

**Representations of  
Civilian Trauma in the Sri Lankan Civil War:  
A Study of Select Movies**

*Thesis Submitted to*

**MAHATMA GANDHI UNIVERSITY, KOTTAYAM**



*For the Award of the degree of*

**Doctor of Philosophy**

*in*

**English Language and Literature**

*By*

**PREETHU P**

*Under the Guidance of*

**Dr. Priya K. Nair**

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**March 2020**



# MAHATMA GANDHI UNIVERSITY

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**DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF**

*Those Lives Lost, Minds Wounded  
and Souls Scarred by Wars.*

*War is neither glamorous nor attractive.  
It is monstrous. Its very nature is one of  
tragedy and suffering. War is like a fire  
in the human community, one whose fuel  
is living beings.*

*~Dalai Lama*

## DECLARATION

I, Preethu P, do hereby declare that the thesis titled **Representations of Civilian Trauma in the Sri Lankan Civil War: A Study of Select Movies**, submitted to the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is a record of the bonafide research work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Priya K. Nair, Department of English & Centre of Research, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam.

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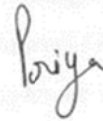
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta*

*Na paro param nikubbetha*

*I bow in gratitude to the Ultimate Reality that makes everything possible. When my dream comes true in the shape of this work, I wish to thank a lot of persons whose help and support made it possible.*

*It is hard to put into words my gratitude towards Dr. Priya K. Nair, my guide, who encouraged and supervised my work. A great teacher, she inspires and brings out the best in me.*

*I am greatly indebted for the assistance given by St. Teresa's College, my research centre, and the Department of English. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Latha R. Nair, my teacher, for motivating me.*

*I would like to offer my special thanks to Mr. Murali Gopy for the advice given, which has been a great aid. The insights he offered have given me clarity of vision which helped a lot.*

*I wish to acknowledge and thank for the help provided by Mr. Rajesh Touchriver, Mr. Samanth Subramanian and Mrs. T who agreed to be a part of my interviews.*

*I would like to express my very great appreciation to my friends, especially Ajith and Lithin, for always being there for me. I am blessed to have these people who consider my dream as their own. I cannot forget the help extended by my batch mates and friends, Elizebeth Renu and Liz, who motivated me throughout my work. Let me also thank my student Mridhula who helped me get the copy of an important movie, and Niranjana, the kind stranger, who provided me with the contact details of someone who became a very significant part of this work.*

*I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Victoria Eggerson and Mr. Venkatachalam Saravanan who helped me during my visit to Sri Lanka.*

*My special thanks are extended to my family which is my support system. Their faith in my dreams encourages me to always aim high. I cannot put into words my love and gratitude towards my dear parents for being what they are. My siblings, Priya and Gautham, were always there for me throughout the course of this work.*

*I thank each and every one who has been a part of my journey. Be it a kind word, handshake or a smile, every little action has helped me move forward through my work.*

***Preethu P***



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## INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka-the very mention of the name of this nation brings to mind contradictory images of peace and violence. What has this idyllic island with pristine coasts and lush landscapes to do with shocking memories of shelling, grenades and genocide in bloodcurdling brutality? What made violence an everyday affair there for close to three decades? This dissertation is an attempt to study how effectively the trauma suffered by civilians during the Sri Lankan Civil War is represented in movies. The first chapter, titled “Of Lions and Tigers”, discusses the historical and cultural milieu of Sri Lanka which is important in the study of the war. The chapter traces the way in which the two factions arrived from India. It studies the political construction of ethnonationalism in Sri Lanka as the root cause for the conflict.

Sri Lanka is a nation with many peculiarities. To understand the nuances that run beneath the cultural scape of this island, one should study it through diverse lenses. It is a multi-ethnic country with strong cultural roots. A study of the historical and cultural milieu of this nation is vital to understand the truth behind the long war it underwent. The causes of the Sri Lankan war are multiple and interconnected. It was fought between the Sri Lankan Army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Eelam* (LTTE) over the separatist demand of an exclusive area for Tamils. Sadly, the arena of

war was the common man's life. It would not be an exaggeration to state that every Tamil in the country has either witnessed, survived or been affected by the war, directly or indirectly. Even Sinhalese civilians had their share of woes. Apart from geographical proximity, Sri Lanka has age-old cultural ties with India. Ravana's 'Lankapuri' mentioned in the great Indian epic *Ramayana* is supposed to be Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese as well as the Tamil settlers in the island had gone there from India. Buddhism, which originated in India, travelled to Sri Lanka and developed strong roots. The southern part of India, especially Kerala and Tamilnadu, are very similar to Sri Lanka. The kind of Tamil spoken in the northern parts of Sri Lanka (Jaffna Tamil), with its peculiar intonation and retention of archaic words, is so similar to Malayalam that in Tamil Nadu, it is often mistaken to be the latter. Legend has it that a singer (*panan*) from India pleased the king with his musical instrument *Yazh* and was gifted with a piece of land which later became known as *Yalpanam* or Jaffna.

It has been a decade since the war came to an end. Sri Lanka is on the path of rehabilitation and reconciliation. There are challenges that have not yet been resolved. The major one among those is the lack of acknowledgement of the sufferings of common men. The allegations of war crimes and genocide, even with witnesses and evidence, were denied by the Sri Lankan government. Unless one comes into terms with the past, it would be difficult to move on into the future. Measures should be

undertaken according to the cultural fabric of the nation. There are different layers of differences that divide Sri Lankan citizens, at different levels. Race and language merged with religion and seeped into politics. Sri Lanka is projected as the nation of the majority Sinhalese Buddhists where minorities have to live accordingly.

The world has witnessed many a civil war, some of them similar to what happened in Sri Lanka. Let us take the example of the Bangladesh Liberation War (1971). It was a movement based on nationalistic sentiments and resulted in the creation of People's Republic of Bangladesh as a separate nation. Dissent originated when Mohammad Ali Jinnah declared that Urdu would be the sole federal language of the newly formed Pakistan, much to the ire of the Bengali-speaking populace of East Pakistan. The allotment from national budget was also considered discriminatory as West Pakistan received the lion's share of the resources. There was a basic cultural difference between the two areas as the Bengali population in East Pakistan began to consider their ethnicity over religion and favoured a liberal secular society. Bengali nationalistic sentiments were ignited and when the Army tried to quell it with force during the Operation Searchlight (25 March, 1971), it ended in large scale genocide. Bangladesh was declared an independent country by the leaders of the movement but it took nine months and the India-Pakistan War of 1971 to finally place Bangladesh on the map as a separate nation.

There are similarities and differences between the Bangladesh Liberation War and the Sri Lankan Civil War. Both nations were postcolonial entities with a multiethnic background. The two wars witnessed the genocide of civilians. India tried to be a mediator in both the wars, succeeding in one and failing in the other. Both began with a linguistic controversy. Religion played an important role in both the wars but ethnicity gained an upper hand later. Both witnessed the rise of liberation armies (Mukti Bahini and the LTTE) which were trained by India and used guerilla warfare. The Sri Lankan war ended in the mass displacement of Tamils who still aspire for *Eelam*. The Bangladesh War also accounts for the presence of a huge section of Bangladeshi immigrants in India which has contributed to violent movements in Assam later. The similarities end there. Bangladesh War ended in the creation of a separate country. Both the warring sections were racially similar as there was no Aryan-Dravidian divide. One is a resolved war, other is not. The Sri Lankan War ended, on paper, but the issues were not resolved.

