes, not far from the factory, huddled the dark, dank-line rooms of the coolies" (256) and "for the coolies who lived and perished among the tea-bushes and nourished them with their remnants when they were dead" (256). The Indian coolie labour was a prerequisite for the success of the plantation industry, and thus an important factor for the enrichment of colonial capitalism and a predominant foreign exchange earner after Independence. The Sinhalese upcountry peasants disinclined to engage in the exploitative, hard labour in tea, coffee and rubber plantations and were branded as indolent. The biased view that the native people were lazy was an important element in the ideology of colonial capitalism and a major justification for territorial conquest.

The narrative also exemplifies the barriers between the Sinhalese people and the Indian estate workers, the xenophobia, the racial exclusiveness and the injustice towards the latter in the continuing colonial exploitative economic arrangement. An Indian Tamil gardener called Sanji, working for the newly appointed Sinhalese Superintendent of a tea estate, right after the British planters have left, plucks up courage to speak freely and truthfully for his people with the regional Sinhalese doctor who is genuinely concerned about the plight of the plantation workers. Sanj's righteous anger and vehement indignation at the repatriation schemes proposed by the newly elected Government impels him to spell out, what it is to belong to the class of Indian labourers:

“Look at those tea-bushes, sir,” Sanji bit out the “sir” this time. “That’s not leaves and buds they’re plucking you know, our women and children, but bits of their lives – and for you.” He dropped the “sir” this time. “And even what little is left of them you want to send back to India. They never knew India. They were born here. Even the British let us die here and be buried among the tea-bushes for manure, but your people ...” (259)

Similar poignant and graphic representations of historical exploitation and disempowerment are reiterated several times in the novel, which clearly depicts some of the several aspects of dehumanization of colonial rule which have been perpetuated by post-Independence Sri Lankan Governments. The predicament of the present-day Tamils is summarized in the following statement: “The British took away their past, the Sinhalese took away their future” (334).

The colonial administration and subsequent post-Independence Governments have done little to redress the hopeless situation of the plantation labourers. To compound their problems, the JVP intermittently interferes with their wretched lives. In fiery JVP speeches aimed at the predominantly Sinhalese village audiences, the rebels eloquently speak of fears of Indian intervention and how Indian estate labour often adjacent to Sinhalese villages are threatening the employment opportunities of native Sri Lankans. Such inciting speeches instigate Sri Lankan hooligans to attack the hapless Indian estate workers and their families. This situation devastates the protagonist Vijay, who at all times stands for social justice.

Through the heated discussions of the novel's characters, Sivanandan brings out several controversial yet pertinent historical facts, such as, which ethnic group occupied the island first; whether it was the southern Dravidian Tamils or the Northern Aryans, the ancestors of the Sinhalese. The Tamils claim that it was the Dravidians due to the land proximity of the Southern state of India to the Northern region of Sri Lanka. Sinhalese historians are attempting to prove otherwise.

Shedding light on Sivanandan's most compelling theme of injustice, he cites many instances of burning and looting of Tamil shops, terrorizing estate workers, burning of the Public Library in Jaffna, linguistic discrimination and the relegation of Tamils as second class citizens. He seems to be categorically pointing out to the fact that, the Tamils have had sufficient reason and aggravation to rise up in an armed insurgency,

seeking self-determination and a separate state. On the other hand, the importance of communal harmony and the absurdity of ethnic conflict are also repeatedly elicited in the novel, through the poignantly expressed opinions of the major characters:

I thought I lived in a world where there was no communal hatred or 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 are 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. (283)

Just like Sivanandan himself, the main characters are of Tamil ethnicity but are married to Sinhalese partners. This appears to substantiate his personal investment in the novel's protagonists, who are constantly seeking social justice. Sri Lanka being a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-linguistic country, the inability to live in harmony seems to perturb the writer immensely.

Through the voices of his characters, Sivanandan takes a clear ideological position about the struggle for throwing off the yokes of British colonialism, which are evident in various anti-colonial messages embedded in the text. His feelings are evidently for the weaker and the helpless, and the narrative presents itself as an attempt to speak for the historically silenced. For this purpose, the entire novel is imbued with an unmistakably liberal, communal ethos. The author categorically stands for the values of justice, equality and freedom and is implacably opposed to oppression and discrimination. Unlike most postcolonial narratives, which are structured by tension between an oppressive memory of the past and promise of liberation for the future, his novel is somewhat pessimistic. It strikes a melancholic note in view of the fact that the central characters of all three books are more individualised and inhabit an unstable terrain and finally die tragic deaths. They are characters who are fated to bear witness to corrupt political developments of their time and their own failures in the attempts to escape them. They are also characters who are unrepentant in fighting against social injustices and are constantly swimming against the mainstream tide. From a literary point of view, they are indispensable metaphoric characters.

Despite these genuine tragic elements in his novel, Sivanandan stands out as an author who has used the colonial situations of the past, to shed light on the conditions of the present, and thus help the reader to understand the historical processes that have brought certain qualities to our present-day lives. Constructed in multiple textual layers, he couches scenes of domestic strife in term of various chaotic political situations in the country. He accentuates post-Independence predicaments by assiduously exploring and challenging the social upheaval of the insurgencies and the racial conflicts which flared up. On the latter, he has proved to be an unflinching and astute commentator who robes the present with past historical events. He sees the past as an evil, to be broken away from, but does not show confidence for a prosperous future created by political actions

either. Further exploring the political and ethical imperative that urged the author to write the novel, it is evident that Sivanandan is not only a representative figure of the Tamils who fled the country because of racial riots, but also an advocate of anti-Imperialism in general. With profound moral seriousness, he reiterates the exploitation and racism that marks the tentacles of the British Empire and the repressive policies pursued by the colonial authorities. It is this moral yardstick, against which all the actions in the novel are judged.

The real presence of the past, the complex readjustment of the present due to conditions of the past, plays a central role in giving a distinctive shape to the entire novel. Although plots of the three books are centred on intellectuals and their troubles, the novel comes close to social reality of the times throughout, and is essentially a social and political critique. The entire novel is a spectacular conflation of old and new history and is an intensely original book about Sri Lanka. It is also a representation of developing patterns of Sri Lankan political thought and provides a chronological account of various violent political developments in the country. Therefore, it is easy to find a clear rationale in the organisation of the three sections. The main characters are engaged deeply in political and social questions and are willing to throw in their lot with the political chaos of the day. In Sivanandan's attempt to get a grip with ideas directly in their personal dimension, these characters are depicted as real elements in a lived web of relationship with an extraordinary historical depth. The articulation of the shape of national consciousness after long periods of oppression and suppression is a salient part of the books.

Evidently, the novel is written for ideological reasons. Sivanandan demonstrates that he is inimitably well informed about the political progression of the country and is seeking out the means of explicating the trajectory of Sri Lankan political development by delving into the colonial past, political upheavals and the shifts in economic patterns. In the context of disillusioning social and political realities of post-Independence Sri Lanka, Sivanandan's backward glance throws light on particular persistent problems. The novel can also be valued as a historical record which gives an insight into resistance activities against colonial excesses, besides being a significant marker of the rising political commitment of the local intelligentsia. After Independence, the public is expecting sweeping social changes. Conspicuously, the impression that the three books conveys is that as long as the wrong politicians are in control, everything is bound to go wrong in both public and private life. The novel's easy assimilation to the Sri Lankan post-colonial literary canon comes through with the fictional treatment of major social upheavals such as the pre-Independence struggle for rights, the post-Independence insurgencies and the ethnic conflict.

Despite the novel's title *When Memory Dies*, the work stands firmly against the erosions of memory and the intrinsically fragmentary nature of perception and reflection, on account of its ostensibly accurate historical content. The above characteristic of

engraving events in the deepest resources of our amnesia is confirmed by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*: “When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival” (18).

Sivanandan often interrogates the ethical, social and intellectual poise of a civilization. Significantly, his social sense may be gauged by his deep, instinctive affinity and empathy with the suppressed and the oppressed, and being one of the most lucid observers of Sri Lankan society, both urban and rural. The novel is profoundly concerned with the society that formed him and his intense championship of the right of the individual to follow his conscience, rather than dogma. This commitment has produced some strong expressions of social passion, sympathy and patronage of the unfortunate and the hard-pressed. It also appears that Sivanandan is a man of his time, and its values are his values. He abhors political violence and seeks to infuse peace with artistic values and has become highly visible in his protests regarding atrocities committed against Tamils. He focuses on the concept of freedom of expression, as it relates to the idea of a communally articulated ethnic group. Arguably, his proclivities and his experiences have led him to be one of the most powerful postcolonial writers of Sri Lanka. He has also become a distinguished representative of his own ethnic group and has exerted undeniable moral influence on his readers. Undoubtedly, his widely read writings have validated his trajectory as an authentic and accredited voice of the Tamils, especially in his position as the Director of the Institute of Race Relations in London and a founder Editor of the journal *Race & Class*. An astute commentator on racial issues, Sivanandan has shown with his writings that the pen could succeed the gun, as a weapon of militancy and protest.

### **3.7.2 Terrorism, Urban Violence and Civilian Sufferings**

#### **3.7.2.1 A Record of “Man against Man”**

##### ***An Enemy Within* (1998) by Punyakante Wijenaikē**

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were arguably the first guerrilla movement in the world to concentrate resolutely on the dreaded use of suicide bombers which added a new dimension to warfare. This was a major weapon in their arsenal to sustain their asymmetric warfare with the armed forces of Sri Lanka during the prolonged ethnic war. Based mainly on facts, the Gratiaen Prize winning author Punyakante Wijenaikē has linked her story with the chilling task of the Tamil suicide cadres who executed with callous efficiency the explosion of Sri Lanka’s Central Bank in Colombo on Wednesday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1996, and the sufferings of the victims.

Wijenaikē weaves a complex web of interpretations around this single sordid event, which was one of the deadliest and coordinated terrorist attacks ever carried out by the LTTE terrorists during their war for separatism in Sri Lanka. It was an act driven by a morbid desire for vengeance and the bombing wreaked havoc in the city centre and

caused bitter recrimination among the worst affected. A symbol of savage revenge, a lorry containing 440 pounds of high explosives driven by a suicide bomber crashed through the main gate of the Central Bank in Colombo. Simultaneously, other gunmen traded fire with the bank's security guards. The explosion ripped through the business district killing 91 people, injuring 1400 others and destroying the Bank building and other neighbouring buildings. The attack is reminiscent of the bomb blasts that shattered New York's World Trade Centre, Bombay's Stock Exchange, and Oklahoma's Federal Building. The Colombo blast is believed to have been a reprisal attack of the terrorists, after their bitter taste of defeat by the Sri Lankan Army who claimed the Tiger base in the Jaffna Peninsula in the North. The aim of the terrorists in attacking an important economic target was to destabilise the country's burgeoning economy, to cause significant economic and civil disruption and also to ruin the country's thriving tourist industry.

The above incident and a wave of terrorist bombing which have imperilled the lives of civilians, made safety one of the paramount concerns and over-riding objectives of the authorities in Sri Lanka. The Central Bank bombing was followed by a series of destructive explosions in Colombo and in other especially vulnerable places, with the terrorists' hope that the Government would cave into LTTE demands. As reported by the Indian Journalist Narayan Swamy, "The Central Bank attack was not the end of the sordid story. Over the next four years Prabhakaran unleashed strikes with a ruthlessness that left Colombo tottering" (2003: 258). The heinous crime of using suicide bombers to detonate explosives where civilians were largely at risk, earned the LTTE movement wide public condemnation.

Wijenaïke is a significant female writer of Sri Lanka who has demonstrably been the most apt chronicler of social attitudes and changes in her writings. *An Enemy Within* is a conspicuous deviation from her other novels in which, neglected and confined women and wives mistreated by their husbands are the author's stock characters. Other writers are also using the theme of chaos that ensued as a result of the despicable deeds of suicide bombers. Roma Tearne is an expatriate fiction writer who has based her novel *Mosquito* (2007), on the after effects of the Katunayake Airport<sup>56</sup> bombings and a number of frequent wayside detonations in various parts of Sri Lanka. Tearne makes the following pertinent observation about the psyche of Tamil suicide bombers who are extreme fanatics for a cause, which is also implied in Wijenaïke's novella: "Their desire for revenge was greater than their interest in life" (Tearne 253). However, the dramatic power of Wijenaïke's novella is far more compelling than that of Tearne's, because of the wide range of thematic treatment in the narrative, and the dominant motif being the suicide bombers amidst unsuspecting, innocent civilians.

---

<sup>56</sup> The main International Airport of Sri Lanka.



Wijenaiké evokes the world of contemporary terrorism and extreme urban violence by binding together various characters that are deeply affected by a shared tragedy. The title of the novella declares the theme. She mingles factual news reportage with novelistic style and has managed to bring in strong, personal feelings and passion in to the narratives, as the above incident has had an enormous impact on the life of the author herself. Her youngest daughter was trapped in the cellar of a building opposite the bank during the explosion. Wijenaiké's brother, who was the owner of a thriving commercial enterprise situated on the first floor of the same building, lost an eye due to the force of the blast. The anxiety, the shock, the unprecedented ensuing chaos which the terrorist attack caused the author's family and that of many residents in Colombo, prompted the author a couple of years later, to write the novella, in which she displays an appropriate mixture of insight and detachment in understanding a tragedy which she shared.

Wijenaiké's intricately and unusually structured novella is divided into separate chapters, each of which narrates the intentions and the reactions of a single character, who is either a victim or a perpetrator of the crime. This narrative method creates a palpable sense of uncertainty of the impending disaster. Finally, each part is woven into a seamless whole. The narratives are built up on two metaphors, the war and the family, and deals with both the atrocities of war and how it affects a community, and they are engineered so as to convey, ineffaceably that the two are inextricably connected. This intention of Wijenaiké to interweave the two themes perhaps arises from the belief that when a society becomes oppressive, human relationships within that society becomes warped as well. Therefore, the novel is caught between two competing narratives; one of legitimate revenge and the other of personal and national crises due to terrorism.

The novella's complexity depends not only on the entwined destinies of its main characters, but also the nuanced views, the mind-set of the assailants, their methods of acts of terror and the ultimate motives of the LTTE collaborators engaged in their liberation struggle. Wijenaiké delves into the minds of the traumatized individuals, as well as that of the perpetrators who executed their plan with a high level of discipline and determination, and the juxtaposition of the victims with the perpetrators are immensely provocative and most significant in her novel. The narrative is thus rich in psychological insights and skilful anatomising of human emotions and behaviour. In the author's attempt to demonstrate the polemics of social behaviour, the terrorists radiate an image of despots, just as much the Sri Lankan army who are repeatedly shelling the Northern areas occupied by the Tamils and killing innocent civilians.

Renuka, one of the protagonists, is a young girl recently employed by the Central Bank, situated in the centre of the commercial zone of Colombo. She bids a loving farewell to her recently widowed mother, before she gets into the van which comes daily to drive her to work. On this particular day, among the usual passengers, the Tamils are conspicuously absent, as all of them have purportedly fallen ill. Seeing the van empty of the Tamil passengers, the mother gets a dreadful premonition or an intuition and begs

her daughter not to go to office that day. But Renuka brushes her mother's fears aside and reminds her that she will bring a Chinese dinner home, because her doctor boyfriend Kamuk, would be dining with them that evening. Renuka's and Kamuk's marriage is in the offing. To allay her mother's fears, Renuka telephones her mother, once she arrives at her office.

Meanwhile, that morning, Raghu a Northern Tamil is getting ready for a sacred mission. It is a special task that he has been entrusted to by his worshipped cult leader - Vellupillai Prabhakaran, whom he regards as "GOD." Here the author is investing a spiritual significance with the rebel leader and elevating him to mythic proportions. Raghu does not feel a twinge of regret for what he is about to do. He is uniquely qualified to take on the task, as his sense of revenge and readiness to kill are personalized. His six year old son was killed the year before, in an air-raid in Jaffna conducted by the Sri Lankan Government. The carefully calibrated preparations for the terrorists' mission have been afoot awhile before:

The operation had begun a week ago when a blue and brown Izuzu Lorry had been purchased by the tigers as the chosen vehicle to deliver the goods to Colombo. It had left the north bound for its target, bearing number plate 42-6453 and carrying the legitimate name of 'Ratnapala' a Sinhala name as cover up, as a Trojan horse. The lorry carried legitimate bags of onions, loaded at Vavuniya. It had got past the security check points. (15-16)

Two other specially trained LTTE cadres named Kutti and Raj, belonging to the Black Tiger Unit have been assigned to co-ordinate the bomb blast. The operation has been planned with meticulous accuracy with other Tiger members in a "safe-house" or a lair of the Tigers in Colombo. Raghu is strapped with a belt of bullets and equipped with hand grenades and small bombs. Raj is to drive the lorry, which is loaded with explosives, while Raghu and Kutti are to distract the security officers. The deadly trio are in possession of forged identification cards, and already reconnaissance work had been made of the route to the Central Bank in order to slip past security checks. Despite the dangers involved in their mission, the three of them prove to be steady and determined to follow instructions given by their leader from his jungle hide-out. The crime they are about to commit is an act of solidarity, and their engagement in the war for a separate state is a collective enterprise based on brotherhood. This moral consciousness is described by Ernest Renan in "What is a Nation?" as: "the sacrifices which demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community" (8-22). Although they are going to certain death, they do not contemplate their doom with even a tremor, because of their absolute devotion to the idea of duty. Historian de Silva, confirms the utmost dedication of the LTTE, in *Reaping the Whirlwind*:

Unlike the rag-tag forces maintained by other separatist activist groups, the LTTE has generally created a well-trained, highly disciplined army and its cadres have a degree of commitment to their cause that its rivals cannot match. The culture of the cyanide capsule dangling from a gold (or gold plated) chain is evidence of the ultimate commitment to a cause, a readiness to commit suicide on its behalf rather than surrender or be captured, a level

of commitment which a more conventionally trained regular army cannot match, and cannot be expected to match. (322)

The palpable awareness of the desired effects of their actions and the purpose of the mission is already felt. “After today there would come up more barricades, more fear. The army may have conquered Jaffna but Colombo was cowering in fear. A tooth for a tooth” (19). On arrival, just outside the Bank, Raghu and Kutti start shooting at unsuspecting and innocent civilians and throwing hand grenades, in order to distract the security personnel of the bank. Meanwhile, the suicide bomber rams the explosive laden lorry on to the security barrier and explodes most of the bank building and adjoining buildings. Raghu and Kutti follow their previous plans of getaway but are apprehended by two civilians assisted by the police. The final human toll and overall damage are immense: “When darkness fell on the city on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1996 fifty three bodies had been pulled out of twisted cement and concrete and more yet to follow” (22). The novel’s ability to stir the strongest emotions lies in the striking images of carnage after the truck bomb has reduced the Central Bank building to a smouldering mass grave.

At the heart of the narrative are feverish monologues of the pain of loss of life and limb. The collective traumatic experiences faced by the victim are related by several narrative voices. The traumatic results of this despicable, cowardly, dastardly act of terrorism against innocent civilians are thus conveyed in a forceful yet poignant manner. One of the unfortunate victims is Anura, the sole bread winner of a family, a father of two young children and a husband to an expectant wife. He is an officer of KLM Airlines Head Office, which is situated right opposite the bank. His curiosity is roused on hearing the first sounds of the hand grenades and he rushes to the window facing the Central Bank to investigate. He sees the initial chaos and a speeding lorry. Hours later he wakes up in severe pain. His wife is beside him at the Accident Ward of the General Hospital. His right leg is badly injured and requires an immediate amputation, and shards of glass had damaged his eyes beyond repair. His wife informs him that he is one of the lucky ones to have survived but he is devastated: “A cripple without sight, what can he do for a young family?” (31). On being discharged from hospital Anura recuperates at home with his sympathetic and accommodating family, but he is only an economic burden to his family. He keeps pondering and turning in his mind the question which inspires the title of the novella: “Did we choose to be blind before we were blinded by an enemy living with us?” (38).

In the next short narrative, using a first person narrator, the author introduces the observations of a female Central Bank Executive who is in the midst of the devastation, mayhem and chaos immediately after the explosion. She witnesses the aftermath of the bombing and the shooting on that fateful day. Taxi drivers commute the injured to hospital without charging and motorists passing by oblige to help the fallen before the ambulances arrive. She also sees the ugly side of human nature, evoked in scenes of inhuman opportunist behaviour: “I saw human vultures pick up fallen hand-bags, shoes

and purses of those who had run in fear or had fallen down dead” (44). As the narrator sees splendid buildings in the heart of the city in shambles, she is reminded of the colonial past of Sri Lanka, which lends objectivity and reality to the present circumstances of the metropolis:

Colombo in the past, had, from time to time, been a beleaguered city. The Dutch, the Portuguese attacked and raped her virginity. During World War II when she lay in submission under the British, she had been turned into a fortress. But apart from an air raid or two, a bomb or two dropped from the air into the harbour and that too after a warning siren signal, she had not suffered too much. Today she faced a different situation. The enemy coming from within, from the womb of her own mother. How could she guard against herself? Check-points, cordoning off with barrels and barb wire how could they stop the earth exploding under her feet? The enemy could not be identified, separated. He moved among citizens, he lived among the people of Colombo. (49)

Here, Wijenaïke is comparing the once brisk and bustling city to a vulnerable and intimidated woman, who is susceptible to be indiscriminately raped by heartless and terrorizing public enemies. This explicit gendering of Sri Lanka as a female and the sexual mapping of her womb become an object of male desire and an obvious metaphor for colonial domination. The description conforms to the Orientalist fantasy of the East as both the female enchantress and the victim. This type of comparison is clearly explained from a colonial and postcolonial angle by Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*:

Thus, from the beginning of the colonial period till its end (and beyond), female bodies symbolise the conquered land. This metaphoric use of the female body varies in accordance with the exigencies and histories of particular colonial situations. (152)

Using eight short, somewhat fragmented narratives, Wijenaïke conveys the death of the city on that fateful day, when the incident threw the country into a state of panic. With the above mentioned narrative technique, Wijenaïke uses multiple viewpoints to give a broader aspect of the disaster, and captures with accuracy the intensely felt moment of disaster. The frightful impact left hundreds dead and many badly maimed or suffering intractable psychological scars. Cumulatively, the sketches build up into a socio-political inquiry into Sri Lanka’s civil strife.

A threatening, menacing and mysterious aura is gradually constructed around the three terrorists assigned for the brutal act of violence, against unarmed and defenceless civilians. They are depicted as men with a will and a purpose and with a mind-set attuned to a very different way of achieving their goals. The frightening prospect of a human bomb able to cause massive carnage and unleash untold violence, stirs a strange and morbid sensation in the reader, as the defining moment of terror draws closer. The gruesome tableau of the results of the bombing embedded in the narrative reinforces the terrorists as stereotypes. These descriptions are, however, genuine revelations of the bank bombing. The actual fact that the Tamil community was secretly informed by the terrorists of the impending bombing, and that Tamil residents and bank workers were warned to keep away from work and from the city centre, is also recorded in Wijenaïke’s

novel. Apparently, only a few Tamils working in the vicinity had inadvertently not been warned and got caught in the bomb blast. A more or less unavoidable outcome of the bombing was the climate of great suspicion about the Tamil brethren and their intentions. Yet another problem was how the Government would be able to tell the public to be careful of Tamil youth, without falling prey to accusations of racism and discrimination.

The phenomenon of anxiety neurosis, the evil impulses which can rise in man and the fear of them, as depicted in the novel, are similar to those utilized by Russian novelists like Fyodor Dostoevsky, who long before the advent of clinical examination of modern psychology was determined to inspect everything which human nature was capable of in his fiction. Given the unquestionable centrality of the theme of terrorism in Wijenaiké's novel, it is pragmatic on the part of the author to examine terrorist motives, in order to lend validity and credibility to the narrative. Wijenaiké prods and analyses the thoughts and reasons behind the bombing, when the three rebels are putting the catastrophic act of terrorism into motion. Thus, the reader becomes privy to the images that goes on in the minds of the terrorists who are about to commit a heinous crime. The image of the terrorists' as depicted by Wijenaiké and their heroic commitment to the cause, are not entirely bereft of positive connotations from the view of the separatists. In the minds of the separatists' sympathisers and advocates of the LTTE, the terrorists are exalted as self-sacrificing individuals and heroic martyrs engaged in a relentless quest for social justice, at the risk of their own lives. They are laying down their lives for a cause they vehemently believe in. For them death has no terror or fear when it is incurred in the course of duty. Raghu, Kutti and Raj are insidious enemies and villains, or heroes depending on one's own perspective. They are unidentifiable, faceless, nameless suicide bombers who disintegrate after the attack but are representatives of the phenomenal collective will of the LTTE movement. The bombing itself is a retaliatory attack which ultimately justifies the aerial strafing of Sri Lankan forces and other counterterrorist attacks in the North. It makes no difference to the LTTE as to who dies or gets injured in bomb blasts orchestrated by them, as long as the Northern Tamils are suffering a similar fate. Therefore, Wijenaiké's narrative possesses an immense capacity to evoke empathy for the victims of the bombing, as well as the perpetrators.

In reality, emboldened by the success of the Central Bank attack, the LTTE mounted more and more horrific attacks with uncanny determination and ruthlessness, even using female suicide bombers in the Southern parts of Sri Lanka and the scale of the conflict magnified. In support of their epic struggle for a separate state, these bombings were spectacularly successful, considering the widespread carnage and collateral damage. The Central Bank bombing was followed by the blowing up of a commercial fleet of aeroplanes at the main international airport, which dealt a terrible blow to the tourism industry, whilst causing a great military setback.

Wijenaïke has succeeded in construing a fairly balanced and dynamic overview of the situation. Although the narrative is a mixture of fact and fiction, it invokes the reality of urban violence, and that as long as the lives of the people of the North and the North-East of Sri Lanka are in danger of being attacked by the Sri Lankan military forces, the people of the South are in peril of being bombed by the separatists in reprisal attacks of lurid revenge. This incident added a new dimension to the understanding of the horrifying potential and the monstrosity of terrorism and fuelled concerns about public safety. The unequivocal and ominous message given out by the LTTE movement by the bombing orchestrated by them jolted awake the security forces, politicians and citizens alike, from their complaisance regarding the vulnerability of the Southern part of Sri Lanka. The calamitous incident created indelible scars and caused deep soul-searching among the country's leadership and the citizens. It also destroyed the possibilities of a harmonious climate and scuttled diplomacy, as the Colombo based peace advocates of the Government temporarily abandoned the impending peace talks.

Terrorism is thematically central and the narrative is rife with violent imagery and scenes of carnage. Whilst revealing the level of professionalism with which LTTE terror operation is conducted, the novel also illustrates the tremendous immediate impact, as well as the long-term consequences the Central Bank explosion had on ordinary people's lives, which are chronicled through multiple viewpoints. Wijenaïke also records the trauma the tragic event caused, which has not yet healed in contemporary Sri Lanka and, and the tremendous surge of anti-Tamil feelings and suspicions that generated after the bombing. The novel discusses the grand themes of life, familial love, revenge and death, through a collage of tales interlinked to the explosion. The psychological probing of the assailant motives reveals their mind-set. Fanon, in *A Dying Colonialism* (1965), analyses the conscience, the mentality and the technique of terrorists: "The decision to kill a civilian in the street is not an easy one, and no one comes to it lightly. No one takes the step of placing a bomb in a public place without a battle of conscience" (55). Contrary to what Fanon states, the LTTE regularly placed bombs targeting innocent civilians in crowded market places, railway stations, bus stands and official buildings. They also targeted economic installations and tourist spots, which would in the long run greatly harm the economic prosperity of the country. With the Central Bank bombing, the terrorists proved their muscle required for their struggle.

The anger, the suspicions and the desire for vengeance caused by the killings, which turned the whole city into a seething cauldron of horror, and the horrific after-effects of grief and anguish are dramatically recorded in Wijenaïke's novel. The narrative enriches the reader with the exact details of the bombing and the meticulous planning and execution of the terrorists are laid bare. The tone of those apocalyptic times is captured by bringing into memory the blood-curdling images of violence wrought by the terrorists and the turbulent evocation of traumas past and present. The novel obliquely raises the key question whether there will ever be an ultimate reconciliation between the Sinhalese

and the Tamils, which surfaces itself regularly in communal strife, political antagonism and the movement towards the disintegration of the island by demands for a separate state. The question is also mooted whether the safety of the South lay in conciliation, taking into consideration the fact that Tamil people are getting killed, maimed and displaced as direct results of military operations in a war in which the Geneva conventions are sometimes ignored by both parties.

Wijenaike has structured her novel in separate chapters and many of them deal with the experiences of one metropolitan bred, city-working individual, thereby giving her work a tinge of Western flavour. One of the chapters is about the three terrorists who carry out the bombing. Throughout the novel the author uses the imagery of barriers and barricades. However, the novel ends with a vision of breaking down of all barriers and reunification of the communities of Sri Lanka who are mostly not communal minded: "Nature has no barriers. Barriers are man-made" (76).

### **3.7.2.2 A Perilous Journey across a Dangerous Strip of Water *Kilali Crossing* (2002) by C. Suriyakumaran**

Tamil by ethnicity, C. Suriyakumaran<sup>57</sup> is deeply concerned about the grievances of the Sri Lankan Tamil community, and his consistent and abiding interest in human rights has impelled him to write on the subject. Born in Kopay, Jaffna, the author was embittered by the civil war as he knew the region well and despised the Sri Lankan Government's militarism. Moreover, his work with the United Nations enabled him to foster his image as an advocate of Tamil rights. Although he is a prolific writer in Economics and Environmental Studies, he wrote little in the imaginative vein. His novella *Kilali Crossing* (2002) is his maiden attempt at fiction, and the novella appears to be an agenda to record the precarious lives led by the Northern Tamil community in Jaffna during the years of the civil war. In his only foray into fiction, the author uses the setting of the perilous and vulnerable transition point of Kilali of the Jaffna Peninsula, where refugees as well commuters risk their lives to cross the lagoon by boat to reach the mainland. The narrative involves the existential anxieties of a generation of Tamils who are living under the shadow of sporadic bombings. It is a representation of a fairly accurate and authentic situation of the Jaffna Peninsula during the height of the war,

---

<sup>57</sup> C. Suriyakumaran, is well known in international circles owing to the fact that he has been a United Nations civil servant. His achievements are far and wide in Sri Lanka as well; as a specialist in Local Government and Devolution, an Economist, an Environmentalist and a writer. He was instrumental in setting up the Asian Development Bank in 1985 and has also held important posts in the United Nations Economic Commission in Asia and in the Far East and in UNESCO. In recognition of his outstanding services to Asia through the United Nations, Suriyakumaran was knighted by the King of Thailand. He has also received The United Nations Sasakawa World Environment Award for his pioneering work in the field of environment. Since his retirement from the United Nations, he has been working as a Visiting Professor to the London School of Economics and Political Science. His pioneering book, *The Wealth of Poor Nations*, has indicated his concern about the world's oppressed people.

when there was a sharp deterioration in living standards due to acute shortage of food, medicine, fuel and other essentials.

The story opens with a true picture of the racial problems of Sri Lanka. The tale is about a young engaged couple of Tamil ethnic origin who are on their way to the war devastated Jaffna by train during the troubled times in order to get married according to Hindu traditions. The couple, Khanna and Raneer, befriend an elderly fellow passenger in the train, whom they call Uncle Arun, out of respect. Khanna had emigrated from Sri Lanka to England, along with his parents as refugees, after the 1983 ethnic riots. But as a follower of Hindu, Tamil customs, he has returned to Sri Lanka to marry a partner of his own ethnicity in a traditional way, and take her back to England.

Suriyakumaran employs the meeting of the young couple with uncle Arun to give the reader an account of the experience of the Tamil community before the war escalated. The nostalgic memories of a Tamil citizen highlight certain social values and a secure way of life which has since disappeared. Uncle Arun, full of enthusiasm, recalls the past when peace prevailed, and the train journey from Colombo to Jaffna was a pleasure. With pride and historical romanticism, he remembers the past as an era of civilised living. His two young listeners are enthralled by the descriptions of the days of yore that Uncle Arun is relating. His inward gaze beholds the everyday reality of the Northern region and he does not set a temporal limit to the current, ongoing problems. He refers to the strategic point of Elephant Pass, the narrow strip of land which connects the Jaffna Peninsula to the mainland. He describes with relish the simple and peaceful lives the Northern people had led during auspicious times, untrammelled by fear and apprehension, as opposed to their present climate of fear and uncertainty. The above is an example of a hybrid narrative employed by the author, which juxtaposes the nostalgic past with the tensions of the historical present.

The Jaffna Peninsula was once a hub of business and social activity, before the communal tensions heightened. Due to the ongoing war, trains are not allowed to go all the way to the North, and therefore the passengers are compelled to disembark at Vavuniya and trek through rebel held territory. At this point, Uncle Arun and the young couple part ways. On arrival at the railway station, Raneer and Khanna are met by a Tamil lawyer friend of her family, who has meticulously planned their journey onwards to Raneer's home village. They immediately sense the tension:

It was all a different world once they had got out at Vavuniya station. The friendly smiles and conversations between people as human beings ceased. There was everywhere an air of caution, even mutual suspicion between groups, military, civilian, community, each as if almost not sure of the other. The exceptions were the high local echelons of the civilian administration or the military side, who met frequently at their official levels. (20)

But the couple is in good hands, as their lawyer is there for the purpose of facilitating a speedy passage through rebel check points. Khanna, who has been away from his birth country for a considerable period, notices that already the country has



been split into two, as they are given an entry passes into the North which they have to surrender when they return to the South again. Once in the rebel held territory, the travellers use different means to get to their respective destinations, either by using ramshackle mini buses, tractors, bull driven carts or bicycles. Not only is the journey hazardous but also slow and a distance of nine miles would take 4-5 hours. The only consolation is that refreshing conversations and tales ensue among the motley crowd of travellers consisting of ordinary folk, Government officers, teachers and students who are relating their travel experiences, and the “the Story Tellers of Kilali” are likened to “the tellers of the Canterbury Tales with adjustments only for the times, and persons” (22).

Significantly, Suriyakumaran brings into the narration the sudden and deep cleavage the two ethnic groups created out of mistrust of each other, after the initial racial riot of 1958. The text enacts the vengeance of an endlessly war-torn country for too long, at the mercy of bumbling, over-ambitious Southern, Sinhalese politicians and racial elements. The tensions of the political manoeuvring after the “Sinhala Only Act” language policy of Prime Minister Bandaranaike, and the Tamil demand of “fifty-fifty” representation for minorities gave rise to the above said communal violence, which is reiterated in the text. In doing so, Suriyakumaran draws attention to the constitutive role of language in the discursive production of nationhood and identity and compels the reader to recognize the historical background which led to the conflict. It is a undeniable fact that during the riots, some unfortunate, innocent Tamils were killed, maimed, raped and driven out by Sinhalese, racial hooligans and thousands of Tamils had to take shelter in refugee camps in Colombo, and wait to be sent to be sent to Jaffna, Trincomalee<sup>58</sup> and Batticaloa,<sup>59</sup> whether they had homes in those place are not. In the same manner, Sinhalese who were working as teachers and priests and engaged in commercial businesses in Jaffna were summarily driven out. During the years that the rebels held various parts of the North and North-East, not a single Sinhalese person was allowed to travel within those areas or engage in business activities, while a large percentage of Tamils lived peacefully in the South, held lucrative posts and conducted commercial enterprises.

Ranee has become pregnant after having had a brief relationship in Colombo with Khanna on one of his previous visits to the country, which is contrary to the cultural norms of her Hindu-Tamil heritage. Despite the fact that she is a highly protected Jaffna girl of strict traditions, she has allowed the Western influenced Khanna to make love to her, although their marriage is yet to be sanctified under Hindu rituals. At this point in the narration, while portraying the Northern Tamil community as a closely-knit and conservative ethnic group, the author reveals the socio-political realities of the ongoing war, by bringing in a whole range of cultural and ideological positions. The personal migratory experience of Khanna and different political and social circumstances invoke

---

<sup>58</sup> Trincomalee is a port city situated in the East coast of Sri Lanka.

<sup>59</sup> Batticaloa is a city situated in the East coast of Sri Lanka.

a rich implication of transgression and defiance of the rigid moral codes adhered to by the Northern Tamil communities. This in turn indicates the precariousness of values and fluidity of Tamil cultural identity, where traditional attitudes to marriage are changing fast.

The couple approach the beachhead of Kilali, the crossing of which is fraught with sheer hazards. The boats that cross the stretch of water are operated by LTTE members and they only sail in the darkness of night. Enormous risks are taken to avoid the gunfire from the strategically positioned, Sri Lankan Army post at nearby Elephant Pass. The LTTE cadres, known as the “Boys,” load the boats and cross in a convoy, and attempt to avoid the searchlight beams of the Army. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission naval monitors who patrolled the area, describes the exact setting of Suriyakumaran’s story:

Jaffna lagoon would never be all that safe for any craft, as there could be firing from both the northern Government of Sri Lanka-held shores and the southern shores held by LTTE. Moreover, in the shallow waters south of Jaffna and west of Vanni, the Sea Tigers proved to be a formidable force to engage, sometimes appearing out of nowhere, with their very fast improvised attack crafts and high-powered suicide boats. Generally, however, during daylight the Sri Lanka Navy would hold the upper hand, barring a direct suicide attack, which was otherwise very hard to defend against. (Solnes 58)

It is not surprising that suddenly, long-range fire from the army camp strikes the water and hits the boat the Raneer is travelling and unnoticed she falls into the water. It takes some time to locate the drowning Raneer, who unfortunately does not know how to swim. Despite administering artificial respiration and first aid, Raneer seems to be losing consciousness. A sense of initial dismay develops into mounting disbelief and horror. On the other side of the water stretch, her parents are waiting to welcome the young couple, but are completely devastated when Khanna places the lifeless body of Raneer at their feet. On arrival at the hospital she is medically pronounced dead.

A key moment in the text to garner the reader’s sympathy is the circumstance and manner of death of Raneer. By using her as a metaphor for the general suffering and untimely death, the author lays bare the despair and powerlessness of civilians inhabiting the Northern region. This account is broadly representative of the perilous daily lives of innumerable number of people palpably affected throughout the region. The war had brutally obstructed the free movement of the Northern Tamils by the Government closure of the A9 highway and other major roads leading to the Jaffna Peninsula. The author is shocking the reader into an awareness of the perilous situation at Kilali lagoon, which is the only way commuters could reach the mainland. He appears to question the actual security measures taken by the Sri Lankan authorities of closing the main access roads which inconvenienced Tamil people, and regard them as unjustifiable, aggressive extensions of war.

Khanna is in a daze while attending Raneer’s funeral which takes place within twenty-four hours, according to Hindu rites and traditions. Her parents, and her brother and sister share his grief and try to console him. He is treated like a family member and a

few days after the funeral is over, the family decide to take Khanna on a trip to show him the Northern sites of interest. The trip offers him an opportunity to temporarily forget his pangs of loss. He observes the simple lifestyle and the hardships of the Jaffna people. Ranees's brother and sister Rajes accompany him on the trip and give Khanna an opportunity to taste Jaffna fruits like jak and mango and the famous palmyrah toddy.<sup>60</sup>

Suriyakumaran's most clinching example of the rhetoric of condemnation is when he highlights the insensitive and despicable act of vandalism instigated by Southern, Sinhala politicians and the Sri Lankan security personnel, during which the Jaffna library was destroyed, shortly after the Holocaust of 1983: "[...]the burning down by highly placed vandals from the South, of Jaffna's internationally renowned Library, housing rare 'ola' (of palmyrah leaf) manuscripts, thousands of books, of modern and past Tamil learning – the symbol and soul of the Tamils of Jaffna and outside" (57).

Suriyakumaran impresses the reader by praising the organising abilities and a wide range of capabilities of self-government of the Northern people under the management of the LTTE. Despite the extreme war situation, the Tamil community survives in a region of scarcities and shrinking resources. In order to provide rationale for his argument, the author gives an impression of self-sufficiency and ability of self-governance amidst dehumanizing deprivation suffered by his people:

Contrary to impressions in the South, the LTTE had not only established honest government and internal peace, but also had been most seriously going into issues of real Development – an essential Environment Management. On the latter, they therefore naturally concerned themselves with Jaffna's water and farming, but also related issues of resource use.. (58)

Here, we can observe that Suriyakumaran is persuasive in his writing and is subtly utilizing the trope of a separate state to serve as a key to understanding the intrinsic link the Northern Tamils have to their economic, linguistic and political freedom, for which purpose he expounds the providential designs of the Tamil people. He also betrays his enduring concern and anxiety to keep the Jaffna Peninsula's ethnic homogeneity intact. He explicitly demarcates their private space, not only territorially but also culturally from the rest of the country. The landscape described, suggests a pessimistic overall view of rapidly deteriorating conditions due to military intervention. To judge from the number of overt references Suriyakumaran makes to this Eelam-theme<sup>61</sup> and the persecution of the civilian population, we can observe that he is determined that no reader should overlook it.

Despite the overtly romantic theme *Kilali Crossing* carries with it, strident denunciation of the Government's insensitivity to the plight of the Northern Tamil civilians is ever present. Suriyakumaran obviously hopes to provoke the reader into recognising the day to day peril faced by the Northern civilians and human rights abuses

---

<sup>60</sup> It is a sweet, slightly intoxicating drink, tapped from the palmyrah palm flowers.

<sup>61</sup> "Eelam" means separate state.

perpetrated against them and with a voice whose anger is palpable. The conscious and multi-layered strategy in the novel of depicting the Northern Tamils as a suppressed and victimized minority is also evident by the fact of scant mentioning of atrocities committed by the LTTE terrorists. In Suriyakumaran's attempt to create a meaningful and powerful account of the Northern region as a sinisterly nasty place full of hazards posed on the lives of innocent Tamil civilians who are compelled to cross the Kilali lagoon under a lethal barrage of artillery fire of the Sri Lankan army, he offers a tightly-knit discourse about the security situation in Jaffna. In the process he portrays the Northern Tamils as a hapless lot, who are innocent victims of the menacing artillery positions of the Sri Lankan Army.

Conspicuously, Suriyakumaran carefully skirts a direct confrontation with everyday contemporary issues of the North, such as the threat of civilian casualties on the part of LTTE firings, land-mine explosions, suicide bombings, abductions and forced recruitment of child soldiers. Instead, he indicates the intensity of deprivation of the war-ravaged region and horrors of a community terrorized by the plight of ultimate warfare. The "Boys" who operate the boats are depicted by the author as brave youth who take enormous risks to their lives, to provide a much needed service, and the term "Boys" is mentioned with heroic connotations. But the "Boys," who operate the boats ferrying passengers across the Kilali lagoon are representatives of a major terrorist organisation, the LTTE, and are heavily armed. They are known to return gun-fire and place landmines in strategic places to obstruct the free movement of the army, which affect civilians as well. Also, exorbitant amounts are extorted from the passengers, partly to augment LTTE funds by these criminally active youth. The author only highlights Sri Lankan Army excesses in order to portray the Army as a monstrous, state outfit and a tyrant occupant force which is crushing and victimizing the innocent Northern Tamil community.