The two major communities in Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese and the Tamils, were racially, linguistically, religiously and culturally divided. Both proud of their religious and cultural ancestry respectively, they could not compromise their faith or land for the other. It would be interesting to analyse Sri Lanka along the lines of 'hauntology', a concept put forth by Jacques Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* (1993). He says that it happens when a



deferred non-origin takes the place of a real presence. Like a ghost, it haunts the present with the yearning of a future. Derrida describes how the spectre of Marx haunts Europe, even in the modern age. He writes:

Ghosts arrive from the past and appear in the present. However, the ghost cannot be properly said to belong to the past. . . . Does then the ‘historical’ person who is identified with the ghost properly belong to the present? Surely not, as the idea of a return from death fractures all traditional conceptions of temporality. The temporality to which the ghost is subject is therefore paradoxical, at once they ‘return’ and make their apparitional debut. Derrida has been pleased to call this dual movement of return and inauguration a ‘hauntology’, a coinage that suggests a spectrally deferred non-origin within grounding metaphysical terms such as history and identity. (Buse and Stott 11)

If this concept is applied to Sri Lanka, we can find that the island nation is haunted by the spectres of imagined identities. In Jaffna Tamils, there is the spectre of Dravidian pride and the yearning for an imagined nation called *Eelam*. The Sinhalese are obsessed with the imagined identity of Buddha’s lineage through the strict *Theravada* school of faith. The present, with the flesh-and-blood individuals, takes the backstage when these hauntings happen. Identity, in Sri Lanka, is constructed on these imagined premises. The concept of Tamil identity is not merely an individual one. It brings

along with it a glorious history which is rooted in myth. It bears shocking tales of battle and bloodshed, and keeps alive the embers of a future space which would restore all the glory lost.

Identity politics, also called identitarian politics, are political arguments that focus upon the interests and perspectives of groups with which people identify. It takes into account the myriad forms in which a group's politics gets fashioned by facets of their identity. The Tamil culture has boosted a nationalist sentiment in the people which has fused with their sense of identity so much that both have become almost synonymous. The concept of a separate Tamil nation has become an 'imagined community' in the minds of the people. It is a concept coined by Benedict Anderson to analyse nationalism. Anderson believes that a nation is a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. It is dealt with in detail in the first chapter.

It would be apt in this introduction to discuss how the Tamil identity has been formed through ages, from *Kumari Kandam* through Tamilakam to *Eelam*. One is the ancient past which is constructed by Tamil nationalists. In order to strengthen the collective identity, Tamil nationalists have blended the theory of Lemuria (a hypothetical lost land) with *Kumari Kandam*, an ancient Tamil society, which is considered to be the cradle of human civilisation. Although the Lemuria theory was later outdated by the continental drift (plate tectonics) theory, the notion

remained well-liked among the Tamil revivalists of the 20th century. According to them, *Kumari Kandam* was not a primeval culture or a rustic civilisation. Instead, they described it as a land which had reached the zenith of human accomplishment, and where the populace lived a life dedicated to knowledge, instruction, travel and trade. The books discussing the *Kumari Kandam* theory were first included in college curriculum of the present-day Tamil Nadu in 1908. Over the next few decades, other such works were also included in the curriculum of Madras University and Annamalai University. As late as 1981, the Tamil Nadu government's history textbooks mentioned the *Kumari Kandam* theory (Ramaswamy 102-105).

The effort taken to establish the antiquity of the Tamil culture, thus, had been several. The Tamil nationalists also discuss *Tamilakam*, the land of the Tamils, to elaborate on their sovereignty. "Tamilakam" is a portmanteau which can be translated as the "homeland of the Tamils". *Tamilakam* was divided into political regions called *Perunadu* or "Great country", the three major ones being the Pandya, the Chera and the Chola dynasties. *Tamilakam* had a sovereign existence and was never under the control of empires from the northern part of the country. Tamil culture also spread outside *Tamilakam* when, in the third century BCE, the first Tamil settlers arrived in Sri Lanka. Around 237 BCE, two adventurers from southern India established the first Tamil rule in Sri Lanka. In 145 BCE,

Elara, a Chola general or prince known as Ellāan, took over the throne at Anuradhapura and ruled for forty-four years.

The second half of the 19th century also saw the birth of Tamil pride in India, based on a distinct non-Aryan Dravidian identity. The concept of 'Tamil nationalism' was initiated at the end of the 19th century mainly to defend the distinctiveness of the Tamil language. The idea declares that Tamils are in need of a nation for themselves and promotes the cultural unity of Tamil people. Those who promote this ideology try to establish that Tamils had such an exclusive space throughout history. The nationalistic sentiments express itself in the form of linguistic purism ("Pure Tamil"), nationalism and irredentism ("Tamil *Eelam*"), social equality ("Self-Respect Movement") and Tamil Renaissance. When a false impression was created that the pan Indian culture was Vedic, a section of educated Tamils asserted the point that Tamil culture was distinct from Sanskrit culture and demanded its recognition as a sovereign.

Sri Lankan Tamil national consciousness began to rise during the era of British rule during the nineteenth century, as Tamil Hindu revivalists tried to counteract Protestant missionary activity. The revivalists, led by Arumuga Navalar, used literacy as a tool to spread Hinduism and its principles. The Sinhalese belong to a proud race which traces their ancestry to the Aryan kingdoms of India. The myth of Prince Vijaya, which is considered to be the foundation of Sinhalese race in Sri Lanka, is discussed

in the first chapter. The Sinhalese consider themselves to be very different from the Tamils as they belong to two different races. It was during the third century that Buddhism reached Sri Lanka through Mahinda and Sanghamitta, offspring of the Mauryan ruler Ashoka. Mahinda converted King Tissa of Anuradhapura to Buddhism. Buddhism blended into the Sinhalese culture and identity and became the religion of the majority. The racial and linguistic divide thus grew to have religious proportions too. It became the cause of the civil war which shattered the nation. When imagined communities become a part of the collective identity of a people, it becomes a matter of survival for them. It cannot be crushed using force. It has to be addressed in a diplomatic way which would not call for wars and bloodshed. Genocides kill bodies, not sentiments. It would spread like fire and violence only adds fuel to it.

The second chapter of this thesis, “Of Wounds and Scars”, studies trauma theoretically and applies it to Sri Lankan War movies. Beginning with Freud, the study looks at how different theorists have defined trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD, which is suffered by a majority of war victims, is also studied. As part of this study, the different kinds of traumatic events that can happen in a war-afflicted country were identified and instances from movies were discussed as its part. According to Lacan, the unconscious is structured like a language. Here, language denotes any signifying system, which can also include films. When language fails, the

unconscious manifests itself. Trauma is an absence that causes the dissolution of signifiers and thus a loss of language. The event thus becomes inaccessible to the victims due to trauma, which makes it unrepresentable. Cathy Caruth speaks of trauma as unspeakable. It is something that repeats itself as nightmares and affects the daily life of the victim. In the Symbolic Order (Lacan), the unconscious comes into being. The meaning which is ciphered and coded is deciphered and decoded in the unconscious. In order to come out of trauma, the traumatic experience should be symbolised, that is, moved to the Symbolic Order where action and involvement can occur on it. The Symbolic Order is cultural too. In a country like Sri Lanka, cinema can provide the symbolic sphere which can address traumata. The addressal of trauma thus becomes an interdisciplinary exercise.

There are representations of war which describes how it feels to be traumatic. Nayomi Munaweera, in *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*, writes:

But there are also nightmares. Over and over I dream of a small house, a glittering lagoon, a mango tree, and a young girl. She stands before me and her large bruised eyes do not leave mine.

When she unpins the sari fold at her shoulder and pulls it away from her, I see sunset-colored bruises on her delicate clavicles. When she undoes her sari blouse, I see the grenades tucked like extra breasts

under her own. It is grotesque. I wake trembling, and her eyes stay with me for hours. (125)

Yasodhara, the narrator, describes her recurring nightmare of a suicide bomber. Though it is a fictional episode, it portrays the real emotions that can happen to anyone who has witnessed the brutal war. In testimonial fiction, only the characters are fabricated, not their emotions. When someone who had been through traumatic events watches its representation onscreen, it can aid in its addressal. Rajesh Touchriver, whose movie *In the Name of Buddha*, speaks about the responses he received when the movie was screened (Appendix II). Many survivors are prejudiced about the Sri Lankan film industry as it is dominated by the Sinhalese. The other side of the coin is discussed as the case of Prasanna Vithanage who faced controversy for including ‘non-Sinhalese’ content and cast in his movies.