Suriyakumaran also hints at, that it is the responsibility of the Government to alleviate the humanitarian situation in the North and restore socioeconomic stability in the region, by subtly laying bare that the violence connected to the ethnic issue is one sided and only by the part of the Sinhalese majority and that the LTTE is a movement attempting to liberate the presumably oppressed Tamil population locked in poverty in the remote Northern parts of the country. The tale is in fact, told ostensibly to stimulate those sympathetic sentiments which arise from the contemplation of undeserved suffering. Perhaps Suriyakumaran in his extreme concern and sincerity towards the stricken Northern people has become less conscious of the dual import of his statements. The profound symbolic meaning of the tragic death of Ranee illustrates the purpose of Suriyakumaran's dalliance with misery and gives substance to the theme. However, the author cannot evade the fact as to what extent the LTTE movement is guilty of instigating terror not only in the Northern region but also elsewhere in the country.

Suriyakumaran's stance as to the cause of the ongoing hostilities is supported by General Cyril Ranatunga who led many Sri Lankan Army operations in Jaffna during his long career, and who believes that the heavy handedness of the Sri Lankan government drove many a Tamil youth in the region to terrorism:

During operations in the Jaffna Peninsula the intellectuals, academics and professionals were sympathetic to the activities of the armed groups whom they affectionately called 'our 'boys.' Lawyers appeared free in courts to defend them. The political leaders accepted them as heroes and so did the community. Religious leaders including the Bishops of Jaffna, Batticaloa, Mannar and Trincomalee and the Roman Catholic Church in general took up the cause of "our boys." (62)

The Northern Tamils rallied around the youth whom they considered as underdogs fighting for a just cause.

In order to further highlight the self-reliance and determination of the Tamils, Suriyakumaran brings into focus the resourcefulness, adaptability and resilience of the Northern people against all odds, by elucidating their ingenuity of manufacturing their own fuel in the absence of petrol: "Fuel was the only problem now, and the car would start first with a few drops of petrol and then convert quickly to a combustion which was partly kerosene mix" (60). In reality, the kerosene mix had become a symbol of the adaptive abilities of the Tamils during periods of scarcity. Ron Aronson, The Professor of the History of Ideas at Wayne State University, in an interview with Geoffrey Hawthorne, the host of the 1984 Channel 4 Voice series "Knowledge in Crisis" clearly explains why freedom hunters never cease:

Because we see these struggles continue to be generated, going back to Spartacus, and that people continue to struggle and will continue to struggle for dignity, for a decent life, for power, for freedom, for democracy, for their own integrity. And I can't see a stopping point to those struggles until they're won. (Aronson, Dunn and Spivak 31)

The cognitive mastery of the above passage is much reflected in the endeavours of the Northern Tamil community who are constantly struggling to survive. Adaptation and invention by the part of the Northern Tamils are virtues that have come out of sheer necessity. An assumption underlying Suriyakumaran's viewpoint is that, the Tamil community is able to operate as a separate state.

In order to demonstrate that the LTTE political commitments to environmental and economic management are far reaching, Suriyakumaran proclaims that the: "The Peace Process was a welcome time" (58) – a time used by the LTTE for economic planning and development. But, he fails to mention that during the period of various ceasefire agreements, the opportunity was used by the LTTE movement to arm, re-group, strengthen their fighting capacity and increase their numbers. The ceasefire period was the time that the LTTE acquired, beach-landed and stock-piled cluster bombs, illegally imported fuel air explosives and multiple rocket launchers, including air-craft parts to be assembled later. Disappointingly Suriyakumaran's narrative is void of comments upon

such matters. Sivanandan, in notable contrast, is a far more discerning writer on the subject. The mixed ethnicity of the characters in his novel *When Memory Dies* has enabled him to portray a more balanced view, expressing opposing ideas. Even the provocative gestures of the racially motivated murders of Sri Lankan policemen and 13 army officers on two separate occasions which led to periods of heightened racial tensions have been conveniently left out by Suriyakumaran. The exclusion of the distinguishing features of the radical activities of the LTTE from the narrative and other major reasons for the rise of extremism in the region, subtly indicate the Tamil valorisation of the movement and Suriyakumaran's acceptance of it.

During the time that Khanna spends with Ranees's siblings, he notices remarkable similarities in her sister Rajes and Ranees, and gets gradually attracted to her. At first, she is shy but with time she starts to chat freely with Khanna and is curious about his life in England. Khanna's almost inconsolable grief of having lost his loved one slowly eases, as a friendship develops between him and Rajes, and gradually he is able to transfer the love he had for Ranees to her sister. He decides to speak to her parents, who in turn speak to Rajes. She is taken aback at first, as she is still recovering from the loss of her loved sister. After giving it some thought, Rajes agrees, but the family is confronted with an immediate obstacle. That is, according to the social norms of the Jaffna Tamil community, it is inauspicious for a marriage to take place within a year of a family member's death. In order to find an alternative way to circumvent this age old taboo, the couple is sent to Colombo, and instead of a conspicuous ceremonial wedding celebration, an aunt is instructed to get the couple registered after a simple Hindu ceremony. The idea of community, as informed by tradition, is a cardinal imperative in Suriyakumaran's thinking, as we see in this part of the narrative. For him a cohesive community implies a moral relationship that underlines responsibility and understanding. This aspect of the novel animates the narrative and gives it an aspect of cultural density born out of common traditional understandings.

After an emotional farewell, once again Khanna catches the last boat to face another hazardous crossing of the Kilali Lagoon with his new bride to be. The narrative gradually builds up suspense by indicating a potential violence which could provoke the feared trauma that may be unleashed in the course of the journey and death as a central, underlying presence in the monstrosity of the environment which might at any moment spring into reality. Since no other form of transport is available to reach the South, people are compelled to take the risk of crossing by boat, despite the frequency of casualties: "Strange how no one felt that it might be another hazardous crossing. Fate had strewn the countryside with death of young and old, many innocent and with hopes, in many houses over the years" (74). With the sustained use of melodramatic tropes, the author reiterates the hapless situation of his partly fictionalised world of a Tamil community and the dangers confronting a way of life. His poignant tone suggests that the civilians are accepting their lot fatalistically. The writer is clearly imbued with the

ideas of modern English writers. The Northern Tamils living in the midst of imminent death, with tension constantly looming in the horizon are depicted by the author in a manner comparable to a human disaster, strikingly reminiscent of “The Horror! The Horror!” described by Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*.

A sense of an all-pervasive presence of danger is created by the sound of firing from Army installations nearby. At this decisive point in the tale, exactly when crossing the lagoon, the excessively traumatising ordeal of the manner in which Khanna lost his beloved Ranees crosses his thoughts and makes him ponder about the futility and the confusion of purpose of this ethnic war:

Khanna’s mind suddenly went back for the first time to what all this hatred and killing of each other was all about. Similar to all those outside the land the so called conflict could not be explained. But then he did not know that those riddled in the conflict too could not themselves honestly explain. It had gone on for so long and its origins had been mixed up in its tortuous pathways over so many years. Wonderful people now engaged in destruction, afraid to look at a solution which was really at their doorstep, but did not want to see. (82)

Genuine depths of feeling are incorporated into the text and a sense of dramatic urgency is created by giving an important new perspective to the prevailing destabilizing and unsettling conditions in the region, the scale of fatalities, injuries and the overall refugee situation.

Although at Kilali crossing there are scenes of urgent peril, there are also situations of patience and courage. Despite melancholy recollection of the sad fate of his former loved one, Khanna manages to overcome his bitter feelings and compose his fragmented thoughts to find happiness with Rajes. They are bound together in a shared tragedy and they know that they will never forget the loss of Ranees. Once the couple arrive in England, Rajes soon settles down to the usual Hindu, extended family life, with the help of an extremely accommodating mother-in-law. With time to come, her parents back in Jaffna receive the joyful news that she has given birth to “a great nice boy” (87). At this point, Suriyakumaran appears to give a hint about the preference for boys by the Hindu Tamils. But the news that filters to them from the North of Sri Lanka and the rest of the country are not as joyful: “[...] Rajes and her family began to hear from their parents of the first rumblings of new upheavals in Sri Lanka” (87) and “the LTTE, or Tigers as they were called, blasting away at public buildings, killing political or military leaders [...]” (88). The following statement, however, reveals Suriyakumaran’s stand on obtaining a separate homeland for the Tamil population: “Apart from promising the moon to the people, the new military leaders had decided to change the map in the North and the East where the Tigers held sway” (88). What Suriyakumaran is alluding to is the major source of irritation to the Tamils which are the Sinhalese colonization schemes in predominantly Tamil areas introduced by various governments. On the subject, Wijesinghe, who has written extensively on the ethnic problem, states the following in *Declining Sri Lanka* (2007):

So the issue of colonisation became the subject of intense debate and anxiety. In addition to official schemes, relatively slow to get off the ground, several sponsored settlement schemes, usually exclusive to Sinhalese or to Tamils, sprang up. Inevitably suspicions arose on either side that these were aimed at establishing claims on land with a view to strengthening or demolishing the case for a separate state, or to expanding or contracting its boundaries. (55)

It is evident that the principle of territorial integrity is significant for both ethnic groups in this conflict.

Suriyakumaran continues to beguile the reader with his sympathetic, heart-rending picture of an innocent Tamil community faced with circumstances that cannot be logically comprehended, as they are repeatedly bombarded in ferocious army forays. He also attempts to portray the Tiger guerrillas as an out-numbered, ill-equipped group of rebels, desperately and heroically fighting against a superior Sri Lankan military outfit, consisting of the Army, Air-Force and Navy. In actual fact, the enormous quantity of arms and ammunition, long and short range missiles, weapons of conventional warfare and land mines recently unearthed, and a number of air-crafts, submarines, fleet of Sea Tiger boats discovered after the military defeat of the LTTE, tell a different story.

The authorial gesture of the novella also has to do with expressing political discontentment. Perhaps the aim of this stirring novella is essentially to open the eyes of insensitive Government authorities, to the plight of the civilians of a community in dire circumstances forced to live in the region. Suriyakumaran is obviously aware that the Northern Tamils must be presented as victims if they are to garner the world's sympathy, which would invariably force the Government to develop a healthier political and economic outlook and, above all, respect human rights. He insists quite tenaciously on the point that successive Governments failed to bring about peace, and accuses Southern Sinhalese politicians of creating a climate of hatred. One of the political observations enshrined in the novel is Suriyakumaran's reference to the "political myopia of the government" (89), in which he implies that it is the Sinhalese who are responsible for the creation of the LTTE, and that is why the rebel organization is needed to protect the Northern Tamils from inhuman atrocities and from the hypocrisy of an intolerable political and economic order, espoused by each successive Government. He insinuates that Northern Tamil youths' actions are shaped by their circumstances and that at a political level the several Governments have failed to develop and implement political strategies to provide an alternative path to the Tamil youth from being sucked into the gun culture and the mind-set of suicide bombers. But more significantly, it is an undeniable fact that the conflict has caused thousands of civilian casualties of all ethnicities inhabiting Sri Lanka. However, the author scarcely mentions the insidious effects of continuous terrorism, although the calamities that the Northern people are facing, which his novella is about, are specifically because of that. The central deficiency in Suriyakumaran's novella is, therefore, the attribution of less culpability to the terrorists and the display of a reduced sensitivity to atrocities committed by them. His inordinate partiality to the LTTE is evident throughout the novel, and the reasons for his



persistent attribution of heroic qualities to the terrorist organisation perhaps arises from his extreme personal motivation to attract the attention of the international community into the region. Suriyakumaran's descriptions of the plight of the Northern civilians whose lives are in constant danger and the prevailing political situation are however realistically presented:

Everybody knew that it was a political solution and none else that mattered. It was indeed so for a long time, but pride and miscalculation on the one side, and sheer near unmatched stubbornness, and skill of the guerrillas on the other, dragged the conflict on. There was talk of peace, some of it totally superficial for lack of real thinking behind it. There was also a new attempt of facilitation, with a friendly outside source to help. (94)

With varying degrees of optimism, a negotiated settlement was attempted several times. But, in reality, the conflict was neither solved with the help of "a friendly outside source" who were mainly the Nordic facilitators, nor through a negotiated political settlement during periods of ceasefire. The war came to an end through aggressive military operations which cost both ethnic groups thousands of lives.

Suriyakumaran appears to have mastered an ability to create both doubts and conviction in the reader's mind; to make us mistrust his narrative perspective and at the same time he persuades us that his is the most compelling truthful rendering of events, which have hitherto hampered civilian life. Yet, the novella is an incisive and compassionate psychological examination of both the situation and the setting. Suriyakumaran's relationship to Jaffna makes the characteristics of the place metaphorically equivalent to his developing identity as a novelist, as much as the feeling of connection to the place, which partly gives his characters, images of depth.

Suriyakumaran's single-minded pursuit of the essential war situation with Jaffna as the crucible for demonstrating the victimization of innocent civilians caught up in the war is further evident by the following. The worst news that Rajes receives from home is the death of her brother who is inadvertently caught in aerial strafing by the Sri Lankan Air Force. Hers is a family who has experienced multiple losses during the conflict. The deteriorating physical and mental health of those who have lost their loved ones in the conflict becomes evident to Rajes and Khanna when they visit their parents after the untimely death of her brother: "The father was hardly able to carry himself, near skin and bones, even stammering slightly. It was clear to Khanna and Rajes that it was simply due to what they had gone through" (93). The father dies shortly afterwards, and Rajes's mother is hit by a stray bullet and is confined to a wheelchair. Due to lack of medical care in the region, her demise is near. Of the Northern Tamils, the only people who are living in peace and prosperity are the lucky ones who have been able to migrate to the West. With descriptions of the travails of the Northern Tamils, the author graphically illustrates the theme of gross human rights violations and the hopes of entire families being dashed by the grim realities of the ethnic conflict. Further, highlighting unquantifiable losses of human lives and property, he consolidates the persecution theme

indicated above, and the graphic details of such atrocities certainly provide the author legitimacy to make the point.

In the absence of a home-made solution to the problems, the outlook conveyed in the novella is pessimistic. Suriyakumaran forecasts an intimation of a conflict of a greater complexity and announces with heavy foreboding, the potential for further discord. He demonstrates that human values have been debased by war and as a result, mankind has lapsed into atrocities. Whilst reflecting on the desecration of Tamil cultural roots and atrocities that his people have been subjected to, he is extremely suggestive that most of the blame is upon the Sinhala supremacists and the politicians who are mobilizing a superior military organisation against the innocent Tamils and applying a pernicious system of discrimination. Suriyakumaran appears to be seeking political remedies in his novella, for the wrongs his people have suffered. Therefore, the novella appears to be a cry for greater devolution of power for his people and restoration and entrenchment of human rights through a new constitution in the lines of mono-ethnic separatism. The tale, which is very successfully told in terms of emotional persuasion, ends with an apocalyptic sounding, yet poignantly and ethically significant rhetorical question. “Was the country going to bleed forever?” (118). Suriyakumaran’s use of such a connotative ending, which subtly denotes a complex state of affairs surrounding the conflict and a convoluted political position, reiterates the incapability of successive Governments in bringing about a peaceful settlement. In a particular sense, the novella is a satiric portrait of Sri Lankan Governments’ capacity to distance itself from the social chaos and the suffering of its own citizens, whatever ethnic group they belong to. It appears that the Kilali lagoon will be a symbol of division, in a nation struggling to unify after three decades of bloody war.

### **3.7.2.3 Mutual Understanding, a Requisite for Peace** ***The Road from Elephant Pass (2003) by Nihal de Silva***

What is most significant in *The Road from Elephant Pass (2003)*<sup>62</sup> is Nihal de Silva’s skilful representation of the ethnic problem from the point of view of a Tamil female fighting for a separate state, and that of a very national minded Sinhalese military officer. The characters’ rhetorical effectiveness is enhanced by presenting opposing views on the conflict. These arguments of abrasive eloquence which are confronted and finely balanced with descriptions depicting the hostile ground realities of the ongoing civil war do full justice to the topic.

The major part of the action is set in the 325,000 acre large Wilpattu game sanctuary, a National Park. The author, de Silva, is utterly familiar with the setting of his

---

<sup>62</sup> *The Road to Elephant Pass* won the Gratien Prize in 2003. It was written during the height of the ethnic war which engulfed the country for thirty years. This best-selling novel was also awarded the State Literary Award in 2004. Due to the fact that the novel has enjoyed significant commercial success and extravagant critical praise, it has been made into a popular movie in Sinhala, called “Alimankada” (Elephant Pass).

novel, being a keen amateur naturalist and also because of his lifelong love for wildlife. Throughout, the author displays his avid enthusiasm in avifauna which breaks the tension between two extremely different main characters, entrenched in opposing regional and communal loyalties which surface during the narrative trajectory of the story. The richness of wild life that the Wilpattu National Park offers appears to have nurtured the full expression of the author's creative imagination. The use of a large body of animal and plant imagery endemic to Sri Lanka gives the narrative an essential Sri Lankan touch, and it is de Silva's double perspective as author and nature lover that enabled him to write this novel.

Unfortunately, the park became a completely lawless region, frequented by Sri Lankan army deserters, LTTE terrorists, smugglers, illicit loggers and poachers, during the ethnic war. For over a decade, the security of the Park was neglected as the Sri Lankan Army hardly patrolled the area and the Park was closed to the public. Tragically, de Silva himself was a fatal victim of LTTE terrorism when he was caught in a landmine explosion, at the same National Park in 2006 while he was travelling with some officers of the Sri Lankan Army who were his friends. His untimely death meant a great loss for Sri Lankan literature in English. Other best-sellers of the same author are *The Giniralla Conspiracy* (2005), concerning the Southern insurgency and *The Far Spent Day* (2004), which exposes the prevailing system of political corruption and aggression. His works are immensely praiseworthy for the mere fact that they deal with volatile situations that have arisen in post-Independence Sri Lanka which the author presents in the most unbiased manner.

The story starts in the Northern part of Sri Lanka, where Captain Wasantha Ratnayake, an Army Officer attached to an Infantry Brigade, is ordered by his superiors to accompany to the Colombo Army Headquarters a Tamil female member of the LTTE who has voluntarily become an informer. Kamala Velaithan has taken an unusual decision to inform against the separatist movement because the LTTE had summarily executed her brother in a cruel manner, on the orders of their leader. His gruesome killing had made her mother go insane. Kamala wishes to avenge his killings by giving information to the head of the Army Intelligence, so that they can ambush the LTTE leader, on a particular day, at a particular location.

Kamala's and the Captain's meeting point is at the strategic Elephant Pass, which is the narrow strip of land which connects the mainland to the Jaffna Peninsula; the Tiger stronghold and the nerve centre of the war. She arrives at the appointed time with her ten-year-old son, to whom she bids a sad farewell. Elephant Pass is an area of tactical importance for both the LTTE and the forces and a theatre for constant, intense battle. Kamala joins the Captain and his driver, but on the way, their jeep is attacked and the driver is killed on the spot. Amidst the sounds of battle surrounding them, they flee the area by foot and attempt to cross the lagoon. In order to avoid police and army check

points on the main roads, the Captain plans to trek across the Wilpattu National Park, and reach Colombo along with his charge, despite having to face extraordinary risks.

De Silva's investment in exoticism in the text is conspicuous throughout the journey through the National Park which takes nine days and it is during this period that most of the action in the novel takes place. It is a journey which follows a meandering course full of bizarre events, in which each detail of the landscape addresses the travellers' capacity for hope and despair and for fortitude and weakness. In a village, they steal a motor bicycle to help them to get on to the tracks inside the Park but they are forced to abandon the vehicle when it runs out of fuel. They buy some provisions to last the journey through the forest. As the journey progresses the Captain develops a strong dislike towards the woman because of his deep sense of suspicion about her connections to the LTTE and her actual intentions. She in turn treats him with aloofness and reserve. From there on, the theme centring on the inevitable man-woman relationship remains a significant presence throughout the novel. The narrative confirms the traditional male perspective, in which the man finds authority because he is in charge of a woman, thus fulfilling the role of a dominator. Despite his superior position, Kamala does not fall victim to domineering masculine habits. The author develops a particularly strong, self-confident and independent female character in Kamala, despite the harrowing experiences she has apparently gone through in her private life.

An appropriate narrative device that de Silva uses to inform the reader of the actual war situation is through the succinct and witty arguments replete with heightened rhetoric between the twin central characters, during which both exhibit patriotic fervour. Together, they constitute a diametrically opposite psyche and thus a remarkable range of opposing views on the conflict is revealed through their dialogue. The fact that the novel's chosen protagonists are of different ethnicity enables the author to depict diverse communal views of the two ethnic groups in their attempts to justify the necessity of violence to curb the actions of the warring parties. She vociferously expresses her general disapproval of the Sinhalese race, by relating the personal losses to her family during the July 1983 racial riots in Colombo. Her father was attacked, and their home burnt to ashes. The death of her father forced the family to move to Jaffna. Kamala is extremely bitter because she has internalised the family tragedies caused by the war.

The war rhetoric is more conspicuous and heightened in the narrative when the Captain reminds her of the deadly attack on thirteen Sinhalese soldiers in Jaffna which precipitated the mob violence in the South. He argues that the Tamil aspiration of establishing an exclusive, traditional homeland by carving out one third of the land area of the country is absurd when the majority of the Tamil population of the country are living in Southern areas while no other ethnic groups are tolerated in the North by the LTTE. She refutes his arguments by bringing forth a territorial claim that the areas in question have been occupied by the Tamil speaking people in ancient times, and that history books and chronicles written by the ancient Sinhalese are bogus and erroneous at

their best. He counters the above argument by insisting that the falsification of history by the Tamils is a means for controlling the present. She musters all the arguments against Sri Lankan Army strafing and indiscriminate bombings, and reiterates the dire need for a separate state where the Northern Tamils can live in peace. She defeats him with a caustic repartee about the misconduct of Army officers which has caused untold suffering to her family. During the arguments, both protagonists display unswerving loyalty to their own ethnic group. Kamala continues to accuse the Government of politicising the Sinhalese suffering on the one hand and obliterating Tamil suffering on the other. She reiterates that the Tamil people can no longer tolerate crass discrimination and the continual defeat of their expectations by the Sinhalese people, and the demand for a separate state is to live in dignity and not as a lower class, subservient race, subjected to ethno-class divisions. The venom of her comments leaves the Captain baffled and slighted.

De Silva shuffles between claims and counter-claims during these heated arguments between the Captain and Kamala, designed to illustrate the irreconcilable differences between the two communities, and to convey the impression that the two adversaries are locked into seemingly endless war because of their blind hatred to each other. The rhetorical strength and the spirit of their words flesh out the arguments of the two adversaries. In a somewhat balanced manner, the views and sensibilities of both ethnic groups are comprehensibly presented. Thus, the rhetorical treatment of the ethnic situation serves a dual narrative purpose. The author has omitted extreme invectives, racial rhetoric and epithets, indelicate and infelicitous expressions or any demeaning descriptions of either ethnic group in these arguments, and in general has avoided pouring vitriol into the dialogue. Neither are there any wilful distortions of facts by either party. Instead, by adhering to necessary brevity and irony, a significant impact on certain elusive aspects of the ethnic conflict is presented.

Since fresh water is a commodity essential for the survival of the pair, the water holes carry a powerful and evocative symbol during the greater part of the narrative. There is a crucial moment, however, when Kamala asks the geo-culturally significant question, as to why all the water holes in the Park are still carrying Tamil names like "Pandi Villu" (means "Water hole of the Pigs") and "Kokkare Villu" (means "Water hole of the Herons"). The question is ostensibly provoked by the various territorial claims of both ethnic communities, reiterated by Kamala and the Captain. She seems to determine territorial ownership and belonging through place-names in the Tamil language. Here, we can observe a clear linguistically based example of the Tamil separatist claim for a homeland, relying on age-old place-name etymology. By the very inclusion of the above, de Silva seems inclined to accept the fact that there had been a southward movement and settlement by an ancient insular Northern community which accounts for the Tamil names given to the waterholes. Simultaneously, de Silva appears to confirm that the conscious manipulation of history could become a mechanism that threatens socio-

political stability when warring factions are attempting to further ethnic supremacy through claims of territorial ownership.

The powerful exchange of facts between the two of them provides a sufficient thematic description of the ethnocentric attitudes dealt with elsewhere in the text. In the heat of indignation, an ironically comic element combined with disdain and innuendo is also introduced into the narration, when Kamala sarcastically comments that the Captain should one day claim that “Periya Pandi Villu” (148) be named after him (“Periya” in Tamil means “big”). The nomenclature “Periya Pandi Villu” is charged with the irony of an understatement and while playing with words Kamala is subtly insinuating that he is a “great male-chauvinist pig.” This final witty remark adversely affects the Captain’s untrammelled ego and brings the piquant conversational exchange to an emphatic closure. The satiric basis of her comment, however, becomes clearer when we turn from its territorial meaning to its aesthetic implication as well.

On the other hand, it is impossible to tell whether de Silva intends to be comic or serious, as one of the enduring problems of territorial claims of the Tamils is the articulation of place-names connected to early settlements. It is also unclear whether the words “Periya Pandi Villu” has only a textual function, or an aesthetic evocation or whether de Silva is reluctantly subscribing to the theory that the region was once upon a time a Tamil area. The above carefully calibrated dialogue and the tit-for-tat moralising, convey to the reader the realities of the territorial aspect of the ethnic divide in which a Tamil ethnic group is claiming a part of Sri Lanka as their own. The text, however, demonstrates that battles fought through verbal sparring are the only ones worth waging, and that major differences can be solved through mediation and compromise.

The world created by de Silva is at once familiar to those who have visited tropical wildlife parks, and simultaneously unfamiliar because he takes the readers on a perilous journey where unexpected events take place every step of the way. De Silva celebrates the exotic, tropical setting of the National Park and enriches the narrative with his descriptions of the abundant presence of indigenous wild animals. Through his use of wild-animal imagery, de Silva depicts scenes of danger in the forest. Further, he makes keen observations about the plant and animal life that is native to the land. The novel not only illustrates de Silva’s preoccupation with nature, but also demonstrates his intimate knowledge of indigenous medicinal herbs which he demonstrates with zeal. His cumulative and repeated use of natural imagery suggests that the unpolluted wilderness provokes fresh associations and re-asserts the analogizing power of natural facts for spiritual ones. His precise observations of nature invite comparison with the writings of Walt Whitman.

Examining the essence of the plot, one can see that de Silva is unrelentingly in pursuit of an elusive future in a predominantly violent landscape. In doing so, he moves us increasingly to the dangerous realms – on to the unknown – to an unpredictable terrain where no assumptions are possible. The mental and emotional state of the main

characters gradually aligns, due to the common, savagely threatening circumstances that they face together in the unfamiliar surroundings of the forest Park. In this part of the story, the protagonists are pitted in conflict against wild animals and renegade soldiers hiding in the Park, and not against each other. The narrative is full of arresting images of an attacking sloth bear, an encounter with a leopard and a herd of charging, wild buffaloes. During their risk-laden trek, Kamala saves the Captain's life by alerting him to the close presence of a lone and enraged rogue elephant. There is increasing physical intimacy when they snatch each other from imminent harm. Thus, a significant sexual symbolism with the wilderness context of the novel is established, which becomes stronger during the latter part of the novel.

The metaphorical relationship between the wild jungle and the unseen dangers lurking in the Park are thus richly exploited, rife with exotic images. These dangers are not only from wild animals, but also from renegade soldiers of the Sri Lankan army hiding in the jungle, from Tamil terrorists engaged in covert operations and clandestine illegal activity in the area. From a literary point of view, these men are depicted as backward and dangerous despots. The setting has its own intrinsic challenges, replete for an adventure novel. Later on in the story, they have a bizarre encounter with some men hiding in the forest. The captain seizes a moment of heroism by saving Kamala's life. He kills a man from the group who attempts to abduct her in order to gang rape her. In this instance, he excels in demonstrating his physical prowess, and also his adherence to official imperatives as he has been ordered to deliver Kamala safely to the Army authorities in Colombo.

De Silva uses the "survivor/saviour" motif, as a means of revealing the protagonists' characters. After these life-threatening encounters in the jungle, during which they save each other's lives, the two protagonists unwittingly come to understand and care for each other. They reach across cultural and ethnic boundaries in order to survive, and their previous aloofness and hostility transform into intimacy and understanding, emphasising the possibility of a renewed amity and peaceful coexistence between the two warring ethnic groups. Significantly, the reader is presented with a gallery of images of the male ego depicted in heroic proportions where male supremacy is highly accentuated. The heroic metaphors create the impression that the Captain, although a military officer, has never slain wantonly or stained his hand in innocent blood but only in self-defence. Violence in respect to chivalry among men is a traditional gender marker and this is demonstrated by the Captain killing the attempted rapist to save Kamala. Even in this act, he is neither depicted as a ruthless soldier crushed in spirit by the brutal regimentation of military life, nor is he seen to be embittered by the deception, hypocrisy and cruelty one finds in pursuit of war aims. In his eagerness to use masculine imagery, the author has further imbued the Captain with virtues close to Western ideals of masculinity. They are physical daring, endurance, chivalry, the explorer spirit, the

masculine spirit of adventure and triumph over nature, and independence of mind which are descriptions that characterizes heroes of contemporary Western adventure stories.

The accommodation of the female protagonist also as a heroine, but at a lower and mundane level, is evident by the fact that she is bestowed with qualities such as patience, adaptability, emotional reserve, thriftiness, culinary competence and concerns about cleanliness and hygiene. The writer's engagement with Eastern ideas is further reflected in the above feminist sensibility that is conspicuous. An essentialization of womanhood, Kamala is portrayed with the nurturing and potency motif of feminine energy. She appears in favourable light with the sustenance trope as well, because in the forest she prepares edible meals out of their meagre food resources. The feminine perspective of Kamala unmistakably infuses the narrative with Eastern sensibilities that may appear to be emerging from the influence of predominantly oriental ideologies. The author is, however, not attempting to cater to Western fantasies by depicting her as a strikingly exotic Third World woman. Sri Lankan women naturally fit into the description of Kamala, especially mothers and housewives. The forces of masculinity and bravery are, however, far more prominent in the narrative than powerful feminine qualities. The conception of somewhat untrammelled masculine strength and the evocation of a man of virility are also assumed by the Captain himself: "I am a fairly powerful man with well above average strength" (242).

Kamala charts her own distinctive identity throughout the narrative. She is noted for her passive considerateness towards the Captain, her obliging disposition, her innovative and supportive ways, especially after their relationship improves. Her heroism lies partly in her willingness to serve the Captain. Despite the fact that there are commonplace assumptions that women become overwrought and highly distressed in the face of danger and are incapable of acting fearlessly under duress, Kamala performs her duties heroically and plays a splendid supportive role. Therefore she does not appear completely insignificant compared to the Captain, nor does de Silva designate heroism only to the male protagonist, as she too is attributed with characteristics of exceptional courage, tenacity and fortitude. Nevertheless, the narrative fundamentally tends to evaluate a woman's worth in terms of her culinary and domestic capacities and her biological value.

The exuberance of de Silva's style of writing springs from the setting itself. The essence of the two protagonists in the novel lies also in the relationship of each figure to the creative fertility of the environment with which they interact. The pair has to flee from one place to another, leaving behind as little trails as possible, because the enraged comrades of the dead man are at their heels. As they trek from one water hole to another, and with each danger they face, there is a gradually growing intimacy between the Captain and Kamala. The river and water imagery signal renewal, expressing a nostalgic hope for peace and prosperity and thus this ancient and universal water signification takes on a special meaning. Vivid nature imagery, which abounds in the jungle in the



form of fauna and flora, stirs the aesthetic sense of the two main characters and they find common ground in their mutual love for wild-life and nature which surrounds them:

The forest was particularly rich in pigeons that morning and I saw bronze-wings darting swiftly across our path, their attractive brown and green wings glinting in the sunlight. Velaithan spotted a pair of very large pigeon-like birds with iridescent green wings and grey heads sitting on a branch and cooing drowsily to each other. (190)

Critically examining whether de Silva is deliberately exoticizing the setting, the excessive exoticism revealed in the narrative does not appear as a marker of conspicuous difference designed to appeal to Western audiences but as a conscious rendering of the author's specific cultural knowledge of his own habitat and his appreciation of the aesthetic aspects of it.

Later in the tale, "Seated on a horizontal branch, and staring down at us, was a large owl with long barred ear tufts that stuck out of its head like handlebars" (236). Apparently it was not an owl but a morbid devil-bird, which according to Sri Lankan superstitions portends death. By the inclusion of the "devil-bird," de Silva may once again appear to be conforming to self-exotization. He is using the bird-of-the-night imagery as a harbinger of a moment of foreboding finality or a chilling pointer to an ominous, fatal event in the near future. The death symbolism that is attached to this scene negates the idea of fertility and a promising union of the two protagonists. The narrative is thus riddled with the kind of explicit foreshadowing that implies authorial omniscience and the episode of the devil-bird is a part of a larger cluster of images of death, associated with the ethnic war. In this instance, de Silva is forecasting the Captain's imminent violent death that occurs towards the end of the story, which is predictable considering the deadly occupation that he is engaged in.

The narrative moves ceaselessly between different models of relationships: suspicion and trust, aloofness and communication, silence and a flow of invectives against each other's ethnic failures, rejection and acceptance, and such. Despite hair-splitting subtleties of deep communal controversies, ideological differences and articulation of contradictory and antagonist elements which plague the two main characters at first, the bond that gradually forges between them later transcends to more than a mere friendship and their ideas align with time. There is a cross-cultural collaboration between the Army Officer and his charge during the trek when they share information about the plants and the animals in the surrounding areas. The above sentiments were confirmed by de Silva himself in 2005, when interviewed about the characterization of the novel by Ilica Malkanthi Karunaratne of the *Island* newspaper in Colombo:

My intention was to show that even the greatest enemies, forced to be so because of circumstances beyond their control, could be friends, grow to respect and understand each other and agree to disagree amicably on issues which they differ on. This is why I chose a person in the army and a follower of the LTTE. (*Island*, 14. Apr. 2005)

Here, we see de Silva advocating a kind of general healing of social ills, to be achieved through exchange of knowledge of multi-ethnic traditions and collaborative effort.

There is mystery, passion and further immersion into the unknown when an adult sensibility is brought to bear on the narrative. Despite the fact there is a certain degree of racial prejudice which has deep roots in the taboo against inter-racial sex, the two main characters are inevitably physically attracted to each other and the Captain makes love to Kamala in a secluded spot in the forest. Although the sexual dynamics of the scene are left out, the imagery of the moment is at once transparent and richly suggestive. No emotive words of love are exchanged between the pair and neither does the scene radiate an aura of romantic love, but perhaps a desperate sexual need. By the part of the Captain it is not sexual victimization or forced brutal sex, as one would expect from an Army officer, but pure consensual sex on the part of the two protagonists.

In this first physical release of their love, they seem to have brave illusions about each other, especially as the character of the Captain has been established as that of a chivalric soldier. Although he has played the part of a heroic protector during most part of the journey, they do not take a vow of eternal fidelity nor give the impression that a vital marriage is imminent or even possible. This final joining of body and soul is depicted as an erasure of earlier discord, stemming from ethnic prejudices, and finally as a kind of epiphany. Predictably, once the emotional high of the moment has worn off after their brief sexual encounter, Kamala's safety and welfare again become the Captain's prime concerns. The Captain's concern also reinforces his own gratifying role as the protector, and thus a subtle finesse is accorded to his character. He knows that her situation as a traitor of her leader and a deserter of the movement is potentially dangerous: "The Tigers would summarily execute any villager suspected of collaborating with government troops" (419). She is also cognizant of the risks and the repercussions that her actions would invariably entail. As their friendship becomes stronger, they learn to trust each other and discuss their family backgrounds, their personal past and their ambitions for the future. She too becomes concerned about the dangers that he will face while fighting the terrorists in the North.

De Silva seeks to contain in the novel a narrative similar to the canonical English books within the European novelist tradition, in the interest of the Westernized English speaking public. During the two protagonists' hazardous journey through the National Park they "had negotiated the minefield, overcome countless threats and hurdles, and emerged miraculously unharmed" (426), and gradually their mutual antipathy completely thaws. In this respect, the story has similarities to Henry Rider Haggard's adventure novel *King Solomon's Mines*, in which one of the main male characters saves the life of a significant female character that is to be offered as a human sacrifice. She in turn repays her gratitude by nursing him when he is near fatally injured in battle. The overwhelming sense of danger in the National Park, contrasted against the paradise-like beauty of unspoilt nature is similar to Haggard's depiction of the frightful journey

through the African wilderness. Even the meticulous habits of personal cleanliness of the female character of Haggard's adventure novel and that of the female protagonist of de Silva's novel are identical, despite the extraordinariness of place and circumstances. *Road to Elephant Pass* draws upon recognizable Gothic elements of suspension and terror, richly laden with elements of encounters with the unknown. In fact, the author recaptures the aspects of romance, unseen dangers and unpredictable circumstances which fit much into Haggard's narrative practice. Western literary influence of the author and the "[...] mixing of Western genres with local content" (Gandhi 1998: 150) are evident in de Silva's narrative, which is essentially a distinctive blend of Western technique and Eastern material.

The inclusion of accounts in the narrative which denote an ability to escape multiple dangers in the forest, the stamina to survive a long trek and the innovative skills of the adventurer, all seem to run parallel to the grain of a theme of a journey accomplished. When the Captain and his charge reach Colombo, it is evening and he takes her to his best friend's house. He requests his friend to give her shelter and look after her welfare till such time that she is able to migrate to Canada. She tearfully promises to write to the Captain from Canada. The next day, the female informer is to meet the Head of the Military Intelligence. The Captain and the female informer part ways at the Military Headquarters, and neither one of them are able to conspicuously and openly express their feelings or intimacy in the official surroundings of the heavily guarded building.

For the Captain, duty is his first call and after his mission is completed, the highly nationally conscious Captain returns to his responsibilities at the Elephant Pass base. On the 22nd of April 2000, the base receives an order from the Commander of the army to withdraw and relocate the troops, as heavy fighting has broken out elsewhere. On leaving the base, the troops come under heavy LTTE fire and they suffer enormous casualties. The tragic climax and the conclusion of the story is when the Captain's mother receives a letter from his Commanding Officer, informing her that he has been declared "missing in action." According to eyewitness account, the Captain is last seen attempting to rescue one of his colleagues injured by sniper fire when the whole area is devastated by a heavy bomb explosion. It can be observed that even the circumstances leading to his death are associated with heroic qualities.

According to Solnes, the Icelandic monitor attached to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, the period 1997-2001 was a time when the LTTE showed superiority in fighting tactics and managed to overrun the Government military complex at Elephant Pass. As a result, the morale of the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) was low and as stated in Solnes's *A Powderkeg in Paradise*:

To this backdrop in the conflict, the LTTE had launched the massive ground-attack on the SLA complex at Elephant Pass, unusual for an organisation that preferred guerrilla tactics of asymmetric warfare rather than comprehensive and complex conventional operations. Although the LTTE did not possess the firepower of the SLA, its cadres seemed to outweigh that handicap by ruthless determination in battle. The LTTE had managed to cut off the

support roads to Elephant Pass and had then broken through the outer perimeters of the giant camp. The SLA defense [sic] seemed to implode as a result of the onslaught. (6)

De Silva appears to be referring to one of many such battles which took place in the area of Elephant Pass in late 1990s and early 2000s during which there were heavy casualties on both sides. In one particular spectacular offense at Elephant Pass during the year 2000, the Sri Lankan Army suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Tamil tigers and the LTTE managed to overrun the Sri Lankan Army.

The novel having been written by a naturalist who knows the terrain well, it provides a vivid description of the interior of the Wilpattu National Park, especially the tracks that lead to every water hole. It is regional and conveys an intimate sense and knowledge of a given place and, moreover, it is firmly tethered in detail to the author's own experience and cultural knowledge and therefore it bears the stamp of his character. De Silva examines the ethnic conflict through the twin tropes of racial animosities and exoticism and the novel is quintessentially modern and conversational in its prose. The distinctive and recurring motifs of the novel are the ecstatic accounts of the park's fauna and flora, and the reader is continually seduced by the magnificent and picturesque scenes of exotic nature imagery which has a typical Sri Lankan essence. From a Saidian point of view, excessive reliance on exotic descriptions of the setting may appear to weaken the narrative. S. W. Perera points out in an introductory article in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*:

Several false notes are struck when the two [protagonists] begin to "debate" about the ethnic conflict, when they suddenly discover a mutual love for nature that counteracts their disparate backgrounds, and when the author creates several "still points" to launch into a lecture on different kinds of fauna and flora in the jungles from Elephant Pass to Puttalam. The last obviously targets foreign readership and such explanatory passages debilitate the novel. (178-188)

But one has to take into consideration that "exoticism" is a culturally bound definition and the fact that the author is a lover of nature and wildlife, to whom it seems natural to draw upon his knowledge. Therefore it should not be perceived that detailed attention to landscape and the romanticised stereotypical vision of the Orient projected in the novel are only intended to titillate European Orientalist imagination because his presentation is also driven by his personal interests and experience and genuine familiarity with the appearance and the conditions of the setting.

The story fits into the wild adventure genre and is also a well-documented tale of war. Although the setting is depicted as exotic and pristine, it is also a place of savagery where the two protagonists experience harsh realities of survival. Examined from the angle of the war in Sri Lanka, the rhetoric of a military man and a female Tamil rebel reveals how entrenched regional loyalties survive as a disruptive force beneath domestic harmony and compromise. However, the rhetorical device used by de Silva not only serves to inform the reader but also softens the impact of the destructive and vengeful

sentiments and expressions of controversial heat and venomous rancour in the dialogue. The discursive pattern contains traces of deeper ideological struggle and reveals the hopes and struggles of both the warring communities. The rhetoric of the two main characters poised and sustained throughout the narrative, and the contents are sharply contemporary in matter and manner. In this respect, the tale can be considered as a social parable, whose power lies in the quality of the conversation it creates. The romantic element in the novel commences when the two protagonists belonging to the two warring ethnicities help each other to survive in the dangerous jungle terrain while the characters' surroundings are incessantly fraught with constant edginess and anxiety. Thus, the generic dissolution of the novel takes the form of a collage of multiple genres; romance, adventure, travel and realist.

The unbiased and balanced nature of the novel is an eye-opener and an appropriate and a valuable contribution towards the process of building bridges between the two dissenting communities. Important revelations in the novel betray that the author himself is trapped in an ambivalent attitude towards the conflict. Despite the fact that he is Sinhalese, he sees the attitudes of the majority of Sri Lanka as responsible for the sectarian violence that has spread across the country during the last decades. It is evident that his liberal judgement in characterization and chosen situations is delivered from a cultivated moral standpoint. Above all, the novel conveys the message that reconciliation and resolution of the long standing conflict are feasible through mutual understanding and communal collaboration.

#### **3.7.2.4 A Tale of Love, Death and Duty** ***No Longer My Child* (2005) by Arthur de Zoysa**

In the Preface of *No Longer My Child* (2005), Arthur de Zoysa,<sup>63</sup> states the reasons which provoked him to write this particular piece of fiction:

As an eyewitness to many an incident on that fateful day in July 1983 and as a keen follower of the inhuman atrocities which occurred throughout the country, mass murder in unprotected settlements, shrines and public places, I was driven by the urge to record them and compile them in book form. The reader will note that almost all the incidents described in this narration are real and true as reported in the media, official reports and acceptance by the militants themselves.