The third chapter, “Of Tales and Testimonies”, discusses how the Sri Lankan war is memorised and represented. The authoritarian government installed memorials which commemorated the lives of army men who fought the rebels. The government, after its victory, built statues of Buddha, as if to establish its control over the island. The Tamils were prohibited from mourning their dead. There were people who were lost in the war, some illegally detained. This cause was not addressed after the war. In *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje puts into words the real situation in Sri Lanka after the war as:



In a fearful nation, public sorrow was stamped down by the climate of uncertainty. If a father protested a son's death, it was feared another family member would be killed. If people you knew disappeared, there was a chance they might stay alive if you did not cause trouble. This was a scarring psychosis in the country. Death, loss, was 'unfinished,' so you could not walk through it. There had been years of night visitations, kidnappings or murders in broad daylight. The only chance was that the creatures who fought would consume themselves. All that was left of law was a belief in an eventual revenge towards those who had power. (56)

The chapter also deals with the genre of testimonial narratives. How the war becomes a part of cultural memory forms the crux of the chapter. It also discusses how the events depicted in testimonials and other representations have been portrayed in films.

As part of the literature survey, different testimonio of the Sri Lankan War is discussed and analysed here. *Only Man Is Vile: The Tragedy of Sri Lanka* by William McGowan, a travelogue, features Sri Lanka as he witnessed it in 1987. In the book, William McGowan marked the Black July riots as:

While travelling on a bus when a mob laid siege to it, passengers watched as a small boy was hacked 'to limb-less death.' The bus driver was ordered to give up a Tamil. He pointed out a woman who

was desperately trying to erase the mark on her forehead – called a kumkum – as the thugs bore down on her. The woman's belly was ripped open with a broken bottle and she was immolated as people clapped and danced. In another incident, two sisters, one aged eighteen and the other eleven, were decapitated and raped, the latter 'until there was nothing left to violate and no volunteers could come forward,' after which she was burned. While all this was going on, a line of Buddhist monks appeared, arms flailing, their voices raised in a delirium of exhortation, summoning the Sinhalese to put all Tamils to death. (“Anatomy of a Pogrom”)

Anita Pratap, in *Island of Blood*, offers a journalist's perspective and experience of the war. She is the first journalist to have interviewed Velupillai Prabhakaran. According to her, what she witnessed in the country shook her and despite being a tough journalist, she was traumatised. In *Island of Blood*, Anita Pratap describes the war torn Sri Lanka as ‘a ravaged nation’ and records her experiences. She christens Sri Lanka as an “island of blood, swirling with broken dreams and broken hearts” (114). The later part of the eighties was a difficult time to be in Jaffna. Even Indian authorities had banned journalists from visiting the district. In November 1987, Anita Pratap went to Jaffna, to get an interview with V Prabhakaran. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was present in Sri Lanka then and she remembers how militants of the LTTE risked

their lives by helping her get to Jaffna. Why should they put their lives at risk to help an Indian journalist who had come with the risky assignment interviewing their chief? It might have been their need to be heard and understood. Anita Pratap remembers how considerate they were and never bothered her with lewd behaviour. In the movie *Madras Café*, the character named Jaya is modelled on Anita Pratap.

IPFK suspected all villagers to be sympathisers of the LTTE and hence treated them harshly. It is a fact the Indian narratives try to mask, but Anita Pratap records how a fisherman, whose family hosted her for a night, complained of how IPKF stole their things. The family, who shared their meagre meal with her, made her realise how good the ordinary people of the village were. The northern part of the country was already in the throngs of poverty, which would escalate to shocking heights in the days to come. She writes about Jaffna as:

It became a land of shortages, gun battles, artillery duels, malnutrition and diarrhea . . . the people of Jaffna excelled in the art of survival. . . managed to concoct their own fuel to run cars and motorbikes and even generators. . . mixed vegetable oil with kerosene as a substitute for diesel. . . detergents out of palmyra, a type of palm oil, and paper out of straw and waste. Contraband goods from Colombo were craftily smuggled in. (45-46)

She mentions how Dr. N Kanagarathnam, the director of the only running hospital in Jaffna, once said that the war has reduced them to a country of stray people and stray dogs. She evokes the image of the Pietà, a Christian motif which portrays the body of Jesus Christ cradled in Mother Mary's lap, to symbolise the plight of Sri Lankan mothers who lost their sons in the war. She narrates the instance of Jayamani Marianayagam, whose son was killed by the Sri Lankan Army. The Army couldn't get hold of the Tiger they were chasing and took her son instead, whose corpse was found later, with "his legs broken, his fingernails missing, half his head blown away" (46). The agony of mothers separated from their children as they took off from their homes amidst the scuffle also finds mention in her work. She imagines how, in separate refugee camps, those mothers and children lived, crying for each other.

The seeds of the ethnic tension were sown much earlier in the island country, which witnessed anti-Tamil riots much before the formation of the LTTE and the beginning of the Civil War. Velupillai Prabhakaran spoke to Anita Pratap about the 1958 anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka which left a deep imprint in the psyche of his four-year-old self. Several atrocities were committed against the Tamils. The angry mob spared none; even infants were roasted in boiling tar. Prabhakaran grew up listening to such stories of cruelty against his people and, quite obviously, developed a rancorous frame of mind towards those who perpetrated it. On 15 July 1983, Charles

Lucas Anthony (*nom de guerre* Seelan), bosom friend of Prabhakaran and one of the founder members of the LTTE, was chased by the Sri Lankan Army. He, being severely injured in the knee, asked Aruna, an LTTE cadre, to kill him before the Army finds him. After much protest, Aruna obeyed the command before escaping. Prabhakaran, in vengeance for his dear friend's death, planned the ambush of 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1983 which killed thirteen Sri Lankan soldiers. He also mutilated the bodies of soldiers. The incident kindled the flame that soon spread to become what is now known as the Black July riots.

After covering the July riots, Anita Pratap, a tough reporter, was caught in the throes of vicarious trauma. She wrote an emotional report after which she broke down into tears. The report was later used by the Indian government to intervene in Sri Lanka on moral grounds. In *Island of Blood*, she writes about how she, during the Black July riots, witnessed Sinhalese mobs butchering Tamils. She remembers how even Indians were targeted. The attack on Indian High Commission was the worst case of anti-Indian violence ever known then in a foreign country. In pre-planned and well-organised attacks, the mob, armed with the electoral roll, burned buildings, cars, motorcycles and furniture belonging to Tamils and looted Tamil homes. The three decades that followed were a sad jumble of “mass murders, bomb explosions, assassinations, civil war, prison massacres, riots, death-squad murders, bombs on Christian churches, attacks on

Buddhist temples, curfews, kidnappings, aerial strafing, landmines, ambushes, car bombs, suicide bombings”(48).

Anita Pratap points out how civilians suffered under the IPKF, the force sent by India to maintain peace in the island. The second armed uprising of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front) was against IPKF and they too tortured civilians for two years with brutal violence. Though not a direct part of the Civil War, this too can be counted as an important event in the course of the war as its cause was related to the induction of IPKF in the island and the results were suffered by the Sri Lankan civilians. It is only in the movie *In the Name of Buddha* that this version of how IPKF was is featured. The movie was banned in India.

There were brief interludes of peace in the island during the ceasefire periods. It made the civilians hope for a peaceful life. Velupillai Prabhakaran's stature and ideology had grown so colossal that he could not think about settling for anything lesser than *Eelam*. “We don't want *Eelam* on a platter. We will fight and win *Eelam*,” Prabhakaran had said in an interview with Anita Pratap (94). He wanted to ensure that the deaths of thousands of his boys were not in vain. Thus, Anita Pratap says, “by fighting for the dead he was engineering the death of the living” (95).

Not much was known about the inner- workings of the LTTE then. Journalists were banned from the northern parts of Sri Lanka. The group had compiled their own literature as well as video records of their history

and operations. They even had a film made which featured Prabhakaran as the head of the national army of *Eelam*, a nation that did not even exist on the map. They used these documents and records to indoctrinate new recruits. The members of the LTTE had unconditional faith in Prabhakaran that they considered it lucky to die in the war. Anita Pratap writes about how members of ‘Black Tigers’, the elite commando group within the LTTE, before going on a suicide mission, would have dinner and a photo shoot session with Prabhakaran. The end of the war did not bring an end to the sufferings of the Tamils. Their lives were doomed to be spent in refugee camps, “hell-holes of misery and grief”. The unhygienic conditions, malnutrition and the spread of epidemics made a hell out of their lives in camps. Anita Pratap speaks of how Tamils were turned away from hospitals, however grave their conditions were.

Samanth Subramanian’s *This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War* portrays the sufferings that Tamil civilians underwent during the war. It is a collection of oral testimonies which also discusses how the Sri Lankan military strived to wipe away all remnants of the war associated with the Tigers. Samanth Subramanian chronicles his experience of post-war Sri Lanka in his work. In four parts, namely ‘The Terror’, ‘The North’, ‘The Faith’ and ‘Endgames’, his work features the lives of ordinary people whom he met in the country who had witnessed/ survived the war. Apart from stories of grief and loss, the book also portrays how the experience of



war is remembered by those who had been caught in it. In a personal interview, Subramanian explains his choice of working with testimonies as:

I believe personal experiences matter. That is the guiding principle of the journalist. We are not theoreticians or policy analysts; we try to build the big picture out of assorted smaller stories. In personal experiences, there is room for uncertainty and incompleteness; it reflects life, because life is uncertain and incomplete, even for people who do not live in a war zone. And there is a moral force to telling these stories, a moral value in capturing and recording them.

(Appendix III)

He explains how the country was still fragile, and the government ran it with an iron hand. As a journalist and a foreigner, he had to be careful not only for himself but also for the people he was interviewing. People were also unsure about talking about their stories, so it required patience and a certain commitment to hear them out, to persuade them that he was worth talking to. He worked by trying to pin down a selection of themes first - the kinds of narratives that would together build a satisfactory picture. In each of these themes, he had multiple narratives, and chose the strongest among those for the book.

When asked about the potential of art to alter the cultural memory of a group of people and help them in building their shattered identities, he says that art certainly helps in retaining memory, or in provoking thought.

It can act as a counter to establishment forces that try to suppress the narratives of certain groups. He believes that narrative, art and dialogue have very important roles to play in the efforts at reconciliation. Part of the course of reconciliation is the process of creating an openness whereby people feel free enough to talk about their experiences. He says that Sri Lanka isn't there yet. According to Subramanian, film has its own advantages and disadvantages. Its appeal is perhaps more visceral, but on the other hand, the spectator is only immersed in the narrative for a couple of hours, whereas a book takes much longer to read. A book is a slower burn. He agrees that the documentaries produced out of the UK that led to the exposures of war crimes against the Tamils were very effective. He mentions that the movie *Dheepan*, the movie starring Shobha Shakti, worked along the same lines.

In his book, he mentions many people he met during his stay in the island. He names Uncle W, Sanjaya, a blogger named Indi Samarajiwa, a former researcher Mahesh who was interested in Urban Buddhism, M, a friend in Jaffna, *et al.* who guided him. He speaks of Dr. Thurairaja, a lover of sports who joined army for the same. He describes the condition of Tamil men in the army. They were always under suspicion and never got their due promotions. Ravi Paramanathan, a retired major he met in Canada, talked more on the subject. He said:

Being a Tamil in the army. . . was like being a bat. ‘Because the bat is a mammal, he goes and talks to the other mammals, and they say:’No, no, you’re a bird. Get out of here.’ Then he goes to the birds, and they say:’No, no, you’re a mammal, you don’t lay eggs. Get out of here.’ (67)

He met, in London, Raghavan-one of Prabhakaran’s first comrades- and his wife Nirmala, who was also a rebel. Her younger sister was Rajani Thiranagama, the Tamil human rights activist who was murdered by the Tigers. Subramanian also speaks of those who remember the war in extraordinary ways, like Ayathurai Santhan who has apparently chronicled the war in his memory as the old cars he bought and sold over the time. He met women who suffered poverty and the loss of their beloved ones in the war.

In the book, Subramanian mentions Ismail in Batticaloa who asked what good is it going to be for him if he converse with the author. He just wanted a copy of the book sent. He explained the LTTE attack in a mosque where he lost his relatives as:

Then the Tigers came back in and shouted: ‘Everybody who isn’t injured, get up. Come out and help us take the injured to the hospital.’ At this, Ismail’s nephew, the six-year-old Akram, jumped up and, in tears, shouted: ‘I want to go home. I don’t want to be

here. ' The Tigers put the barrel of a gun into Akram's mouth and fired. (175)

Through the memories of some others, the book describes how the Tamil Muslims were driven away from Jaffna, carrying nothing but 500 rupees, that too to pay for bus service. Women's earrings were ripped off with lobes; families had their welfare certificates confiscated. Razeena remembers that there was a song playing in the bus they were transported in. She describes it as "a song that went '*Kaakeyare kaakeyare, engapogire?*' In Jaffna Tamil slang, a Muslim was often called '*kaaka*'. . . Maybe it was a pointed jibe or maybe it was just a coincidence" (162).

He mentions an instance where people crowded around him and his friends to unburden themselves emotionally. They gave details of those who were missing from their families. Samanth Subramanian writes about the trauma of Tamils, "Everybody had a Mullivaikal story-either a first-hand one, if they had lived through it, or a second-hand one, told to them by someone who had been there. There were no third-hand accounts. That's how closely the trauma was held within the Tamil community, and how vividly it was narrated" (254). Subramanian writes, "The war ingested everything whole, bent everything to its service: religion and politics, history and geography, fact and mythology" (31). The war entered everyday life in multiple ways. A roadside pub selling 'Lion beer and Tiger beer' was one of these.

He also describes how the memory of the war was manipulated. The winning side flaunted their power in many ways. They set up Sinhalese-only sign boards and renamed culturally important spaces. For instance, Nainativu was rechristened ‘Nagadeepa’ but in the island, the *vihara* still coexists with the temple in fraternal solidarity. He mentions that the temple is facing east towards India, while the *Viharaya* is facing Sri Lanka. He also mentions how a part of Thanthamalai Murugan Temple was razed by soldiers. The book mentions myth-making in Sri Lanka. Subramanian writes about how Mahinda Rajapaksa is projected as King Dutugemunu’s descendent as well as blood relative to Buddha (188). Styling himself as the ‘second Mahinda’ who protects Buddhism, myths were churned out using government apparatuses. Myths were fabricated and made into histories. “Once a version of history had been propounded, it needed also to be protected” (198). Efforts were initiated to claim the island as the property of the Sinhalese and “where there was nothing Buddhist to reclaim, there was always something Tamil to destroy” (196).

Some other testimonies of the war worth mentioning are *Seasons of Trouble*, *Still Counting the Dead* and *In My Mother’s House*. Books like *Tamil Tigress* by Niromi de Soyza, autobiography of a former child soldier of LTTE, and Malaravan’s *War Journey: Diary of a Tamil Tiger* cannot be called civilian testimonies as it features the lives of LTTE cadets.