The author has thus interlaced true facts with fictitious characters, to form a plot of fiction to convey a glimpse of the sordid truth during the tumultuous ethnic war between the Sinhala and Tamil people of Sri Lanka. The novel is an indictment against war and the ethnic conflict, and the story has as its central theme the self-destructiveness of

---

<sup>63</sup> *No Longer My child* is Arthur de Zoysa's first serious attempt in writing fiction, although he is known for legal and theoretical aspects of writing. He is a Human Resources Professional who boasts over thirty years of service in that field during which period he held important positions in more than six State Corporations and in two large Industrial Organisation in Sri Lanka. Presently he is retired and is engaged in private consultancies.

terrorism. An exact historical relation of real facts reported in the narration in reference to the growing rift between the two communities, makes this novel stand out from others written on the subject of ethnic violence. It is a meditation on the conflict between good and evil, and the relationship between sin and responsibility, which is achieved by employing two starkly different characters, one damnable and the other admirable.

Thambiah and his wife Rajeswary are two law abiding Tamil citizens and responsible parents living in a spacious, comfortable, country home in a remote Northern village in the Jaffna Peninsula. Although they have heard about the aspirations of the Tamil people of obtaining a separate state or an Eelam, they believe that they are “matters for the politicians and the Parliament to decide” (3). The sheer scale of the problem eludes them for the moment and they are complacent and content with their trouble-free lives. They are proud parents of offspring who are seemingly doing well and their world is woven around their children’s progress. Their two married daughters are both doctors of medicine and live and work abroad. Their sons Shamendran is a lieutenant in the Sri Lankan Army, attached to a cantonment in Batticaloa, in the Eastern Province, and Harendran is a chemical engineer in a private Company, Voltec [Lanka] Ltd., which deals with chemicals and electronic equipment. The Company’s Headquarters are based in the United States of America and Harendran has been selected, “to undergo training in advanced compact audio technology and sound frequency at the research bureau of the parent company in Minnesota” (9).

De Zoysa draws upon superstitions and belief in horoscope predictions in his narrative and seems to give the impression that the knowledge handed down by the ancients as regards to astrology is not altogether without meaning. Thambiah, during his younger days and during his spare time, has acquired the ability of horoscope reading. While examining his own horoscope and that of his family, he sees that the planetary configurations in the charts forebode disaster. He conveys his fears to his wife who does not believe that their comfortable way of life can be disturbed by any kind of turmoil. Presently, she is more preoccupied in her effort to find a suitable wife for her twenty-seven-year-old soldier son, Shamendran.

The sons come home for a weekend before Narendran’s departure to the United States. At that time an unknown young man visits their home to meet Narendran, and Rajeswari’s sixth sense, as a caring and cautious mother, is awakened to the intentions of a stranger. The visitor is one of the “Boys,” a member of the militant group fighting for a separate state, and the purpose of his visit is to induct Narendran into the LTTE. He is requested to mobilize Tamils living in the US to financially support their cause. The movement’s campaign to politicize and mobilize Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in order to generate finances for the LTTE is thus recorded in the novel. Narendran keeps the discussion during the meeting secret from his parents, but discusses with his father the situation in the country regarding the status of the 1.8 million Tamils living in Sri Lanka. His father declares that he is totally against violent means of gaining political leverage,

though he is afraid that the younger generation of Tamils have other views. The Tamil youth dedicated to the cause of a separate domicile “have been successful in implanting the seed of ethnic repugnance in their minds” (17). Here the narrative seems to imply that the communal conflict is gradually creating an ideological gulf between the older generations and the younger, and a consequent collapse of patriarchal authority in the community.

The parents’ complacency is rudely shaken when one of their neighbours is robbed at gunpoint by the “Boys” who are hell-bent on augmenting the funds by using any means. Similar incidents of blatant robberies in the area reduce unsuspecting residents to near destitution. These incidents inspire Rajeswari to find an ingenious way of hiding their meagre life savings and personal jewellery in a pipe which she fixes alongside the water pipeline to the kitchen. However, when a band of young men storm their home demanding money for “the cause,” out of fear she hands in all the cash they have at home. Little do they know that the so called “freedom fighters” are about to execute their plan of dispossessing the couple of their comfortable house as well.

A web of human relationships that lies at the heart of the tale brings out a universally valid image of human predicament, filial betrayal, break-down of family values and a deep chasm between generations. The entire Northern region is evidently undergoing an agonizing process of internal divisions, societal distractions and confused situations, as a result of the disturbing influences of war. The elders are helplessly attempting to cling to traditional values, arranging marriages and securing the future of their children, while the younger generation demands their compliance and complicity to engage in the war.

Parental worries deepen when the couple’s chemical engineer son, Harendran, goes abroad several times for some unknown reason, without their knowledge. He is requested by the LTTE to mobilize support from Tamil residents in North America: “There is money here. We collect from our brothers and sisters and pass it on to our brothers in Sri Lanka, Brothers and sisters in Canada we know are doing a great job” (23). The anxious mother interrogates him on one occasion, with the result that he disappears altogether. Harendran’s chemical engineering knowledge is highly valued and he becomes a key man in the LTTE movement and is put in charge of the manufacture of explosives and training of young men and women in handling bombs. He is only answerable to Sridharan, the leader of the movement. Months later, a group of young men involved in the movement barges into the parents’ home, demanding that they hand over the house for LTTE purposes. To their horror, one of the men in the group is their own son Harendran, and the parents are shocked beyond belief as to what is happening. They are forced to leave their comfortable home, which they reluctantly do, laden with mixed feelings of anger, sadness and betrayal.

This is a moment of revolution, a time of generational change, the passing of the old order for the establishment of a new, and most significantly a challenge to the

established social norms of the region. We also see the encapsulation of a family at a critical point of dysfunction. The source of pessimism and uncertainty that grips the older generation is to be found in the radical changes that are taking place. The attitudes and ideological outlook of the Tamil youth engaged in the ethnic war is aimed to fulfil LTTE aspirations. According to Hindu customs, sons are duty-bound to look after their aged parents, but Harendran rejects this obligation. Instead, we observe a breach of filial piety when a son turns against his parents and sacrilegiously invades their family home. We can also observe examples of radical alterations of the social and cultural landscape of the Northern region, due to the ongoing war. The LTTE dominance instigate ideological shifts which apparently alienate older generations from the younger who are actively involved in insurgency and, most alarmingly, young individuals from their former selves. While the older generation harbours anxiety about their children's involvement with the LTTE and the rapidly enveloping transformation in the region, educational, cultural, social and familial structures are crumbling down. The Tamil historian, Wilson, confirms the effects of the ethnic war: "It has also eroded the socio-cultural layers of Tamil society, and the traditional inter-family texture has suffered, probably beyond repair" (2000: 170).

De Zoysa reports the historical incident which took place in July 1983 when flames of ethnic hatred were ignited by an incident in which thirteen Sinhalese soldiers were killed by the "Boys" in Jaffna. Instead of handing the bodies of the soldiers to their families, the Government-backed security forces organised a collective funeral ceremony in the General Cemetery in Colombo to honour the dead. The inciting speeches made during the funeral orations of the soldiers whipped up racial hatred and mobs went on the rampage. As accurately described by de Zoysa:

It was appropriately called Black July. Every Tamil shop and every Tamil house in Colombo and in the suburbs and outstations were set on fire by nondescript gangs who went about in open trucks like angels of death and destruction. By sunset the sky overhead was a mass of black smoke and the dusk fell over the charred remains and dead bodies of men and women hacked to death by unknown hands. (46)

The incentive to riot was indeed a curious one. Those who were rioting had no relationship to the dead soldiers. By citing the above atrocities of the Sinhalese hooligans, de Zoysa is openly suggesting that the Sinhalese have become racist oppressors, and the Tamils are the victims and the dispossessed. However, we can also observe that he is veering uneasily between his own ethnic loyalties, as the political implications of the riots are not strongly marked in the narrative, but faintly suggested.

The sterner and darker features of the story are conceived in the life of the main protagonist, who is caught in the melee of revenge attacks and mob violence in Colombo. She is a thirteen-year-old Tamil school girl called Veena, who discovers the mutilated body of her father on the road side in the city. Highly traumatised by what she has witnessed, she rushes to her home in desperation to find that their house and that of



other Tamil neighbours have been set on fire. The hardly recognizable charred remains of her mother and her younger brother are later found by the police. Unable to come to terms with the horror and overwhelmed with the shock of it all, Veena falls unconscious by the roadside. A Sinhalese couple, Namal and Anoma Wijewardena, who pass by, pick her up and take her to their home and help her through her massive inner turmoil. After recuperating in their home, Veena is sent to a Catholic convent in Jaffna which takes care of orphans.

Living among strangers with the tragic trauma of her life haunting her, she starts a new life and fresh schooling. With courage and unbreakable spirit, she makes a valiant attempt to regain some kind of normalcy in her life. She makes occasional trips to Colombo to visit the Wijewardena family who are taking care of her interests. On one occasion, while travelling by bus from Colombo to Jaffna, she meets Harendran and they are instantly attracted to each other. As she is living under the strict care of nuns in the convent, she dismisses the possibility of ever getting to know him closely. The encounter proves to be a tantalizing attraction, as Harendran makes discreet inquiries to find out about her identity and to her enormous surprise, unexpectedly arrives at the convent to see her. Afraid of the strict code of behaviour expected out of her by the nuns, she quickly dismisses him but her thoughts are very much centred on him. Being a clever and hardworking student, she obtains entry into the Jaffna University, and prepares for a Bachelor's Degree in Commerce. University life offers her the freedom to meet Harendran, who at first keeps her in the dark about his involvement with the movement. Soon, she observes acute changes in his behaviour and finds that her suspicions are not quite unjustified. She senses an aggressive edge to his emotions and the tension between them is compounded by the weight of his silence. She also finds it rather strange that he does not ever speak about his family or his actual job. But after gentle interrogations, he confesses his involvement and dedication to the cause of the LTTE.

Despite her own losses and immense trauma, Veena abhors all forms of violence, but Harendran puts forward legitimate arguments to support the use of organised violence as a necessary evil required to achieve the ends of the movement, the final goal being to obtain a separate state. On his invitation, she visits a LTTE training camp where young recruits are instructed in the use of fire arms and construction of bombs. At the camp, she meets one of her former class mates, Ross, who has also lost her home and her relatives during the July ethnic riots in Colombo. To avenge her losses, Ross has become a formidable force in the movement, sharply in contrast to Veena's aversion to revenge and violence. Due to ideological differences, Veena develops a dislike of Ross, who is actively involved in covert operations. Veena remains a subdued observer in a world of startling events among revengeful people, and resists being drawn into a whirlpool of violence.

As the tale progresses, the reader is gradually introduced to the insidious and deceitful ways of the man Veena is infatuated with. The narrative is also filled with other

menacing, imperfect and irrational characters, and de Zoysa explores a complex interplay of human emotions, mediated through his characters' motives and actions. He ensures that his characters are not unrealistically insightful or over-endowed with self-knowledge. Even in their most open and self-revealing moments, some crucial information is held back or remains unclear. Veena for instance is somewhat disconcerted as she sees less and less of Harendran, during which time, under his expert guidance and tutelage, three LTTE women cadres explode the vehicle of the Deputy Defence Minister, Ranjan Wijeratne in Colombo. Here, the author includes the real name of the assassinated Minister and the exact location where the crime was committed, perhaps in order to give the novel an air of authenticity.

Members of the movement, who do not conform to the exact orders of their leader, are brutally done away with. Utmost obedience, compliance and dedication are expected of the members, whether they have been forcibly conscripted or not. One of the females who are absolutely pliant in the hands of their instructor Harendran is a young girl called Dharma. Understandably, she bears a deep personal grudge against the Sri Lankan Government and the leading Indian politicians for having allowed the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF),<sup>64</sup> to come to Sri Lanka, in order to quell the Tamil terrorists. On receiving false information about her younger brother's involvement with the rebels, a group of Indian cadres had forced themselves into their home and raped Dharma's sister and her mother and killed all her family members. Being the sole survivor of her family, she feels she owes a debt to the departed, and that is to take revenge on those at the top, who took the decision for the Indian involvement. Here, the author brings in the geopolitics of the region, as well as gender based violence connected to the war.

At this point of the narrative, in order to make the tale further credible, de Zoysa employs an actual, tragic, historical incident, namely the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, which left an indelible mark on the psyche of the people of India and also altered the way the Indian Government looked upon the ethnic problem of India's neighbour. This assassination was the penultimate of LTTE tactical, ruthless blunders and one that struck an emphatic political blow to Sri Lanka's powerful neighbour. For this act of self-defeat by the movement, Dharma volunteers to go to Chennai, a Southern city in India, along with other members of the movement where she rehearses the criminally deviant plan she is assigned to carry out. For her, suicide bombing is a means of liberation. With explosives strapped to her waist under expensive clothes, she goes for a political meeting of the Congress Party in Sriperumbudur, a town close to Chennai, where the former Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, is expected to address a political rally. She manages to avoid a stringent security check and approaches Gandhi with a garland in her hands, along with other well-wishers. With a bitter-sweet

---

<sup>64</sup> For further details about the function of IPKF in Sri Lanka, see K. M. de Silva's *A History of Sri Lanka*. (700-01)

feeling, after garlanding him, she bends down in obeisance to touch his feet according to Hindu customs, and at the same time she presses a button fixed to her waist band and instantly explodes the ex-Prime Minister and herself. Fourteen others die in the blast, including the photographer assigned to record the ghastly event. The camera which was later found revealed the identity of the perpetrators which bore all the hallmarks of LTTE crime. The barbaric assassination of Gandhi made the entire world realize the monstrosity of the LTTE movement which progressively annihilated with the same brutality, moderate Tamil politicians and Sri Lankan statesmen. Besides the assassination of Gandhi which had an immense political significance to the whole region, the abduction and forced recruitment of children and teenagers into LTTE fighting units weakened their image as freedom fighters.

Most of the time, de Zoysa conforms somewhat strictly to the authorial responsibility of providing accuracy to the above historically important incident. The actual place-name and time in connection to the Gandhi assassination are authentic, except the false name 'Dharama' given in the text to the female member of the LTTE who carried out the assassination, while the actual name of the suicide bomber is Thenmozhi Rajaratnam. The author's narrative thus raises questions regarding its authenticity, just as the name of the movement's leader given in the text is Sridharan, whereas the ultimate leader of the LTTE is none other than Velupillai Prabhakaran. Examining the reason why de Zoysa, at this juncture of the narrative does not comply with the strictures of authenticity despite his initial assertion in the Preface of the novel, it is impossible to speculate that the author is inadequately informed about historical facts regarding the assassination, and the Sri Lankan connection of the ethnic conflict to this brutal murder. Since de Zoysa's approach arguably demonstrates a deliberate irreverence towards the quest for authenticity, it can be construed that behind these disparities of the account might be his fear of reprisal by the LTTE.

In order to highlight the atrocities of the LTTE, de Zoysa brings in another victim, a young woman called Savitri, who has been gang raped by several men and left for dead. When she regains consciousness, she escapes and struggles to lead a normal life. Savitri and Veena work at the same University and she advises Veena not to get involved with the terrorist activities of the movement. It is from Savitri that Veena learns about Harendran's displaced parents and decides to find them. The parents by that time have regained their house and are surprised to see the unexpected visitor. Harendran's mother is hostile at the beginning but gradually warms up to Veena, when she confesses that she has nothing to do with the terrorist movement. To their dismay, she informs the parents that Harendran is the trainer and planner of all the isolated killings in the South.

The symbolism of Harendran as an embodiment of evil is achieved by intermittently highlighting his tragic flaws. The revolting and coarse aspect of his character, his ruthlessness and steely commitment to violence begin to predominate as the story progresses. It seems that he has already embarked on the road to his own destruction, as

well as that of others, and he tries in vain to forge Veena to be a terrorist just like him. But she becomes more and more disobliging than supportive towards his monstrous plans and steadfastly and artfully avoids bending to his wishes. She remains observant and constantly cautious about his insidious activities. Her feelings and opinions gets deeply coloured by her awareness of his LTTE involvement and his fixation on various demonic plans. Subsequently, Veena and another trainee of Harendran are forcibly assigned by him to visit the Army camp where Shamendran, his brother is stationed. The plan is to blow the brother up by using a ballpoint pen filled with explosives. Veena is horrified at the prospect of a brother wanting to kill one of his own siblings and finds it impossible to confront the task. She displays incredible personal heroism by sabotaging the meticulously organised criminal plan, by replacing the explosive pen with an ordinary one. She risks her own life by taking the opportunity to warn Shamendran about his brother's plans and activities, and beats Harendran at his own cruel game. The brother takes an instant liking towards her and she seems to be attracted to him too.

Harendran, who is by now depicted as a criminal anti-hero, coaxes the convent nuns to let him use the cellar of the large, old convent for his important experimental activities, but in reality he is manufacturing a sophisticated explosive of mass destruction, with a sinister plan in mind. This preparation and part of the action takes place in the cellar described as a den of intrigue. An element of science fiction and advanced technological skills are also added to the narrative to describe Harendran's experiments. Being a qualified chemical engineer, he displays ingenious dexterity in inventing strange gadgetry. Veena is requested by the nuns to carry food and drink to him to the cellar, which gives her the opportunity to follow her sleuthing activities and to find out more about his insidious plans. She observes that he is manufacturing a somewhat large device fitted with discs and getting curious as to what his plans are, she constantly spies on him.

Veena's mistrust and disenchantment increases when to her horror, she discovers a sexual relationship between Harendran and Ross. He seems to stray away from the rules that the terrorists are commanded to adhere, which is to maintain a dignified distance, sexually at least, from members of the opposite sex, so as to maintain discipline, order and a high level of morale. After this incident, he becomes haughty, egocentric and ever ready for an argument with Veena. Harendran's superficial, opportunistic behaviour is further exemplified when he attempts to rape Veena by using violence on an occasion when she comes down to the cellar to serve food to him. He shows no care for propriety or for the preservation of her virtue and the community's revulsion towards a young man going against the accepted, Hindu social codes in the region. In a grotesquely abnormal and unsafe situation in the cellar, which emanates Gothic elements and symbolic implications, she faces yet another tawdry actuality of Harendran's weaknesses. She manages to put on a fierce struggle and gets away unharmed, but petrified and shaken. Violence and sexual aggressiveness are also powerful underlying forces which describe

the antagonist, who is the pivotal figure of the entire evil scheme. He displays severe shortcomings in his ability to form normal human relationships.

Although at first the convent provides an ideal setting for safety, education and perhaps spiritual guidance for Veena, after the LTTE influence it proves to be an unsafe refuge. De Zoysa seems to place great stress on the element of spectacle, and even the final triumphant scene is imbued with tragedy. When one considers the many representations of murder, terror and Gothic horror as a background for de Zoysa's novel, a strong similarity can be seen to Edgar Allan Poe's tales. The gruesome quality imputed by Poe to his writings, bears a resemblance to the amount of violence inserted into de Zoysa's narrative, and the sensational consciousness which emerges now and then.

Along with her disappointment and disenchantment, Veena finds herself influenced to bring about her own liberation. Harendran's effort to encompass her by his own psyche fails, even through sheer fright or sensual love. But there is a weird paradox and an irony at work here. Why did she remain resistant and unresponsive to Harendran's wishes to involve her in terrorist activities when she herself has been a victim of extreme Sinhalese atrocities? It appears that her personal experiences have given her a lasting dislike for violence. Her thought processes strike a note of psychological truth. That is, she deplores the violence that wiped out her entire family and for her violence is despicable, whoever advances it.

The author's juxtaposition of violence and non-violence using a victim appears to be an attempt to find a moral pretext for the insoluble racial relations. It also seems that by attributing characteristics of forgiveness to the protagonist Veena, he is guiding the narrative to affirm his own deep seated desire, that the past should be forgiven and forgotten, in order to achieve durable and lasting peace in the future.

With great vigilance and astonishing dexterity Veena averts a disaster of an enormous scale, at the last moment. She gives an anonymous call to Shamendran, Harendran's brother, to warn him of the impending explosion. On the day of the intended misdeed, Harendran is attending to the last minute details of the intended explosion in the convent yard of his daring and destructive device, when Shamendran backed up by a posse of Army officers charge into the convent. At this point, the author offers an ironic twist to the aspect of violence and brutish individualism to the story, whilst also informing the reader that the time period of the war was an epoch of fratricidal terror. A macabre conclusion and a moment of farcical exaggeration it may seem, the two brothers come face to face and Shamendran makes the gut wrenching decision to riddle his brother's body with a volley of shots from his sophisticated T56 rifle, while Veena watches in horror from a convent window. Although this macabre image seems preposterous in realistic terms, it needs to be recognized as legitimate, considering the climate of terror that prevailed during the war. De Zoysa is apparently using a Dickensian strategy to make the protagonist Veena to enter the same scene of

vicious unreality along with the antagonist; a scene of great power because all the metaphors are pointed in the same direction.

Love touches Veena but half-heartedly, as she rushes into Shamendran's arms while they stand in front of the shattered, bleeding remains of his brother. Here, the author appears to be probing the rapport between words and visual images. Further, he is softening the grim and tense atmosphere charged with blood and gore, with a subtle romantic attraction between Veena and the brave soldier, and bringing an almost insolvent situation into a triumphant conclusion. Most of the actual imagery is derived from the frightening contemporary realities of war, and the comparison of the main characters moves uneasily between extremes of idealization and debasement. Binary opposites between revenge and compassion, and the gentle and the harsh, are evoked throughout the narrative, which is achieved by portraying the protagonist as a compassionate young woman and the antagonist as a stony adversary and an inhuman wretch. The work struggles to unify opposites and embodies contrasting themes such as, the fascination of death as opposed to forces of life. We can also observe that those who play positive roles within this chaotic and evil environment reach almost angelic status, while those who do not, are reduced to devils. The reader is also able to follow the moral, psychological and intellectual development of the protagonist throughout this Bildungsroman novel who finally emerges as a hero. There is a hint of epiphany in the story, as at the end in a slow metamorphosis, she emerges from victim to victor. The brutal conclusion to the conflict ends on a note of rejuvenation and an assertion of happiness with Shamendran and Veena getting married and moving to another life in Colombo. This association of simultaneous horror and romance, once again evokes a Gothic melodramatic element in the narrative.