Rohini Mohan's book *Seasons of Trouble* chronicles the experiences of three civilians during the 'prachanaikalam' (period of trouble) in Sri Lanka. The book follows the life of three protagonists-Indra, Sarva and Mugil- during the course of the war and its aftermath. Indra is a Sri Lankan woman who tries to save her son Sarva from unlawful detention. Mugil is a former rebel who takes over the responsibility of her family during their life in a refugee camp. The author had interacted with survivors and chose to include the testimonies of these three in her work. Mugil, who joined the LTTE as a child soldier, shares the tales of misery that she experienced during her life in Vanni. Sarva's story features the problem of illegal detention as his was a case of one of the many 'white van disappearances' that occurred in the country. Mohan tries to mark the war through personal histories. She spoke Tamil fluently, but the different dialectical variations of the language made it difficult for her to understand the nuances.

Frances Harrison, who was working as the BBC correspondent in Sri Lanka, chronicles her experiences in *Still Counting the Dead: Survivors of Sri Lanka's Hidden War*. As an anthology of testimonies given by people from different walks of life, the work portrays civilian trauma during the war. The civilians have suffered and witnessed unparalleled experiences. "Then He's like the United Nations and Red Cross people who abandoned us, I will punch Him in the eye"- this is what a woman survivor says about God, if at all there is one. Harrison's book, in ten chapters,

features narratives by a UN official, pro-LTTE Tamil Net journalist, the head of the LTTE Peace Secretariat (Pulidevan) who was murdered seemingly on the penultimate day of the war, a government doctor, a nun, a teacher, an LTTE media department woman functionary with two children, an LTTE fighter, a shopkeeper and a rape victim married to an LTTE fighter. By featuring witnesses from different walks of life, Harrison presents a polyphonic report of the time period.

*The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers* by Gordon Weiss features the final stages of the war. He condemns the military, Tigers and the international community for putting a group of people into the horrors of captivity and trauma and turning a blind eye towards their plight. Sharika Thiranagama's *In My Mother's House* tries to give visibility to the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamil Muslims who were displaced by the LTTE. Their identity was not associated with Tamil pride, but was centered on religion. When the dominant narratives of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms are featured in war stories, the sufferings of the Muslims are not given voice.

The scope of testimonial writing is not confined to nonfiction. Though many critics disagree, genres like poetry and prose fiction are also considered to be testimonials. Moving on to the scope of prose-fiction as testimonial narratives, it would be useful for the study to analyse some instances from biographies, memoirs and novels which come close to



testimonials. There is the possibility of testimonial-like fictional narratives.

It is useful to safeguard the author in oppressive regimes. According to

George Yúdice, a testimonial narrative is

an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e. g. , war, oppression, revolution, etc. ). Emphasizing popular oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as a representative of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or exorcising and setting aright official history. (17)

Niromi de Soyza's *Tamil Tigress* is an autobiographical account of one of the first female fighters of the LTTE. Sri Lankan government has confirmed that de Soyza was a member of the LTTE and that her claims are true. The book, controversial for the presence of many factual errors, features the memories of a former child soldier of LTTE. She writes: "In Sri Lanka curiosity was not a trait encouraged among children, particularly in girls, because those in power- often males, but anyone older, or of higher caste, education or influence- were always right and their reasons needn't be explained or understood to the subordinate"(9).

There are many novels which feature the Sri Lankan Civil War as its theme. In his second novel, *Hmm*, Shobha Shakti, a former child militant of LTTE, presents a narrative with autobiographical undertones. It discusses

the plight of the common men who have no other option but to remain in silence and accept all the stories that come their way. T D Ramakrishnan's *Sugandhi Enna Aandal Devanayagi (Sugandhi Alias Aandal Devanayagi)* discusses the relevance of Sri Lanka to the southern part of India by blending myth and history into a narrative. The novel offers a blend of perspectives on the Sri Lankan war, including but not limited to feminism, myth, cultural historicist readings, body politics, etc. It can be read as a feministic piece on how a woman ties together different elements in history that contributed to the war as well as on how strong voices of dissent from women are silenced in fascist regimes as well as progressive movements.

In the introduction to the novel, the writer discusses why Sri Lanka becomes relevant to us. The southern part of India is very much close to Sri Lanka geographically. It is also culturally very similar to the island nation. From the presence of Tamils to the similarity in cuisines, South India has more things in common to Sri Lanka than to the northern parts of India. For a Keralite living in the capital city of the state, travelling to Jaffna requires lesser time than going to Kasaragod, a district in Kerala. Before the Gulf boom, Sri Lanka (Ceylon) was the refuge of many a Malayali who travelled abroad to look after his family. Why, then, has not the war affected us? –asks the author. Why has the strip of sea between the two countries become an ocean of indifference? Thus, like testimonio, it calls for action from a wider public. In his novel *Samadhanathinu Vendiyulla*

*Yudhangal*, Malayalam author K Raghunathan narrates the plight of a soldier's wife who had to take over the responsibility of the family. The work also criticises the government's policy of sending the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka. Novels like Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* by Nayomi Munaweera and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* has the war in its backdrop.

In *Poetry as Testimony: Witnessing and Memory in Twentieth-century Poems*, Antony Rowland discusses how poetry can be considered as testimony. The book discusses how Shoshana Felman, in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, takes a cue from Freud who considered testimony to be cross-generic, declares "poems can operate as testimony as they work through the effects of suffering that are not yet fully understood" (21). He argues that testamentary poetry has the traumatic event as its metatext and produces many global 'secondary' witnesses to it. Let us now analyse some of the poems from Sri Lanka that feature different themes from the war. M.A. Nuhman's poem, "Murder", translated by S. Pathmanathan, features the condition of war-infested Sri Lanka. It discusses the paradox of how Buddhism, the religion of non-violence, became the reason for a bloody war. He writes: "Last night/ I dreamt/Lord Buddha was shot dead/by the police,/guardians of the law. / His body drenched in blood/on the steps/of the Jaffna Library. " Murdering Buddha's philosophies was important to make it a tool of violence. The

poet says that Buddha's corpse was burned down with Jaffna library, along with *Dhammapada*. The burning down of Jaffna Library, an event which has had a very great impact on the Tamil psyche by scarring their cultural pride, is mentioned along with the question of religion. Buddha's teachings are not valued in the country where such a reserve of knowledge was destroyed in the name of religion. By evoking powerful imagery of Buddha's murder, the poet appeals to the masses against such mishaps. At the same time, Jegatheeswari Nagendran, in *Rain Falls. . . The Sun Rises*, takes a dig at the attitudes of a middle-class Jaffna family. She writes: "our Dravidian culture vultures are just as bad with their emphasis on exclusive ethnic enclaves and Vedic Hindu Heritage" (Muller).

P Ahilan's collection, *Saramakavikal (Elegies)* has poems based on the final stage of the conflict. He has a mother, a nurse and a bystander at a hospital as narrators. In his poem "Exile Days", translated by S Canagarajah, he writes: "The wind grating the palmyrah trees/ whipped up inexpressible horror/ That was the last day in our village. " He invokes the image of Christ's crucifixion and parallels the day with that when the Tamils were forced to leave their villages. The pain of loss and displacement is projected through the well-known universal image of suffering so that secondary witnesses from a different space and time can feel it with full intensity. When trauma takes away words, allusions and imageries can work to put the point forth.

Sivaramani Sivanandan was a 23-year-old poet who lived in Jaffna during the early years of the war and was driven to suicide in 1991. In her poem "Humiliation", translated by Chelva Kanaganayakam, she writes:

“Behind the bars/of your laws/I cannot be held; / from your muddy permanence/I am a stone/reclaimed. . .” Her strong stance in opposition to the war against Tamils is evident in the line. She uses powerful images in her poetry. Her suicide, like many other poets’, was an act of protest. In

“I”, translated from Tamil by Indran Amirthanayagam, R. Cheran, and P. Manikkalingam, she describes the living conditions of the Tamils as:

“When anguish/and chaos/rule the streets/with barking dogs/and locked doors/checked and re-checked/in readiness for night, I cannot think/of the Sun/rising tomorrow.” In “A night in war time”, she considers the war to be a long night and describes how it has affected children. “A burst of gun fire/Shatters the stillness/ Of a star filled sky/Destroying/The meaning/Of children’s stories”, she writes. Children in Jaffna have forgotten how they used to play and, in turn, “They tear off/The wings of insects / Make guns/ From sticks and logs/And kill friends/Imagining them enemies.”