The novel does not conclude with words of optimism, but in a rhetorical mode of revelation. The war is not over yet, and the ordinary citizens of the country who want nothing but peace are becoming willing and unwilling participants, as well as victims of the war:

The recapture of Jaffna is only a morale booster which hardly succeeded to blunt the might of the Tamil Tiger movement. It only resulted in militants infesting the jungle in the south up to Vavuniya and Mullativu and even westward. It has the signs of a never ending war with neither party actively interested in reaching a finality. Only the arms dealers, information sellers, suppliers and commission agents thrived at the dreadful cost of the Jaffna resident and the uncommitted citizen of the south who are hoping and praying for peace. (247)

In the statement above, powerful emphasis is placed on the harsh reality that as long as arms dealers, gun-runners and corrupt officials benefit, the prospect of concluding the war is not near at hand.

## Conclusions

Sri Lanka has inherited an excellent education system from British colonial rule and a strong academic base in the English language. The spread of the language and culture invariably enhanced the administrative apparatus of the colonists, as well as the colonized subjects. But the colonial promotion of English as a privileged academic subject contributed to the academic, political and social divide. When the British granted Independence they left behind a distinct mark on the whole administration of the country. They left behind roads and railways and rules of cricket but also Indian plantation labourers who were neither here nor there. The English language had become the chief marker of urbanity, modernity, and to a certain degree a privileged marker of one's cultural identity. The English-educated were advantageously placed in Sri Lankan society and remain so to a certain degree even today.

The Sri Lankan's access to higher education was greatly limited by class and wealth before the introduction of free education, and the universities were institutions which ensured upward mobility. The English language is indeed a positive legacy of British colonialism which has helped Sri Lankans to reach across to the English speaking world. Even though English is not by any means the principal literary language of the country today, even after sixty-five years of Independence, Sri Lanka's intellectual umbilical cord remains tied to the West, particularly to Britain. It is obvious that writers of indigenous languages must feel the narrowness of their own linguistic area, because they have slim chances of becoming known to the world at large, unless their works are translated into English. Other than the fact that English has become the predominant business language, it is also considered a cultural acknowledgement to be proficient in the language. European knowledge and ways of thinking have been instilled into the consciousness of the elite-educated Sri Lankan literati and, as a result, there appears to be a tendency to accept the tenets of European writers. The authors of the analysed literature are beneficiaries of the class mobility afforded by the acquisition of the English language. The cross-cultural characteristics of Sri Lankan English literature are among the energizing imaginative factors that enrich this writing. This view is expressed by Brennan in "National Longing for Form": "The recent interest in Third World literature reflected in special issues of mainstream journals and new publishers' series, as well as new university programs, is itself a mark of the recognition that imperialism is, culturally speaking, a two-way flow" (44-70).

It is the knowledge of English which has allowed Sri Lankans entrance into the world of Western thought, literature, science and technology. The British may deserve some credit for this process although their motives have not been of the purest. But the principal credit belongs to the Sri Lankans who energetically developed and spread the habit of English usage, having needed considerable courage to do so, amidst protests

from extreme nationalist groups who wanted every vestige of the colonial past to be erased after Independence. However, it is very rare that we observe furious and vociferous indictment of colonial atrocities penned in post-Independence English literature from Sri Lanka. The main reason that the texts do not incite any degree of rage against the colonizers for having funnelled enormous profits to Britain could be due to the fact that most of the authors belong to the English-speaking urban class. As a result, most of the examined novels are not highly of a subversive nature. Neither do they concern themselves with empowering the poor, although they give visibility to the rage of the disadvantaged-classes and voice to the subaltern. They emphasize the rift between people of Western learning and the common folk, the upper class English-educated authors lending voice to the under-privileged. By the nature of the subject matter, these writers have established a national literature which demonstrates an apparent unfettered critique of contemporary social evils. It is a literature which has the capacity to intervene in history and to help re-construct.

Sri Lanka has been influenced by various social and cultural changes due to repeated colonization. As a result, the culture and language have inevitably become hybridized. Sri Lankan writers in English do abide by the standards set out by English canonical writers, and rely on resources of Western intellectual endeavour by virtue of their Western-influenced education. However, one can recognize the rhythm of the vernacular voice and also cannot fail to observe the inclusion of Sinhalese and Tamil words, idioms and sayings in English texts. Such linguistic adaptations signify the cross-cultural nature of Sri Lankan writing, and confirm the fact that Sri Lankan literature in English is a hybrid. In addition, this literature is energized by experiences of travel, foreign education and other significant global influences. Moreover, given the social, ethnic, linguistic and cultural mix of contemporary Sri Lanka, the modern English literature of the country is unavoidably a hybrid.

It is painfully obvious that foreign readers might get a distorted view of Sri Lanka by reading these novels. Notwithstanding conspicuous images of violence, the novels are dealing with internal strife and civil conflict, all of which have authentic historical backgrounds and the historicism in the novels is intentional. The army excesses, torture and violence featured heavily in the novels of Wijenaikē, Perera, Goonewardena and Ondaatje are no different to the gruesome torture, intimidation, mutilation and the use of sexual humiliation used as a technique to break prisoners of Iraq in Abu Ghraib jail by the U. S. Army during the Gulf War. As the Sri Lankan writers are adopting precisely a realist approach, the inclusion of violent images is inevitable in order to maintain a sense of perspective and veracity. These authors do not evince a polemical desire or an imperialist urge to commodify Sri Lanka as a paradise or to denigrate the country as inhabited by unpredictably savage and inherently irrational people. The objectivity of the novels seems to be to present an accurate and balanced account, despite the complexity in moral issues. Therefore the authors should not be seen as literary upstarts and



sensationalists whose sole purpose is to exploit a public appetite for violence, but as novelists who are taking a liberal posture to remain as close as possible to the historical truth.

The diversity and the plurality of Sri Lankan society are apparent features in the analysed novels and reinforce the realist framework, as well as the development of themes that are typical of literature of colonization and decolonization. The local and specific concerns expressed in the novels are the burning issues that confront the postcolonial society of Sri Lankans; namely the gap between the rich and the poor, the urban English-educated and the rural Sinhala-educated, the rise of fundamentalism, militarism and separatism. How the Sri Lankan society is reacting to the circumstances of decolonization is conveyed in the novels, which also demonstrate how British colonialism has permeated the urban culture and lifestyle of Sri Lankans and the fact that traces left by colonization run deep in the country. The social and economic inequalities that began during the British colonial period, establishing a powerful, elite Western-educated class and giving prominence to English proficiency, continued for a number of decades after Independence. The culpability of British colonization weighs heavily for this creation of elitism and class oppression which subsequently led to volatile social consequences in post-Independence Sri Lanka. It can be deduced that it is that very influence that produced the image of “Self” and “Other.” Since language and education remained a potent source for social and economic mobility, the poorer segments of society, the Sinhala-educated and the peasant class became increasingly disenchanting, and the two insurgencies were a struggle for social justice. Presently, the prominence given to English is gradually changing and more importance is being given to the local languages. There is a possibility that in the course of time, the power of the English-educated group will gradually decrease.

A theme which looms large in the novels about the insurgencies is the plight of the Sinhala-educated youth who are compelled to face the imminent prospect of being unemployed and impoverished as a result. The double colonization that the marginalised Sinhala-educated youth have been subjected to at the hands of the urban English-educated is expressed in the novels. These works are informed by similar anti-colonial concerns with special reference to the intrusive colonial pedagogy. The intentions of the rebels were a conscious reaction against Western cultural imperialism and an attempt to break away from the stifling English domination and the class system it had created. Although the novels differ in scope and in technique, they strive to convey identity problems caused by cultural dislocation and one can observe that the issue of identity is closely connected to that of language. The rebels’ detachment from the English language also reflects their conviction that it is a foreign acquired speech. As Fanon analyses the comparable uprisings of the black man, insurgencies are an attempt to free themselves from “the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment” (1967: 50), as they are “victims of a cultural imposition” (1967: 195).

In some sense, the rebels portrayed in the novels are extremists, anti-colonial revolutionaries, and their rebellious activities are a transitional social reality, ubiquitous in countries that once constituted the British Empire. The rebels' struggle to destroy the deep-laid foundations of British power and their denunciation of the visible affirmation of the continuity of "Britishness" in the metropolitan order in the official, cultural, political and social spheres are evident in the rebel rhetoric. According to Spivak: "it is only the texts of counter-insurgency or elite documentation that give the news of the consciousness of the subaltern" (1988: 12), and as such, the analysed novels are valuable, not only for having captured the past but also for predicting the future and casting into sharp relief the social controversies created by colonial power structures.

The Sri Lankan writers in English have sufficiently matured to design their own concepts, interweaving foreign ideas with indigenous traditions and are able to tap two different cultural traditions: the Western and the Eastern, and the novels conspicuously reflect this double heritage. Thus, Sri Lankan writings in English effectively point to the fact that they are going through a transition into a new literary paradigm, although one can sense a pro-English stance in terms of language ideologies that the elite-educated seem to espouse. Yet, this literature has a Sri Lankan soul and expresses a sensibility drawn from the Sri Lankan spirit and the Sri Lankan tradition. The vitality of English as a literary language is bound to flourish in Sri Lanka, further enriched by purely Sri Lankan idioms and expressions which consist of distinctively Sri Lankan experiences but infused with British elements. As pointed out by Brennan in "National Longing for Form," "influence of global culture begun by imperialism is still increasing" (60).

The novels play a salutary role in their articulation of nascent Sri Lankan experiences after Independence and are as such an important part of postcolonial academic study and interrogation. Sri Lankans find their lives reflected in these narratives. They are replete with the rhetoric of colonialism, anti-colonial struggles, liberation, economic servitude, social subjugation, cultural and linguistic denigration, as well as the social classes produced by colonisation. Although the novels are fiction centred on social concerns, they do not completely ignore the truth by presenting a distorted view of Sri Lankan society. They are, in fact, testimonials which lay bare the problems which have arisen due to colonization, as they mainly focus on the linguistic and cultural conditions created by colonialism, while touching upon exploitation in material terms. This literature to a certain extent involves the articulation of a marginalised voice: the voice of an emergent nation.

All the selected writers, in addition to being influential intellectuals, are creative writers of distinction. They are predominantly first generation post-Independence writers who are treating various aspects of the postcolonial situation. The issue of writing about the insurgencies and ethnic conflict is a contentious matter, as the subaltern conditions are ongoing. Therefore, they are a literature thriving amidst conditions of political and social turmoil. They give an insight into the poor vision of post-Independence Sri Lanka

politicians and policy makers. At the same time, a common theme that the authors adopt is that both the LTTE and the JVP are clandestine organisations which are attempting to capture power through violent and non-democratic means.

Influencing the writings is the physical configuration of the land, geographical variety, the different ethnic groups inhabiting the land and mixture of different cultures. Overt exoticism and the intensity of oriental imagery might reinforce the image of Sri Lanka as part of the “mysterious and mystic Orient.” But the self-conscious representation of exoticism is due to the natural tropical beauty of the landscape that the authors are perfectly acquainted with, which provides a rich subject for inspiration and literary exploration. The writings focus on the character of the Sri Lankan people, as well as the failures of society, caused by fractures of language, class, caste and economic status, leading to irreconcilable ethnic conflicts, class divisions and other serious problems. The authors have given their novels a compelling political dimension and attempt to render visible the historical and institutional structure that played a part in bringing about the conflicts. The spirit of social inquiry and the impulse to engage in analysing communal conflicts through literature appears to flourish during times of social unrest. These works of literature record how people feel, reason, speculate and react and therefore they are an indispensable part of the mind of the past.

From a postcolonial perspective, as developed by these authors, the disillusionment of the subaltern descendants of the former colonists is recorded in these novels. Literature’s pivotal role in anti-colonial discourse is somewhat fulfilled by these novels, although they are not strongly radical or subversive. However, they map out the trends and developments of contemporary political discourse in the country, demonstrating how men and women who were capable of realising the changing realities, reacted to them and searched for ideologies in the newly independent nation. Not only do the novels reflect the dominant ideologies, but they also encode the tensions, the attitudes and the complexities of interaction between various social groups in contemporary Sri Lanka. As pointed out by Mukherjee in *Postcolonialism: My Living*: “postcolonial societies also have their own internal centres and peripheries” (222).

Proctor’s *Waiting for Surabiel*, de Silva’s *Ginirilla Conspiracy* and Goonewardena’s *An Asian Gambit*, all exemplify that Independence did not actually end colonialism as social patterns formed by colonialism remained active under the influence of Sri Lankans groomed by the colonists. These three novels bring into the narratives the rural population who are unable to take advantage of elite Western education and the cultural effects of dominant Western thought, and their anticipation and impatience for a new society purged of the colonial past. They expose the imposition of a renewed colonialism over the remnants of nineteenth-century colonialism, as well as illustrate the fact that the cultural construction of colonialism is deeply bound with Eurocentric ideas. We can also observe that the idealism of the dissenters is tempered by their ambitions in their violent expressions of discontent which led to widespread anti-social attitudes, fostered notably

by the unemployed and the disenchanting sector of rural Sinhala-educated youth. Recognizing the power dynamics at play between the Western-educated and the Sinhala-educated, these authors explicitly depict the class of elite Sri Lankans that has moved from an unconscious colonial mind-set to taking over or mimicking the former colonizer. Wijenaike's *The Rebel*, de Silva's *Ginirälla Conspiracy* and Sarachchandra's *Curfew and a Full Moon*, however committed to domestic issues, are essentially conveying the insurgent and liberationist rhetoric of Fanon.

The political and social upheavals of the country have coincided with an outbreak of literary talent, especially on the subject of the ethnic conflict. Though the novels examined are arguably of a more socio-political interest than artistic, they adhere to the conception of literature as a vehicle for conveying authentic experience. They also display a form of historical self-consciousness, which is evident from the innumerable tropes of rhetoric contained in the narratives. Major historical events which have occurred in the past which function as formative influences in shaping social reality today in Sri Lanka are evident in the examined novels. The writers assert their own perceptions of truth regarding the social conflicts and contribute to an important body of postcolonial writing, conveying the expectations and problems created by colonization and subsequent Independence. They also deal with the demographic shifts which accompanied specific social problems and illustrate the plural development of social identities, as well as confirm the fact that the ethical domain of nationalism in Sri Lanka remains a very much contested terrain.

The English novels from Sri Lanka have traditionally articulated Sri Lankan life. But the novels examined in this dissertation, in particular, exemplify fundamentally the involvement of literature with social restiveness. They successfully depict the realities of the volatile social order that existed during the six decade period after Independence and acknowledge the economic inequalities of present-day Sri Lankan society. The contents of the novels may create an impression to foreign readers that the Sri Lankans are a culturally backward and malevolent race of people who are congenitally violent and unpredictably ruthless. However, the roots of Sri Lanka's economic and social problems lie partly in the greed, self-interest and short-sightedness of Western Colonialism. The country's rich indigenous culture, traditions and religious philosophies of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim cannot be found in any way as being backward. On account of the nature of the subject matter, this body of literature confines itself to the tragic style and is overtly bleak. Although the inclusion of violence might invariably enhance a wider commercial appeal, the writers' objective appears to be to exercise moral responsibility in conveying the reality of the volatile period in Sri Lanka's recent history, as they keep one foot within the humanist-realist tradition. They also retain a historical and political edge and embody potential lessons. As such, these perceptive novels should receive the recognition which they amply deserve.

Political turmoil and ethnic violence have profoundly affected the lives of millions of people in modern Sri Lanka. It is a great pity that the development of the country during the first five decades of its long desired Independence from British rule turned out to be a volatile period. Language became a passionately contested political issue after Independence and mainly it is language that has divided Sri Lanka and caused inter-communal disharmony. The examined novels reflect the relationship between language and political change and the question of language in a revolutionary situation and they also clearly demonstrate how central the issue of language is in the construction of a post-Independence Sri Lankan identity. Contested processes of nation-building, linguistic affirmation and state formation have resulted in damaging conflicts. After centuries of colonial rule, the process of decolonization has provided the nation with little to unite its culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse population. Because the English language served as a tool for colonial power and control instead of being introduced as a lingua franca in every remote village in Sri Lanka, it failed to provide a linguistic perspective within which divisions were healed. Widespread knowledge of English could perform an important function as a language to bridge the gap between the various ethnic communities, as a lingua franca for trade and tourism, and as a valuable medium for international education and acquisition of technical knowledge.

Despite the fact that communal differences and post-Independence violence in Sri Lanka are partly as a result of decolonization, the novels examined do not overtly express a stand against colonialism except a few. The first generation of Sri Lankan novelists after Independence appears to avoid laying bare colonial discriminations and exploitation, even though postcolonial critics are looking for more overtly anti-colonial agenda in writings from the former colonies. But they do write about the profound social and cultural transformations unleashed by colonialism, one of which is considering the English language as a colonial institution and attributing new dimensions to indigenous languages. As such, the novels provide a commentary on modern Sri Lankan society – a society in transition between the old ways and the new. Perhaps the discomfort of the historical reality of largely benefiting from an elite, colonial education might be discouraging the English-educated writers from fully exposing colonial atrocities. Perhaps, as time goes by, there might be a considerable change on this aspect of Sri Lankan writings. However, one can observe a burgeoning postcolonial awareness which provokes Sri Lankan writers to investigate the present-day inequities inherited because of colonization. A recent Sri Lankan author, Maryse Jayasuriya, states in *Terror and Reconciliation: Sri Lankan Anglophone Literature* (2012): “Thus, socio-political changes that took place in Sri Lanka under the British set the stage and contributed significantly to violence in the post-independence era (4).

Whilst tracing various authors’ trajectories across the post-Independence literary terrain, it was found that Sivanandan is conspicuously the only author who presents observations of past inequities or inequalities due to the country’s colonized history. In

this regard, *When Memory Dies* is the pivotal text. Opposition to colonial rule was spearheaded by a nationalist struggle and his novel exemplifies some of the discourses that were responsible for formal decolonization. Colonial consciousness and discourse of resistance accentuated by the subaltern voice are particularly striking in Sivanandan's text, as it contains examples of militant protest by Sri Lankans during the British colonial period and marks important moments of Sri Lanka's political history. His characters are conspicuously Sri Lankan rebels pitted against British representatives of colonial power. The political contexts of his characters' lives are significantly expressed through their gestures of subaltern resistance against a race-based discrimination practised by the colonial administrative system. The author points to central flaws of the colonial labour administration and at the heart of the national consciousness of the author are the inalienable rights of the indigenous people. While carefully analysing the postcolonial status of Sri Lanka, the author categorically considers the present-day problems of Sri Lanka as legacies of colonialism. He achieves the above by including a nexus of ideas that throws retrospective light on the failings of the colonial policies which he believes conditioned the future situation in post-Independence Sri Lanka. He is however not attempting to cover the sprawling history of colonial exploitation and resistance, but has chosen a few salient points and has worked through them.

The insurgencies and the separatist conflict have enabled Sri Lankan fiction writers to treat events of the recent past of the country in a more innovative manner, while still largely adhering to realities. Though the insurgencies have left a considerable mark upon contemporary Sri Lankan national literature, it is the ethnic conflict that has provided material for authors who record the decay of communal consciousness and the linguistic history of Sri Lanka. The analysed novels mark a historic juncture, as they are concerned about uprisings, demanding equity and removal of inequalities, and it can therefore be construed that social criticism is a part of Sri Lankan literature written in English. The novels, in fact, hover between fiction and reality when describing personal and communal experiences of the turbulent times of the country and they are powerful expressions of social concerns. They lay bare particular symptoms of renewed colonization, for instance the hotly debated issues like language communalism and colonial linguistic inheritance which has laid a firm foundation for cultural inequalities between English and indigenous languages.

Although the analysed novels may not directly address the major issues centring on the hard, economic realities of imperialism, they deal with the current issues and conditions which have arisen due to colonization. Also observed in the novels is a class structure produced because of the dire needs of people, caste mobility and a transformation of the rural class. A rapidly vanishing peasant class, once associated with virtues of humility and simplicity, is presented in the novels as a class that was previously unaware that its poverty was partly due to colonial exploitation and subsequent duplication of colonization. The novels show how the peasants have become

aware of contemporary political issues. They are a class of people fragmented and fraught with tension, struggling to regain their identity, the evidence of which are the insurgencies, which themselves can be interpreted as expressions of protest against perceived recolonization, marked by elitism and cultural condescension. These novels portray the struggles and the divisions within the formerly colonized population and the contradictions that have arisen in the newly independent State.

Among the authors who have written about the insurgencies, Sarachchandra stands out because of his conspicuous pathos and predominant concern about Sinhala-educated university students. His novel clearly depicts the ambiguous class position and the marginalization of these youths, as compared to the norms of metropolitan finesse and Westernised education. He subtly indicates the persistence of colonialism in the linguistic and educational spheres, long after the formal end of the colonial presence. The revolutionary insight of his book illustrates a class struggle. The other novels on the insurgencies examine the power of bureaucracy and its dehumanization of individuals, and are resonantly political. They provide an evocative portrait of the world of political machinations and corruption in Sri Lanka. The fact that the insurgents in their search for ideology did not wish to be in league with the systems and the Eurocentric world that the previous imperialists had already established in the colonies is evident in the novels. Also, the novels bring into focus the rural-urban dichotomy and the fact that colonial improvement was confined to the urban areas which offered the rural folk little opportunity for upward social and economic mobility.