Rudhramoorthy Cheran, a famous poet from Jaffna, wrote about the war in strong words, but with a stillness and hope. K Srilata says that there is hope in the fact that writing, like Cheran’s, goes on even in a wounded territory. It is words which must bear witness in situations where nothing else can. She also writes about how the sea is a recurring motif in his

poetry. *A Second Sunrise*, edited and translated by Lakshmi Holmström and Sascha Ebeling, features Cheran's poems which present vignettes of the Sri Lankan civil war. In "Apocalypse", he writes: "We have all gone away; / there is no one to tell our story. / Now there is left/ only a great land wounded." The need to tell stories about whatever they have suffered is a basic requisite in rehabilitation. Poets like him cannot suffer in silence, hence they write to tell the stories of their people.

"A Letter to a Sinhala Friend" describes the stereotypes the Sinhala people hold about the Tamils, as those who "sow lead-shot from guns/ instead of seeds; a place/ half full of two-storey houses, / half full of terrorists". He asks his Sinhalese friend: "Did our different languages, after all, / put such distance between us/ that we could not smile together/ savouring/ the beauty of falling ponnocchi flowers...?" This poem narrates how differences can dissolve in dialogue. The need for a space for different ethnicities to interact and love each other would aid in reconciliation. Lakshmi Holmström notes that Cheran's poetry follows the Tamil poetic tradition of '*akam* and *puram*' (inner and outer), the former of love and the latter of war. While writing about love, Cheran also handles bolder themes of militancy and rebellion. In "A Second Sunrise", he urges his fellowmen, on the event of burning the Jaffna library, to act: "Who were you waiting for,/ your hands tied behind your backs? . . . Out of the streets/ where the embers

still bloom, / rise, march forward.” In an untitled poem, he writes of the condition of Tamils as: “The sea is without water/ Tamil is without land/ Kinship is without name.”

In “Amma, Do Not Weep”, he alludes to the classical Tamil epic *Silappathikaram* in the line: “there is no longer a Pandiyan king/ to recognize blood guilt.” It evokes nationalistic feelings of pride in the Tamil people as the myth is an integral part of their collective memory. The poet thus appeals to the Tamil pride while discussing their sufferings. He asks the Tamil women who have lost their husbands: “On sleepless nights/when your little boy stirs restlessly/screaming out, “Appa”/what will you say?” In everyday diction, the poet chronicles the horror and brutality in Sri Lanka in restrained tones. In the poem “Body”, he writes: “A body by the sea,/ head split open. / In the straight glance of the eyes/ that refuse to close even in death/ there float: resistance, surprise, / distress, struggle, agony, despair/ and an endless dream.”

S. Vilvaratnam, in “The Grief-stricken Wind”, translated by A J Canagaratna, tells the story of a confused wind in search of human smell in a deserted village. He writes: “How could the wind know/The people/Had sneaked out of the village/Their belongings bundled in gunnies/In the dead of the night/When it was slumbering?” The pain of displacement is etched in sentimental tones. V. I. S. Jayapalan has written poems about his life as a refugee in *The Song of a Refugee*. In “The Memory of Autumn”, he

shares the woe of displacement suffered by the Tamils as: “My son in Jaffna/My wife in Colombo/My father in Vanni /At this old age/My mother in Tamilnadu /Relatives in Frankfurt/One sister in France/But me/In Oslo/As a camel that has strayed to Alaska losing its way. //What is our family? /Is it a cotton pillow/Torn and flung into the wind/By Fate the monkey?” In the poem “A Refugee Poet Talking to the Moon”, he remembers his home while at a refugee settlement. He writes: “Here I do not have my own sky/The air I breathe too seems to/Belong to others.” He writes how “The anger of our raped women/ will be reborn as fiery goddesses.” It is an allusion to the Tamil myth of Kannagi, who burned the city of Madurai. Trying to invoke ancient images of power and survival, the poet is boosting the Tamil psyche to move on.

When Latha, in her untitled poem, reminisces how the landscape has changed: “The uniformed guide/ standing on the first step/ delves deep into the month of May/ and rambles on about/ artillery guns and landmines/ hand-grenades rifles/ blood tears fear. / As it comes to a grinding halt,/ he speaks of the time when/ Tamil *Eelam* Welcomed You/ here. Face flushed by the harsh sun;/ I shade it with a scarf/ The check-post lies worn out. / Tamil lies under Sinhala/ all along the way. ” The concept of *Eelam* was always an important part of the Tamil consciousness. Infused with their cultural memory, it served as an imagined space for them. When she writes about how “The hero stones have been bundled away for interrogation”, it



resonates the collective pain of Tamilians. Hero stones (*veerakkallu*) are a part of Tamil culture. It is a stone set as a memorial of a fallen hero whose spirit protects the land. The image of a hero stone insulted (taken for interrogation) suggests how the Tamil culture has been destroyed by the Sinhalese. Ravikumar's untitled poem addresses the disgrace of being alive in the turbulent times of war. He speaks of indifference as: "When the child/ with bandages/ in place of hands, / looks at us with smiling eyes, / why do we turn our faces away?" He even takes a dig at religion and God, when he says: "Chant the names of God/ So that those howls escape your ears. / It is even good for them/ To listen to the name of God/ At the time of their death. " Guilt complex and survivor complex are outcomes of trauma. The helplessness and shame of someone who cannot do anything to save his fellowmen is evident in this poem.

The voice of a Tamil Muslim is heard in H. M. Jabir's "A Letter to My Father", written in memory of his father Hayathu Mohamed, who was murdered by the LTTE in June 2002. "What did they do to you? /Did they shoot at you? /Did they hack and cut your body into parts? /Did they smash your head with a rod, /Pierce your body with a crow-bar? / And did they rejoice and dance?" In most of the discussions about the Sri Lankan war, only two narratives are given prominence- the winning Sinhalese and the defeated Tamil sides. Tamil Muslims in Sri Lanka were a much oppressed group as they had to bear the brunt from both the warring factions. What

official narratives fail to address, personal poetry brings out.

Vannachirahu's "Dawn" addresses the collective experience of fear as:

"Our nights are uncertain/Dear, /Let us look at each other/ Before we go to bed/This may be our last/Meaningful moment". Vinothini, in her poem

"Krishanthu", writes about the rape and murder of young women during the war. She writes: "No sound arose/She fell in a faint/ They raped her senseless body/ It happened /At the open space of white sand/She was buried/ At the edge of the salty cremation ground." Sri Lankan Tamil

poetry addresses the trauma of the war through multiple perspectives.

Apart from the cathartic effect, it also serves as testimonies of a group of people whose stories are ignored. They are silenced due to their trauma as well as suppressed by the winning forces. Whatever brings out their pain, however small it is, can be treated as a step towards a better tomorrow.

The fourth chapter of this thesis, "Of Acts and Afterimages", studies the film industry of Sri Lanka, concentrating on the genre of war films.

There are many movies across the world that portrays war which have attained classic or cult status. The World Wars, Vietnam War, Rwandan genocide- all of these have found great visual representations on the silver screen. The question remains as to why such representations of the Sri Lankan War never occurred.

Movies were studied for their content, not considering the technical details. The movies were treated as texts that were analysed. Sri Lankan

movie industry consists of two branches, namely the Sinhalese and the Tamil. Both mimicked Indian cinema in content and technique during the early stages. The Tamil cinema in Sri Lanka is still underdeveloped. The movies considered in detail in this study include those made in Sri Lanka as well as abroad. The movies portray different perspectives and give diverse versions of the war. When addressing civilian trauma, different perspectives are to be considered, which these movies present. *August Sun (Ira Madiyama)* by Prasanna Vithanage portrays three parallel narratives, each featuring the lives of civilians who were affected by the civil war. Chamari, the woman whose husband goes missing in action, represents the trauma of many women who lost their beloved to the war. The journalist, who helps her, Saman Gunawardena, can be seen as someone who gets personally involved in the plight of another. They travel to the areas which were affected by the war. Another narrative follows Duminda, a Sri Lankan soldier, who finds his sister in a brothel. When the breadwinners of families went to fight, those who remained at home tried to find ways to survive. Moral codes of right and wrong blurred, as seen in the acceptance of Duminda of his sister's struggle to make both ends meet. The story of the Tamil Muslim boy Aralath and his father Hasan, who were among those driven out of their homes by the LTTE, portrays how the thin line between perpetrators and victims altered during the course of the war.

Those who argued for a Tamil homeland began to think along the lines of religion.

*In the Name of Buddha* by Rajesh Touchriver features an episode in the life of a doctor named Shiva who had to flee the country. Based on a real life story, the movie portrays trauma with candour. The movie features the early days of the LTTE and it takes a sympathetic stance on the organisation. It became controversial for its portrayal of violence and was also banned in Sri Lanka. *Death on a Full Moon Day (Pura Handa Kaluwara)* by Prasanna Vithanage is the story of Wannihami, a blind old man who cannot accept the news of his soldier son's death. Even when the coffin arrives, he seems to believe that his son cannot be dead. The movie portrays how authorities prefer a man to be declared dead, rather than missing, in the war. The religious leader seems to be happy with the fact that there is a martyr from the community. The father's intuition wins when, towards the end of movie, the coffin is opened. *Saroja* by Somaratne Dissanayake tells the story of a Tamil child named Sarojini who gets adopted by a Sinhalese family. The movie features the sufferings of the ethnic minority at the hands of the rebel group. It takes a positive stance towards the activities of the Sri Lankan Army. *Flying Fish (Igillena Maluwo)* by Sanjeewa Pushpakumara is an anthology film which presents three civilian perspectives. It features the story of a Tamil girl whom the LTTE tries to forcefully recruit. She gets her first period while travelling in

a bus and has to go through the routine checking by the army. Her parents are gunned down by the LTTE later. Another narrative follows the life of a woman who gets impregnated by her soldier boyfriend. Her father, who gets recruited into the civil defence force, is humiliated by the soldiers and commits suicide. It leaves the woman orphaned and alone. The third story follows the life of a widow and her son. The woman has an affair which irks the boy who stabs her later. *Dheepan* by Jacques Audiard is a French movie which depicts the life of three Tamils who flee Sri Lanka under false identities. They try to live as a family in the new country but violence there shatters their dream of a peaceful life. A lot of Tamils had to flee the country during the bloody civil war. The plight of those who could not afford it sought illegal ways to fly out of the wrecked nation. *Dheepan* portrays the agony of such immigrants who had to start their lives anew in a foreign land where everything is strange. *Kannathil Muthamittal (A Peck on the Cheek)* is an Indian Tamil movie by Mani Ratnam which features a girl's search for her mother. Amudha, who was adopted by her Indian Tamil parents, tries to find her mother who is a rebel in Sri Lanka. The film poses many poignant questions and views the war from a child's perspective. *Alimankada (The Road from Elephant Pass)* by Chandran Rutnam puts forth two perspectives. It features the story of Tamil rebel woman and a Sinhalese soldier who fall in love with each other. They belong to different factions and are prejudiced about each other but are

forced to travel together. It makes them realise that the basic human emotions are common to all. The movie celebrates love as an antidote to all kinds of differences.

Sri Lanka is a land which holds a wave of throbbing pain flowing under its seemingly peaceful surface. The wounds that the long war has inflicted on to the domestic lives of citizens have not healed yet; the religions, which are institutions that should promote peace and healing, have become reasons for hatred among the masses. Buddhism, the official religion of the country, is a strong force in all spheres of public life, especially politics. What Sri Lanka needs in the path of reconciliation are sincere efforts without any materialistic considerations, be it in the form of policies, art, rehabilitation measures, or inter-religious bonding.

This thesis is an effort to understand how representation can effectively address trauma, which otherwise is considered ‘unspeakable’. Cinema, a popular medium with a wide reach and appeal, can be a potent tool in that direction. It can promote the understanding of an event, at both local and global levels, and inaugurate dialogue on it. It can become vehicles for testimonies which may never enter official historical records. Films can also reflect the zeitgeist, which is very essential in documenting an event. Cinema can thus lift the shroud of secrecy and produce a million witnesses. It can, in the garb of fictionality, become vehicles of alternate versions. Efforts have already begun in investigating the use of cinema in

psychotherapy. An interdisciplinary study, with equal emphasis on humanities, is also required. Movies are texts which are created out of a social or cultural context. Humanities help to study those layers of the texts which cannot be defined by science alone.

The world shrinks, technology grows. The new world requires new paradigms to study its existence. It is easy to diagnose and treat a survivor of war for PTSD with machines and medicines, but the first step is to make him/her recognise the trauma. To face one's fears is the greatest of all fears. It is where trauma studies, literary theory and film studies can work together. Jeffrey Pence, in *Memory and Popular Film*, talks about how cinema has become the equivalent of memory in modern times. Like memory it remediates experience, but it is also a construct. "If the process of memory can be linked to remediating experience, the fate of that process largely depends on the context of the 'construct' which available technologies provide as means and models of remembrance"(237).

## CHAPTER I OF LIONS AND TIGERS

*“No more arresting emblems of the modern culture  
of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of  
Unknown Soldiers.”*

- Benedict Anderson

Sri Lanka, the small island nation in the shape of a tear drop that falls off the Indian mainland, the land which poets fondly dubbed the "pearl upon the brow of India," has in its history a throbbing wound which has not yet healed. Christened the 'heart of the Indian Ocean' for its strategic location, the country witnessed many a violation of basic human rights during the brutal civil war which spanned more than a quarter of a century. The establishment of a quintessential ethnic identity was the *raison d'être* for many, and curbing it became the obligation of some others. The atrocities perpetrated by both the factions led to unfathomable violence and fatalities, the aftermaths of which are misremembered and misrepresented even today.

The Sri Lankan Civil War was the result of many events that occurred over years, if not centuries, and how it was recreated in the minds of people. To understand the war, the cultural history of the island should be analysed in detail. Cultural history is a field of study which deals with a



period as a whole. It spans cultural phenomena, evolutions and expressions, to examine a wide range of concepts like ideology, history, identity, race, narration, media, etc. The scope of this thesis warrants a detailed examination of the areas of Sri Lankan history and historiography, nationalism, film and the idea of memory as a part of cultural history.

Dividing the history of Sri Lanka into definite periods was always a tough task for the non-native historian who mistrusted the native statements as nothing but romantic tales. Horatio John Suckling, in *Ceylon: A General Description of the Island, Historical, Physical, Statistical. Containing the Most Recent Information*, wrote that Sri Lankan history does not have many incidents worth recording and the native chronicles, with its “monotonous succession of plots and crimes”, was dull and unexciting (137). G. C. Mendis treated the 2500-year history of the island as nothing but an annexe to the histories of foreign countries and, in *The Early History of Ceylon, or, the Indian Period of Ceylon History*, divided Sri Lanka’s history into the North Indian Period, South Indian period, Portuguese period, Dutch Period and British period.