Chandrasoma in *Out Out Brief Candle* highlights the changing relations between castes, especially in connection to the history of rural class struggle, caste and subaltern consciousness and educational inequalities. Other aspects brought out in his novel are the rigidity of the colonial apparatus, the dominance of the colonizers in senior positions in the colonial administration, demands of colonial governance and their efforts to produce a docile workforce out of the indigenous population, while maintaining the position of superior Self, as opposed to the inferior Other. The author also draws attention to the exploitation of the colonized subjects, cloaked under paternalist attitudes of the colonial masters, and in many ways the novel gives an insight into post-colonial responses to British education and linguistic control.

The novels dealing with the insurgencies bring the plight of the Sinhalese-educated university students to the forefront of national consciousness, and depict their problems as part of the legacies that colonialism has bequeathed to the country. These novels devote a considerable amount of attention to the perspective of Sinhalese youth and carry out an incisive analysis of the colonial situation that created the social and cultural dilemma which marginalised them. Although the insurgencies are perceived as the acts of a collective consciousness, the authors, with the exception of Sarachchandra and Tennyson Perera, are more weighted towards representing them as the aberrant behaviour of crime. Perera in *Of Terror and Trials* highlights the subjugation of rebels

by State violence and creates an image of the State as an oppressive intruder into the affairs of the rural dissenters and not as a benevolent protector or provider. It is the ideological thrust behind his writing that marks it as subversive, distinguishing the novel from others written on the subject. Ondaatje in *Anil's Ghost* and Nihal de Silva in *Giniralla Conspiracy* seem to display in the characters and in their narratives an intellectual conditioning which is attributed to colonial education and Western influence.

Perera in *Of Terror and Trials* and Selvadurai in *Funny Boy* see the killings of forthright journalists as a cowardly threat to media freedom. One can also recognize a cautionary note and an admonitory strain in the texts. Very few authors seem to have become blinkered by revolutionary romanticism, with the exception of Sarachchandra. This gives rise to the question: can education legitimately aim at moulding people into agreement with the basic assumptions of the society they live in, or is the only honourable role for the educated man that of a rebel and a disputant? Ironically, the JVP rebels were adhering to the Western assumption that education is potent in inciting people to challenge the society they live in, to overturn its assumptions and to rebel against its conventions.

All the novels are heavily wrought with descriptions of violence, as they contain descriptive scenes of human torture and death and excesses committed by the forces in suppressing the uprisings and the violent reactions of the rebels. Especially, Perera, Wijenaikē and Chandrasoma, cloak the army officials who apprehend the insurgents with a mantle of despotic authority. These authors are in actual fact examining the social transformation taking place in the country, where the youth uprisings can be construed as a sign of economic despair. An important feature in the novels is the social and material conditions of metropolitan modernity, contrasted against the lack of development and scarcity of opportunities of the village. The novels also emphatically convey the impression that the Sinhala-educated rural youths were disenchanted with Western systems of the colonial influenced metropolis and the English-speaking bureaucrats, because they inhibit success and social mobility to the rural class. Bilingualism is strongly established in most urban areas in Sri Lanka. However, the English language, which seems a gift for so many Sri Lankans during the last 150 years in a dynamic global environment created by British imperialism, is rejected by the rebels due to their own lack of proficiency in it. Wijenaikē's, Sarachchandra's, Goonewardena's and de Silva's novels contain the expressions and views of a significant part of Sri Lankan society – of people who are no longer content being perceived as the "Other," still subjected to a crippling subaltern status conditioned by a foreign oppressing culture which is a residue of the colonial legacy. The authors do not betray any prejudice against the reasons for the youth uprisings, except denouncing their violent methods to obtain power. Goonewardena's *Asian Gambit*, conspicuously highlights the social disorganization which afflicts society amidst rapid growth of urbanization.



The novels bear certain thematic resemblances, when examining the darker aspects of life in Sri Lanka, as the authors have adhered to scrupulous accuracy when referring to the major cause for the youth uprisings and the actual circumstances which led to the main events connected to the two insurgencies. In this respect, they are fiction based on historical events and records. They also raise ethical dilemmas regarding the social conditions and the deprived backgrounds of the rural youth. At the same time they affirm that historical situations connected to colonization have created the cultural consequences and human predicaments leading to contemporary radical thought, culminating in insurrections. The primary endeavour of the rebels was to intervene in a violent manner in the heritage of colonialism rapidly being duplicated with great force. These novels also reflect the tension between traditionalism and modernity and rebel protest. They portray the conflicts of personal ambitions and the welter of intrigues which has made leaders overlook the larger national interests. The rebels' aim was to reinvest themselves with the power they felt which was lost by working in English. They also felt that they were a group of new and young articulate Sri Lankans who were battling within the nation for a worthy cause, as they very much cared who governed the country and how. Therefore, they considered their acts of defiance as a form of heroic disobedience, stemming from an innate ethical responsibility, for which some of them paid with their life. Sarachandra, illuminates the above clearly in his novel and so does Wijenaikie.

All the novels have a sustained salutary presence in Sri Lankan literary and cultural criticism for the fact that they are concerned about the problems and experiences of the youth of the country. The contemporary resonance of the novels is evident by the fact that there is an imminent danger of a recurring insurgency. A leading Sri Lankan newspaper reports: "Sri Lankan intelligence services are aware of another insurgency to be launched soon using university students. The intelligence services are gathering information on this, Cabinet Spokesman and Media Minister Keheliya Rambukwella said" (*Daily News*, 5 Nov 2010). The above news item demonstrates that the main themes treated in the novels are highly pertinent, in view of the fact that there is a great possibility that history might repeat itself. The analysed novels therefore might hold a new resonance in connection to student problems and dilemmas, and stand as unofficial monuments of the past, as well as predictions for the future.

Since these novels represent and explicitly address aspects of social and political issues, the authors unwittingly and wittingly influence the way the country is seen by the rest of the world. This is particularly true for novels written by diasporic writers who speak from different locations and believe tremendously in social freedom, as for example, Ondaatje, Sivanandan and Selvadurai. The latter two authors have come to their host countries as oppressed and dispossessed people and while they are re-discovering their sense of dignity and self-worth, they are endeavouring to speak about the injustices suffered by them and their families in their own home country. Therefore,

there is a spate of critical activity and obvious self-reflexivity around the above authors. The theme of exile is common to their novels. As pointed out by the Tamil-Canadian academic Kanaganayakam in "Dancing in the Rarefied Air: Reading Contemporary Sri Lankan Literature:

one of the distinctive features of contemporary Tamil writing is its indeterminacy and subversion. But for the Tamil population that has known only what is disseminated by Tamil writings, for instance, the relation between literature and experience of dispossession, violence, migration, and social change is an immediate one. (51-65)

Although Ondaatje, Selvadurai and Sivanandan are domiciled abroad and hence physically removed from the actual current happenings, they had intimate access to information about the country's development. They have fearlessly pursued controversial political events in their land of birth in their novels, and convey the fact that it was the unfavourable conditions in the home country and ethnic and linguistic disadvantages that compelled them to move away. Their writings also reveal that they are first-generation migrants, because of their attachment to Sri Lanka and their thematization of the contemporary problems in their homeland and, significantly, they are draw heavily upon their ethnic origins. It is also easy to recognize in the narratives that these writers do have a subtle political agenda. Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*, Suriyakumaran's *Kilali Crossing* and Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* are in addition self-reflexive historical fiction, which conveys conflicting positions that embody major issues faced by the Tamil community. They are righteously indignant of the human rights violations against a community struggling to maintain a semblance of dignity in their lives, amidst chaos and uncertainty. The common denominator of the characters of the novels written by the Tamil authors is that they are dispossessed citizens of Sri Lanka, struggling to survive against all odds and the narratives illustrate the physical as well as the psychological cost of the civil war.

Significantly, in *When Memory Dies*, Sivanandan places important historical events within the imperial context, in order to bring out the culpability of the colonizers and the inequality of the imperial power relations and subsequent postcolonial nation building. His novel has become a text central to Sri Lankan postcolonial literary studies, as he writes particularly about the colonial situation in Sri Lanka during the 1930s and 1940s, which was a period when anti-colonial strategies, independence struggles and resistance of subalterns were beginning to take place, which he describes with authority. Through his major areas of inquiry, he foregrounds the tensions with the imperial power and makes the reader aware of binary oppositions such as colonizer and colonized and domination and resistance. The problems that Sivanandan highlights are the kinds of oppression, subjugation and the silencing of the subaltern that occur across the racial divide. He graphically illustrates the colonized people's awareness of their subjugation and their lived experiences because of it, and emphasizes the negative effects of colonialism with far more passion and eloquence than any other postcolonial novelist

who has written in English from Sri Lanka. The articulation of injustices has sprung from anti-colonial impulses. He ironically depicts the British administrators who insensitively gunned down Sri Lankan protestors as despots. The glaring omissions in legitimizing the rights of the Indian, immigrant plantation workers and exploitation of plantation labourers are exposed in his novel. The author's condemnation of the British administrative class is scathing throughout the text, and therefore his writing emerges as resistance literature, especially as it is written in a strongly oppositional voice, laying bare the hollowness of imperial intentions and puncturing a hole in the imperialist assumption that subjugating parts of Asia was a moral and cultural mission. Although his novel searches for identity and resistance to colonization, the mode of postcolonial criticism utilized by the author entirely overlooks collaboration by the local élite.

There are significant ideological differences in Tamil writing, as they all stress the need for the Tamil community to live in peace in their homeland and as this dissertation indicates, writers of Tamil ethnic origins self-consciously foreground their marginally positioned identities. The greatest strength in their fiction is the ability to arouse strong emotions, provoke intellectual reaction and ignite controversies by the frequent use of the rhetoric of victimization and poignant scenes of death and destruction. The narratives have strong socio-political dimensions as they level significant indictment against consecutive Sri Lankan governments for being neglectful of the ethnic situation which has intensified the conflict. A predominant feature that characterizes these novels is that they rely on authenticity, although their styles are strikingly different. The scenes of violence are unflinchingly realistic while having strong symbolic overtones as well. Therefore, it can be inferred that twentieth-century novelists writing on the subject of the insurgencies and the ethnic conflict are actually engaging their novels on public and popular news discourse because of their references to immediate public events which disturbed the stability of the country.

The diasporic writers, whilst exposing Sri Lanka's woes, are also culturally exalting the country, perhaps for the foreign literary market, especially Ondaatje. These novels report on the ideologies of the cultural moment of twentieth-century Sri Lanka and the factual side of public concerns are also not entirely outside their realm of interest either. The moral stance of these writers appears to be to project a balanced perspective of the conflict, which they achieve by including atrocities committed by both sides. In that sense, the analysed novels take responsible stance towards the political standpoint of a nation that has recently gained Independence. They also indubitably perform an important educative function, inviting readers to assess the events reported in them in view of human rights, especially the novels of Ondaatje, Selvadurai, Sivanandan and Perera. Perera's *Of Terror and Trials*, although was first targeted to a Sinhala speaking audience, the fact that the book was translated, its remarkably revealing contents against State law enforcing authorities became available to the English speaking readers.

A wide array of viewpoints on the horrible effects of ferocious warfare connected to the insurgencies and the separatist conflict in Sri Lanka are offered in the novels and they indicate that it is the national history of the country that divides people from one another. Relocating these events from a post-colonial perspective, it is evident that they are communal investigations on subjects which have a genuine relevance to contemporary society. These novels reflect the post-colonial search for identity of communities in a changing world, specifically from a colonial past into an independent national future, rife with conflicts. Undoubtedly, they add vibrancy and diversity to current South East Asian writing. In most of the novels, knowledge is aligned with the powers of the West, although local knowledge is not particularly discounted. However, they are novels of a national struggle, of a class war, of culture and about people of conviction. Insofar as the social and political engagements in the examined novels, they comprise a literary corpus that endeavours to account for the violence of the reactionaries and the rebels, as well as state sanctioned violence and in many ways engage with local realities. Unfortunately, they capture the most potent embodiments of evil in twentieth-century fiction from Sri Lanka.

The subject of escalating ethnic tensions of the newly independent nation has given authors an altogether new currency to produce an astonishing wealth of imaginative and intelligent works. The authors have channelled their experiences and knowledge of the war and issues that have been insistently present in the North and North-Eastern regions of Sri Lanka into their writings. Anti-colonial movements have not represented the interest of all people of the colonized country and after Independence these fissures have become evident. The novels examine the degree to which post-Independence nationalism is inclusionary and to what extent it empowers the two main ethnic groups of the country, as well as the attempts to resolve the rights and the wrongs of colonization. The novels written on the ethnic conflict have gained a new significance in the light of the social crisis which unfolded due to loss of life and limb during the protracted war of thirty years and the topic has attracted an extraordinary range of themes. They are bound to find ever-increasing acclaim since the authors are largely drawing upon a threatened way of life. Revelations of the last battles between the forces and the LTTE, how they affected ordinary citizens and how they came to terms with the enormity of what happened, and reconciliation attempts will be in the public eye for some time to come. Sadly, the country will be mapped by a new literature, alarmingly embodying uncomfortable facts about human rights violations during the civil war.

As regards the subject matter in the novels, although they deal specifically and consciously with Sri Lankan issues, it can be inferred that the examined literature, though expressing a wide range of opinions as to their historical context, is mainly written in a manner that aims to assert inter-communal unity. For this purpose, the authors address issues of lawlessness and social breakdown and the moral consequences of the civil strife in the country and desire speedy resolution. Terrorism and political

assassinations are among the methods used both by the LTTE and the JVP in their struggle. Geopolitical consequences like the Indian involvement in the civil war and the brutal assassination of Rajiv Gandhi are highlighted in a few of the novels. They are not run-of-the-mill novels on the subject of war, but original fiction which analyses a particular aspect of the conflict and is somewhat resolutely Euro-centric in its focus. While the novels share many features, it is evident that there are subtle differences in their respective approaches and preferred vantage points of thematic treatment, which gives voice to the silenced, the subaltern and the marginalised.

In a world where marginalised ethnic groups are finding a more powerful collective voice to demand social justice, the novels of Sri Lankan diasporic writers are of considerable significance. The dominant mood of these novels are protest, nostalgia, legitimate anger towards displacement and exposure of injustices that are going on in Sri Lanka, for instance the inexcusable acts of mob violence and State terror against innocent civilians. They evoke a whole range of tones, from the satirical to the pathetic, and reveal fundamental similarities in their politics and the social articulation of difference from a minority perspective. They display contemporary ideas about the bestiality and incivility of the security forces and are a clear indictment against Government authority. However, none of the writers claim racial superiority over the other in any significant or conspicuous manner or attempt to denote a cultural "Other." Nor do the texts include war-mongering rhetoric.

The immigrant writers' efforts to come to terms with an inaccessible past are also evident in their novels. A common thread which runs through the fiction is the awareness that Tamil ethnic voices and values are marginalised and that it is of crucial importance to assert their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieve their repressed histories. The authors also expose the repressed fears of a minority ethnic group and the desire to exercise considerable socio-political influence and economic independence in its favour. The novels are not merely the result of the authors' war-time dissatisfaction, but also a forum to put into perspective various human rights violations and at the same time stress the absolute necessity for ethnic pride and roots. The texts are solidly grounded in historical context and deal with the politics of dispossession. Stinging denunciations and exposure of distressing conditions are common to these novels. Tamils writers like Sivanandan, Suriyakumaran and Selvadurai are also involved in political protest, as is evident in the narratives. Their writings are invaluable resonant literature with regards to the exposure of atrocities against Sri Lankan Tamils, and as a consequence these novels are not only historical but they are also self-reflective writings. Sivanandan, Ondaatje and Selvadurai, whilst questioning truth and justice in respect to marginalised voices, prominently engage in resurrecting the past, heavily depending on a progression of history, memory and identity. These three authors are obviously aware of their global readership. Suriyakumaran's novel offers a perspective from which the ethnic conflict can be viewed as an appropriate representation of human violations in a

prime site of struggle, Jaffna. There is, however, a crucial point on which the author has to be questioned because he repeatedly insinuates that LTTE violence is required in order to obtain economic independence and, finally, a separate state, although political negotiations are of vital importance for peace. While Wijenaikē examines the rationale behind terrorist motives and the trauma of LTTE violence, Suriyakumaran immortalizes and exalts the terrorists as freedom fighters and romanticizes the innovative abilities and self-sufficiency of the Northern people and thus advocating a self-sustaining national sovereignty. He prides himself on the LTTE movement's initiative to take matters into their own hands. Simultaneously, he presents the Sri Lankan army operations as that of depraved, xenophobic, despotic persecutors, insensitive to the sufferings of the Tamil civilians of the North. On the other hand, de Zoysa betrays his inclination to stereotype the members of the LTTE movement with extreme characterization, as being murderous, fatalistic, tyrannical and sexually corrupt. A vociferous critic of Tamil terrorism, he subtly insinuates that the Tamil terrorists are partially responsible for the Tamil people's predicament. Yet, de Zoysa, in *No Longer My Child* details the horrific death and destruction inflicted upon innocent Tamils by Sinhalese hooligans during the July 1983 racial riots.

The texts of Tamil writers have strong allegorical implications considering the fact that the writers and their families have suffered immensely due to the ethnic conflict. Their writing brings to the fore a range of minority concerns, examining a history of ethnic relations degenerating into communal hatred and violence. They utilize the symbolism of gross alienation and racial discrimination to grant legitimacy to their arguments and justify the rights of people to resist tyranny. The narratives include violent scenes which are indictments of a social system that allows such flagrant abuse of its citizens, while the Government is in a state of denial. These writings also make a significant contribution for the advancement of Tamil nationalistic aspirations and goals. They employ multiple narrative techniques, which include irony, satires and parody. The diasporic authors, having the opportunity to publish their works abroad, have a foreign audience in mind as well, and are thus able to cast a harsh spotlight on injustices like racial riots, mass murders and the burning of the Jaffna library, to name a few examples. However, it is ironic that these very writers fail to mention that a bulk of the war budget of the LTTE was raised from the heartland of Europe and North America, from the purported guardians of human rights and proponents of democracy. Only de Zoysa, in *No Longer My Child* refers to the funds collected in Canada from resident Tamils to fight the war and Ondaatje, who obliquely mentions in *Anil's Ghost*, the acquisition of modern weaponry from backers on the side-lines in safe countries and the war being sponsored by gun-and drug-runners. But Selvadurai, Sivanandan and Suriyakumaran fail to mention the powerful presence of an international link which was a major morale boost for the Tamil insurgents in Sri Lanka, and the mastery the LTTE displayed in generating funds from the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, spread over 50 countries. Yet,

these authors should be credited for internationalization of Sri Lankan literature and bringing it to new heights of prominence, while simultaneously enjoying the celebrated status of national authors in their own host countries, although they have garnered attention and exploited the marketing value by illustrating their novels with images of extreme violence.

The novels on the ethnic conflict do not display a shared agenda or a collective consciousness, except the desire for peace. Especially de Silva's *The Road from Elephant Pass* is a story which promises ethnic reconciliation through mutual understanding. He expresses his faith in the positive consequences of intercultural communication. However, the fundamental ideas of the diasporic authors are similar. They place before the reader certain basic facts regarding the origin of the conflict and also a body of shared experience, a more tragic than triumphant vision of the experience. These experiences have provided material for the tales and it is evident that they have distinctive autobiographical roots whose overwhelming impact of expatriation has contributed to the subject matter. Whilst allowing us to examine their articulation of migrancy, the diasporic writers question a sense of belonging to their land of birth from which they have emigrated under violent circumstances. They foreground the uneasy relation between ethnic and national identity and the gap between language and reality. The dissenting and angry voices of the wronged Tamils and the simmering social unrest are ever present in the texts of Tamil authors. Diasporic novels are thematically connected to one another by their convergence upon the one most important view, that the Tamil community in Sri Lanka is grossly alienated.

The language issue is an interesting path of inquiry that should hold great promise to scholars, as well as sociologists who are interested in the exploration of the link between language and power, as it is an emotionally charged political issue, the consequences of which confront the country even today. Above all, the Tamil writers are seeking legitimacy for their political rhetoric and for their role as defenders of human rights while specifically fighting injustice through the power of their pen. Their expressed textual anger is evident in the novels and the authorial intention that their writings would produce positive effects is palpable. Though the Sinhalese authors mention the riots connected to "The Sinhala Only Act" and attempt to denote the Tamil view-point in their texts, only the Tamil authors depict it as a legally entrenched social injustice and an oppressive law that marginalizes the Tamils. They are appalled by "The Act" which they consider as an insidious translation of racist attitudes into actual judicial legislation and as a symbol of substantial discrimination against them. Without a doubt, "The Act" provoked intolerable strains within the nation and caused bitter division. Although a number of Tamil novelists have referred to this menacingly divisive "Act," Selvadurai's language in *Funny Boy* is by far the most pointed. The Tamil writers depict racial riots which affected the Tamil community as expressions of aggressive intolerance.

Whilst writing from the specificity of their community's experiences, the Tamil authors have used the standard method of persuasion in their narratives, which is to appeal to reason and at the same time to provide evidence for crass discrimination and the creation of almost insuperable obstacles against the Tamil community. They overtly indicate the violation of human freedom and individual liberties. Although, Sinhalese authors mention the racial riots, they do not emphasize the fact that the Tamils are oppressed people or even if they do, only in a fleeting manner, with the exception of Arthur de Zoysa who has based the major part of his novel on the July 1983 racially motivated violence. Most significantly, these inclusions and exclusions mark the fundamental difference between novels written by Tamil and Sinhalese authors.

The settings of the novels are at times when the war is at a fever pitch. The Tamil novelists tend to emphasize the heroic potential of the LTTE members and the ingenious, inventive capacity of North and North-Eastern civilians living under constant peril and economic want in a desperate landscape. They share a sense of commitment to the task of uncovering the emotional truth behind the endangered lives of innocent civilians, in a region not particularly committed to human rights by either warring factions. They also attribute excessive military suppression for their eroded rights which has led to a series of unsettling questions about Government neglect. For instance, the Tamil novelists emphasize the fact that the law-enforcing authorities in Sri Lanka have deliberately impeded the efficient exercise of just authority. Suriyakumaran's novel figures prominently in this respect. The settings are also at times of extrajudicial killings and disappearances when the situation in Sri Lanka was spinning out of control. The characters are victims of circumstances who grapple with forces that are derived mainly out of political and social processes. It is therefore possible to read the examined novels in exclusively historical terms, as they document a historical chronicle of twentieth-century Sri Lanka. They make a significant contribution to the history of migration and displacement in particular, impelled by the escalation communal tensions in the country. Writings of both ethnic groups are equally marked by the traumatic experiences of war, while expressing the existential struggle born out of a sense of oppression. Even writers of Sinhala ethnic origin include atrocities of Southern Sinhalese mobs and the excessive Sri Lankan Army reprisals. Therefore, from a nationalist point of view, some of these novels have attracted unwanted attention locally and abroad because of the incendiary nature of the subject matter and because of their perceived ideological contents. From these novels, the foreign reader might get an unsettling impression that due to the long, dark history of violence, the country is on the brink of collapse. On the other hand, these authors have based their novels in highly charged areas where there is much Government and national interest and what is written might be taken up by policy makers.

Conversely, there has been perceptible economic growth in the country, despite the huge amounts of money spent on the war. Nevertheless, from literary point of view, the analysed novels are a part of the struggle for cultural and intellectual expression of the



colonized voice and are indispensable to that process. This is particularly true for novels written about the insurgencies, as they are about class revolt and struggles for cultural dominance, driven by the Sinhala-educated who resented continued colonization, even if in the new guise of Western-influenced metropolitan cultures. These novels touch on the themes of snobbery and social status and provide evidence of the profoundly complex class struggle. They address the problems of the recoverability of the subaltern voice and demonstrate the fact their own countrymen can be oppressors as well. Also, dismantling of the colonial rule did not automatically bring about changes for the better for the peasantry. The question boils down to the fact that there is no national identity left untouched by the vicissitudes of colonial history, which are clearly indicated in the novels.

Sri Lanka was on the cusp of changes, promising a just society and cultural pluralism at the time of Independence. But during the last sixty-five years, allegations of human rights abuses have dimmed the lustre of the country's democracy. The transitional and volatile nature of Sri Lanka's postcolonial status is conveyed in the novels, as they are discourses rooted in a specific history of linguistic and cultural displacement and the social struggle of this period. The authors are clearly examining the past, as well as the present, as if to look for answers to the complex sociocultural problems faced by the Sri Lankan people, with regards to the ethnic issue and other social restiveness and as such, submitting postcolonial history to sociological analysis. Examined under the rubric of "Post-Colonial Literature," the novels allow us to explore the distance between the rhetoric and the reality of the post-Independence nation, with regards to ethnic, peasant and caste struggles and class-based dissent. They facilitate an understanding of Sri Lankan society's recent past and perhaps ostensibly and ideally contribute to bring about an awareness of the need for a collaborative leadership that envisions an all-inclusive nation in the future, regardless of class and ethnicity, which is imperative to bring about durable peace and progressive social change.



## Bibliography of Primary Works

- Arasanayagam, Jean. *Dragons in the Wilderness*. Colombo: Godage International, 2007.
- Chandrasoma, M. *Out Out Brief Candle*. Colombo: Caxton Printing, 1981.
- De Silva, Nihal. *Far Spent Day*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2004.
- . *Giniralla Conspiracy*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2005.
- . *Road from Elephant Pass*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2003.
- De Zoysa, Arthur. *No Longer My Child*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2005.
- Goonewardena, James. *An Asian Gambit*. New Delhi: Navrang, 1985.
- . *Awakening of Doctor Kirithi and Other Stories*. Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1976.
- . *One Mad Bid for Freedom*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1990.
- . *The Tribal Hangover*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1995.
- Gunasekera, Romesh. *Reef*. London: Granta, 1994.
- Jayawardena, Elmo. *Sam's Story*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2001.
- Ondaatje, Michael. *Anil's Ghost*. London: Picador, 2000.
- . *The Broken Ark: A Book of Beasts*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1979.
- . *The Cat's Table*. New York: Vintage International, 2012.
- . *The Cinnamon Peeler: Selected Poems*. New York: Knopf, 1991.
- . *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems*. Toronto: Anansi, 1970.
- . *Coming Through Slaughter*. Toronto: House of Anansi, 1976.
- . *The Dainty Monsters*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1967.
- . *Divisadero*. Toronto: Random House of Canada, 2008.
- . *Elimination Dance*. Ontario: Nairn Coldstream, 1978.
- . *The English Patient*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992.
- . *In the Skin of a Lion*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987.
- . *Leonard Cohen*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970.
- . *The Man with Seven Toes*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1969.
- . *Rat Jelly*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1973.
- . *Running in the Family*. London: Bloomsbury, 1992.
- . *Secular Love*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1984.

- . *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do: Poems 1963-1978*. New York: Norton, 1979.
- . *Tin Roof*. Lantzville, B.C., Canada: Island Writing Series, 1982.
- . *Two Poems*. Milwaukee, WI: Woodland Pattern, 1986.
- Perera, Tennyson. *Of Terror and Trials*. Trans. Vijita Fernando. Colombo: Godage International Publishers, 1998.
- Proctor, Raja. *Forever life: Short Stories from Ceylon*. Lahore: Afro-Asian Book Club, 1967.
- . *Illicit Immigrant*. St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1981.
- . *Waiting for Surabiel*. St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1981.
- Rajapakse, Shirani. *Breaking News*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publishers, 2011.
- Roberts, Karen. *July*. London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 2001.
- Sarachchandra, E. R. *Curfew and a Full Moon*. Hong Kong: Heinemann Asia, 1978.
- . *Foam upon the Stream*: Delhi: B. R. Publishing, 1986.
- Selvadurai, Shyam. *Cinnamon Gardens*. Paris: UNESCO, 1987.
- . *Funny Boy: A Novel in Six Stories*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1994.
- . *With the Begging Bowl*. London: Anchor, 1999.
- Shobasakthi. *Gorilla*. Trans. Anushiya Sivanarayanan. New Delhi: Random House, 2008.
- Silva, Neluka. *The Iron Fence*. Colombo: Perera Hussein Publishing House, 2011.
- Sivanandan, A. *When Memory Dies*. London: Arcadia Books, 1997.
- . *Where the Dance Is: Stories from Two Worlds and Three*. London: Arcadia, 2000.
- Suriyakumaran, C. *Kilali Crossing: A Tale of Despair and Desire*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2002.
- Tearne, Roma. *Mosquito*. New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2007.
- Wickramasinghe, Martin. *Madol Doova*. Trans. Ashley Halpe. Dehiwela: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1976.
- Wickremasekera, Channa. *Distant Warriors*. Colombo: Perera-Hussein Publishing House, 2005.
- Wijenaike, Punyakante. *Amulet*. Wellampitiya: Godage International Publishers, 2002.
- . *An Enemy Within*. Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha Publishers, 1998.
- . *Giraya*. Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1971.
- . *The Rebel*. Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1979.
- . *Third Woman and Other Stories*. Maharagama: Saman Publishers, 1963.
- . *To Follow the Sun*. Colombo: M. D. Gunasena, 1995.

---. *The Unbinding: A Story of Rebirth and Other Stories*. Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha, 2001.

---. *The Washer-Woman and Other Stories*. Colombo: S. Godage, 1998.

---. *Yukthi and Other Stories*. Kelaniya: New Kelani Printers, 1991.

Wijesinghe, Manuka. *Monsoons and Potholes*. Colombo: Perera Hussein Publishing House, 2006.

Woolf, Leonard. *Village in the Jungle*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981.



## Bibliography of Secondary Sources

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.
- *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*. Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2006.
- Armitage, David. *The Ideological Origins of the Empire: Ideas in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- . *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- , eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Bandara, Suraj A. "University Tough on Ragers." *Daily News*, 4 Sep. 2010: 4. <[www.dailynews.lk/2010/09/04/news36.asp](http://www.dailynews.lk/2010/09/04/news36.asp)>.
- Bandarage, Asoka. *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity, Political Economy*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2009.
- Barbour, Douglas. *Michael Ondaatje*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.
- Bayoumi, Moustafa, and Andrew Rubin, eds. *The Edward Said Reader*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
- Betts, Raymond F. *Decolonization*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "Foreword: Framing Fanon." *The Wretched of the Earth*. By Frantz Fanon. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove, 2004. vii-xli.
- . *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- . *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Boahen, A. Adu. *African Perspectives on Colonialism*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1987.
- Brennan, Timothy. "The National Longing for Form." *Nation and Narration*. Ed. Homi K. Bhabha. London: Routledge, 1999. 44-70.
- Broemer, Marlene. "Duelling Chronotopes: Pre-colonial and Postmodern/Postcolonial Time and Space in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*." *Images of Post/National Society*. Eds. Gunilla Florby, Mark Shackleton and Katri Suhonen. Brussels: P. I. E. Peter Lang, 2000. 343-354.
- Bulankulame, Indika. *Frozen Tears: Political Violence, Women, Children and Problems of Trauma in Southern Sri Lanka*. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2005.

- Burrows, Victoria. "The Heterotopic Spaces of Postcolonial Trauma in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*." *Project Muse: Studies in the Novel* 40 (2008): 161-177.
- Burton, Antoinette, "Anil's Ghost and the Ends of History." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 38.1 (2003): 39-56.
- Chandraprema, C. A. *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror*. Colombo: Lake House, 1991.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. London: 1986.
- . *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.
- Chrisman, Laura, and Benita Parry, eds. *Post Colonial Theory and Criticism*. Cambridge: Suffolk St. Edmundsbury, 2000.
- Cohn, S. Bernard. *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1966.
- Cook, Victoria. "A Spectre of the Transnational: Exploring Identity as Process in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 9.1 (2002) 105-117.
- De Mel, Neloufer, and Minoli Samarakkody, eds. *Writing an Inheritance: Women's Writing in Sri Lanka 1860-1948*, Volume 1. Homagama: Karunaratne, 2002.
- Derrickson, Teresa. "Will the 'Un-Truth' Set You Free? A Critical Look at Global Human Rights Discourse in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*." *Literature Interpretation Theory* 15 (2004) 131-152.
- De Silva, K. M. *A History of Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2005.
- . *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka*. Delhi: Penguin Group, 1998.
- . *Sri Lanka's Troubled Inheritance*. Kandy: International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2007.
- Dirks, Nicholas B. *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006.
- Dissanayake, Wimal. *Enabling Traditions: Four Sinhala Cultural Intellectuals*. Colombo: Visidunu Prakashakayo, 2005.
- Eagleton, Mary. *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove, 1967.
- . *A Dying Colonialism*. Trans. Haakon Chevalier. New York: Grove, 1965.
- . *Towards the African Revolution*. Trans. Haakon Chevalier. New York: Grove, 1964.
- . *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove, 1963.
- Featherstone, Simon. *Postcolonial Cultures*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005.



- Florby, Gunilla. *The Margin Speaks: A Study of Margaret Laurence and Robert Kroetsch from a Post-Colonial Point of View*. Lund: Lund UP, 1997.
- Fredman, Sandra. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Trans. Joan Riviere. London: The Hogarth, 1963.
- . *Civilization, War and Death: Selections from Three Works*. Ed. John Rickman. Hertfordshire: The Garden City, 1939.
- . *Discrimination and Human Rights: The Case of Racism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Character and Culture*. New York: Collier, 1963.
- Gandhi, Leela. *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-De Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006.
- . *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Columbia UP, 1998.
- Gilly, Adolfo. Introduction. *A Dying Colonialism*. By Frantz Fanon. Trans. Haakon Chevalier. New York: Grove, 1965. 1-21.
- Goonetilleke, D. C. R. A. *Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People 1917- 2003*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2005.
- . "Sri Lanka's 'Ethnic' Conflict in Its Literature in English." *World Literature Today* 66.3 (1992): 450-453.
- . "The 1971 Insurgency in Sri Lankan Literature in English." *The Writer as Historical Witness: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*, Eds. Edwin Thumboo and Thiru Kandiah. Singapore: UniPress, 1995. 380-391.
- Gooneratne, Yasmine. *Celebrating Sri Lanka Women's English Writing, Volume 1*. Colombo: Women's Educational & Research Centre, 2002.
- . *English Literature in Ceylon 1815-1870*. Dehiwela: Tisara Prakashakayo, 1968.
- Gunaratna, Rohan. *International & Regional Security Implications of the Sri Lankan Tamil Insurgency*. Colombo: Unie Arts, 2001.
- . *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution? The Inside Story of the JVP*. Kandy: Institute of Fundamental Studies, 1990.
- Gunaratne, Malinga H. *For a Sovereign State: A True Story of Sri Lanka's Separatist War*. Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha Publishers, 2005.
- Gunasekera, S. L. *A Tragedy of Errors: About Tigers, Talks, Ceasefires and the Proposed Constitution*. Colombo: Sinhala Jathika Sangamaya, 2003.
- Haggard, H. Rider. *King Solomon's Mines*. London: Penguin, 1994.
- Harasym, Sarah, ed. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Herath, L. B. *Sri Lanka's Modern Writers and Patriots*. Colombo: Samayawadhana Printers, 2007.
- Hilde, Staels. "A Poetic Encounter with Otherness: The Ethics of Affect in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 76.3 (2007): 978-989.

- Hoare, Quintin, and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. and Trans. *Selection from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971.
- Howe, Irving. *Politics and the Novel*. New York: Horizon Press, 1957.
- Indrapala, K. *The Evolution of an Ethnic Identity: The Tamils in Sri Lanka C. 300 BCE to C. 1200 CE*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2007.
- Ismail, Qadri. *Abiding by Sri Lanka: On Peace, Place and Postcoloniality*. Minnesota: Minnesota UP, 2005.
- Jayasuriya, Maryse. *Terror and Reconciliation: Sri Lankan Anglophone Literature*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012.
- Jayasuriya, Maryse, and Aparna Halpe, eds. *South Asian Review: Sri Lanka Anglophone Literature* 33.3 (2012). Special Number.
- Jayasuriya, Wilfrid. *Sri Lanka's Modern English Literature*. New Delhi: Navrang, 1994.
- Jayawickrama, Sharanya. "At Home in the Nation? Negotiating Identity in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 40.2 (2005): 123-139.
- Jazeel, Tariq. "Because Pigs Can Fly: Sexuality, Race and the Geographies of Difference in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*." *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 12.2 (2005): 231-249.
- Kanaganayakam, Chelva. "Dancing in the Rarefied Air: Reading Contemporary Sri Lankan Literature." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 29:1 (1998): 51-65.
- . "In Defense of *Anil's Ghost*." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 37 (2006): 5-26.
- . "Things Fall Apart from a Sri Lankan Perspective." *Postcolonial Text* 5.1 (2009): 1-11.
- Kandiah, Thiru. "Inadequate Responses and the Attenuation of Creativity: Sri Lankan English Fiction of the Insurgency of 1971." *The Writer as Historical Witness: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*. Eds. Edwin Thumboo and Thiru Kandiah. Singapore: UniPress, 1995. 393-408.
- Karunaratne, Ilica Malkanthi. "Elephant Pass." *Island* 14 Apr. 2005: 5
- Knowles, Sam. "Gates of Fire: Michael Ondaatje's Transnational Literature, *From Running in the Family to Anil's Ghost*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 45.3 (2010): 429-441.
- Knox, Robert. *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*. Dehiwela: Tissa, 1958.
- Ladduwahetty, Neville S. *Sri Lanka's National Question: A Collection of Articles*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2010.
- Little, Douglas. *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Post Colonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998.

- Ludowyk, E. F. C. *The Story of Ceylon*. London: Faber and Faber, 1967.
- Macfie, Alexander Lyon. *Orientalism*. London: Pearson Education, 2002.
- Marinkova, Milena. "'Perceiving [...] in one's own body' the Violence of History, Politics and Writing: Anil's Ghost and Witness Writing." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 44.3 (2009): 107-125.
- Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. New York: Orion Press, 1965.
- Mukherjee, Arun. *Postcolonialism: My Living*. Toronto: Tsar Publications, 1998.
- Muller, J. B. *The Burghers*. Colombo: Wimal Enterprises, 2006.
- Naipaul, V. S. *India: A Wounded Civilization*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.
- . *Half a Life*. London: Pan Macmillan, 2001.
- . *The Mimic Men*. London: Penguin, 1969.
- Narayan Swamy, M. R. *Inside an Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran*. Colombo: Yapa Publications, 2003.
- Nelson, Cary, and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan, 1988.
- Pennycook, Alastair. *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*. Oxon: Routledge, 1998.
- Perera, S. W. "Attempting the Sri Lankan Novel of Resistance and Reconciliation: A. Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*." *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 23.1-2 (1997): 13-27.
- . "Sri Lanka 2003." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 39.4 (2004): 178-188.
- . "Sri Lanka 2005." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 41.1 (2006): 215-229.
- Prakash, Gyan. *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.
- Pratap, Anita. *Island of Blood: Frontline Report from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Other South Asian Flashpoints*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2001.
- "Ragging Syndrome." *Daily News* 5 May 2005: 28 Sep. 2011.  
[http://dailynews.lk/2010/05/05/main\\_Editorial.asp](http://dailynews.lk/2010/05/05/main_Editorial.asp).
- Rajan, V. G. Julie, and Atreyee Phukan, eds. *South Asia and Its Others: Reading the Exotic*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009.
- Ranatunga, Cyril. *Adventurous Journey: From Peace to War, Insurgency to Terrorism*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2009.
- Renan, Ernest. "What is a Nation?" Trans. Martin Thom. *Nation and Narration*. Ed. Homi Bhabha. London: Routledge, 1944. 8-22.
- Ruthven, K. K. *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.

- Said, Edward W. "An Interview with Edward W. Said." *The Edward Said Reader*. Eds. Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin. NY: Vintage, 2000. 419-444.
- , ed. *Literature and Society*. Maryland: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1986.
- . *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 1979.
- . "Yeats and Decolonization." *The Edward Said Reader*. Eds. Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin. NY: Vintage, 2000. 291-313.
- Salgado, Minoli. *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance, and the Politics of Place*. Oxon: Routledge, 2007.
- Sanderatne, Nimal. *Economic Growth and Social Transformations: Five Lectures on Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Tamarind Publications, 2000.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. Introduction. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. By Albert Memmi. Trans. Lawrence Hoey. New York: Orion Press, 1965. xxi-xxix.
- . Preface. *The Wretched of the Earth*. By Frantz Fanon. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove, 1961. xliii-lxii.
- Siriweera, W. I. "Recent Socio-Political Conflicts in Sri Lanka." *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* XVII & XVII (1994): 193-215.
- Sivanandan, A. "Ethnic Cleansing in Sri Lanka." *Race and Class* 51.3 (2010): 59-65.
- Solnes, Jon Oskar. *A Powderkeg in Paradise: Lost Opportunity for Peace in Sri Lanka*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2010.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. London: Macmillan, 1988. 24-28.
- . *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1999.
- . "Selected Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. 3-31.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, and Harold Veesser. "The New Historicism." Interview by Harold Veesser. *Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. Ed. Sarah Harasym. New York: Routledge, 1990. 152-168.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, John Hutnyk, Scott McQuire and Nikos Papastergiadis. "Strategy, Identity, Writing." Interview by Melbourne Journal of Politics. *Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. Ed. Sarah Harasym. New York: Routledge, 1990. 35-49.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, Ron Aronson, and John Dunn. "The Post-modern Condition: The End of Politics?" Interview by Geoffrey Hawthorn. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. Ed. Sarah Harasym. New York: Routledge, 1990. 17-34.
- Sturrock, John, ed. *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary Writing*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966.

- Sugars, Cynthia, ed. *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy & Canadian Literature*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004.
- Thalgodapitiya, W. *Portraits of Ten Patriots of Sri Lanka*. Kandy: T. B. S. Godamunne, 1966.
- Tinker, Hugh. *South Asia: A Short History*. London: Macmillan, 1966.
- Von Der Mehden, Fred R. *South-East Asia 1930-1970: The Legacy of Colonialism and Nationalism*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1974.
- Vukovich, Daniel F. *China and Orientalism: Western Knowledge Production and the P. R. C.* Oxon: Routledge, 2012.
- Wain, John. *Essays on Literature and Ideas*. London: Macmillan, 1963.
- Walsh, William. *Indian Literature in English*. Harlow: Longman, 1990.
- Wickremasinghe, Subash. *Under Attack: A Collection of Articles on Political Activities in the Face of LTTE Terrorism*. Colombo: Vishva Lekha, 2007.
- Wijesinha, Rajiva. *Breaking Bounds: Essays on Sri Lankan Writing in English*. Sabaragamuwa: The Sabaragamuwa UP, 1998.
- . *Declining Sri Lanka: Terrorism and Ethnic Conflict: The Legacy of J. R. Jayawardena (1906-1996)*. New Delhi: Cambridge UP India, 2007.
- Wijewardana, Don. *How LTTE Lost the Eelam War: Defeat of the Tamil Tiger Terrorists Who Ravaged Sri Lanka for Over 30 years*. Pannipitiya: Stamford Lake, 2010.
- William, Patrick, and Laura Chrisma, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Colombia UP, 1994.
- Wilson, A. Jeyaratnam. *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000.
- Winder, Robert. *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain*. London: Time Warner UK, 2004.
- Worcester, David. *The Art of Satire*. New York: Harvard UP, 1969.