The history of a country thus becomes the history of colonisation. Even in mythological scriptures does the nation celebrate migrations from India. The Sinhalese claim their lineage from the so-called Aryans while the Tamils are proud of their Dravidian ancestry. As Patrick Peebles writes in the preface to his work *The History of Sri Lanka*:

History, however, has been a victim of the conflict between Sinhalese and Tamil Lankans that led to the outbreak of civil war in 1983. Both Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists and Tamil separatists have constructed pasts for the island that support their vision of the future. One invents an unbroken island-wide Sinhalese-Buddhist history from the earliest known period; the other imagines that the presence of Tamil rulers in part of the island can be equated to a Tamil homeland. Both of these are distortions of what we know about the island's past. They demonstrate how important history is to understanding Sri Lanka today. (xiii)

The history of Sri Lanka, according to the natives, dates back to mythological times. According to *Mahavamsa*, the island known as Lanka or the "resplendent land" in the Indian epic *Ramayana*, portrayed as the abode and fortress capital of the *Asura* king Ravana, is the modern Sri Lanka. *Ramayana*, composed around 500 BC, narrates how the island was originally built by Viswakarma and was captured by the demons Malyavan, Sumali and Bali who ruled till they were defeated by Vishnu. Kubera took over the island but his brother Ravana, grandson of Sumali, seized it to establish his kingdom. Ravana abducted Sita, who was wife to Rama, an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, and was killed in the battle that ensued. *Mahabharata* also has various references to Lanka. For some scholars, the location of the mythological island does not correspond to that

of the modern day Sri Lanka and they believe it to have submerged. According to some others, the epic is just a poetic description of the early southward expansion of Vedic civilization rather than a historical account of the time period mentioned (3000 BC). Islamic lore speaks of how Adam, first human being and prophet, and his wife Eve, were refugees on the island after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, while some connect the island to be the original Eden.



Fig. 1.1. *Ashoka Vanam* in Seetha Eliya, P, Prakash. “*Ashoka Vanam* in Seetha Eliya”. *Tripadvisor*, *Tripadvisor LLC*, Dec 2017, <https://media-cdn.tripadvisor.com/media/photo-l/11/a0/25/bd/ashok-vatika.jpg>

Adam’s bridge (a chain of shoals, also known as *Ram Setu*) is considered to be the structure mentioned in *Ramayana* which has been constructed with the help of Vanaras. There are sites in Sri Lanka which form a part of the *Ramayana* circuit in pilgrimage tours conducted by

Indians. Ravana's palace, *Ashoka Vatika*, Rambhoda, etc. are some of these (see fig. 1.1).

Sri Lanka is, thus, very much connected to India in many ways. There are some theories about how both the countries were part of a big continent long ago and were separated due to tectonic activity. Even now, the distance between the northern tip of Sri Lanka and Dhanushkodi in India is less than 30 km. Archeological findings at Iranamadu in Kilinochchi suggest unambiguous evidence of prehistoric settlements by Paleolithic people in Sri Lanka. The Middle Palaeolithic period also had a civilisation, probably of the anatomically modern human beings who migrated from Africa, who used tools made out of quartz. The Stone Age people of Sri Lanka, classified as Veddoid, belonged to the general class of proto-Australoid. Balangoda Man, a group of cave-dwelling Mesolithic hunter-gatherers, appears to have occupied the land mass around 34000 BP. They domesticated animals and used granite tools. History mentions the presence of a land bridge between the island and South India through which people and culture mingled. The ethnicity of the Stone Age human beings is a point of contention in the Sri Lankan scenario. The Sinhalese, who claim Aryan ancestry, does not favour the idea of early South Indian contact while the Tamils put forth Dravidian culture as the origin of Sri Lankan civilisation.

Though not adequately documented, evidence suggesting the transition from Mesolithic to Iron Age advocates the existence of cultivation and the use of pottery. Indications of two large settlements, with signs of an Iron Age culture, have been discovered at Anuradhapura and Sigiriya. The ancient tribes of *Yakkhas* (demons), *Nagas* (cobras) and *Devas* (gods) who populated the island, as mentioned in the Buddhist chronicles, may refer to the totemist Iron Age aborigines. The quest for the recorded historical heritage of Sri Lanka in their own annals begins with a fourth century epic compiled to glorify Buddhism, the *Dipavamsa* (*Island Genealogy or Dynasty*), which cannot be considered a comprehensive narrative, and its later adaptation titled *Mahavamsa* (*Great Genealogy or Dynasty*), the sixth century chronicle compiled by Buddhist monks in Pali, the language of *Theravada* Buddhism. *Mahavamsa*, which traces the rise and fall of Buddhist kingdoms in Sri Lanka, begins with the conquest of Vijaya, the legendary primogenitor of the Sinhalese migrants, who set foot on the island on the day of Buddha's death or *parinirvana*. According to the *Mahavamsa* version of the legend, Indian prince Vijaya and 700 followers came to Lanka, displaced the island's original inhabitants (*Yakkhas*), established a kingdom and ruled the island during the period 543–505 BCE.

Paul E. Pieris advocates that there was a flow of pilgrims from India to the Hindu temples (*Iswarems*) dedicated to Siva in Sri Lanka even

before the arrival of Vijaya. “These were Tiruketeeswaram near Mahatitta, Munneswaram dominating Salavatta and the Pearl Fishery, Tondeswaram near Mantota, Tirukoneswaram opposite the great bay of Koddiyar and Nakuleswaram near Kankesanturai” (*Journal of the Royal* 17). The legend of Vijaya begins with Suppadevi, born to the king of Vanga and a princess (named Mayavati in some versions) of Kalinga, who it was prophesied would copulate with the king of beasts. During a journey to seek an independent life in Magadha, the caravan she was travelling with was attacked by Sinha ("lion") in a forest of the Lala (or Lada) region. Sinha, who was attracted to Suppadevi, kept her locked in a cave. They had two children, a son named Sinhabahu ("lion-armed") and a daughter named Sinhasivali. When old enough, Sinhabahu asked his mother why Sinha looked so different. When she told him about her royal ancestry, he decided that they should go to Vanga. Having escaped from the cave, they reached Vanga where a general of the kingdom, a cousin of Suppadevi, married her. Sinha, in an attempt to find his missing family, had started wreaking havoc on villages and the king proclaimed a reward for anyone who could kill the beast, which was claimed by Sinhabahu after killing his own father. Though he was made the ruler after the death of the king, he handed over the kingship to his mother's husband, and established a city called Sinhapura. He married his sister Sinhasivali, and the couple had 32

sons in form of 16 pairs of twins, of which Vijaya ("victor") was their eldest son, followed by his twin Sumitta.

Vijaya, who was made the prince-regent, became so infamous for his vicious conduct that the citizens demanded his execution. King Sinhabahu expelled Vijaya and his 700 followers from the kingdom. The ship carrying the banished men landed at a place called Supparaka and later reached Lanka, in Tambapanni, on the same day Gautama Buddha died in northern India (see fig 1. 2). After overpowering Kuveni, a *Yakkhini* who tried to devour him, Vijaya took her as his consort. Kuveni gave his men food and shelter and with her help, Vijaya defeated the *Yakkhas*. Vijaya established the kingdom of Tambapanni (the land of copper-red soil which coloured the hands) and his followers were later known to be Sinhala after Sinhabahu. To be consecrated the king, Vijaya needed to have a woman of royal lineage as his queen and hence his ministers sent ambassadors to the city of Madhura (Madurai). Pleased by the gifts sent by Vijaya, the Pandya king of Madurai sent to Lanka his own daughter, other women (including a hundred maidens of noble descent), craftsmen, a thousand families of 18 guilds, elephants, horses, waggons, and other gifts. Although Kuveni had betrayed her own people and had given birth to two of Vijaya's children, Jivahatta and Disala, she was banished by the ruler as his citizens feared supernatural beings like her. Kuveni, a traitor, was killed by a *Yakkha*, and her offspring survived to be the folkloric ancestors (Pulinda people) of the

present day *Veddahs*, an aboriginal people who inhabits the eastern part of Sri Lanka now. Vijaya, who gave up his evil ways and ruled Lanka in peace and righteousness, was heirless. After his death, Sumitta's youngest son, Panduvasdeva, reached Lanka and took over the crown.

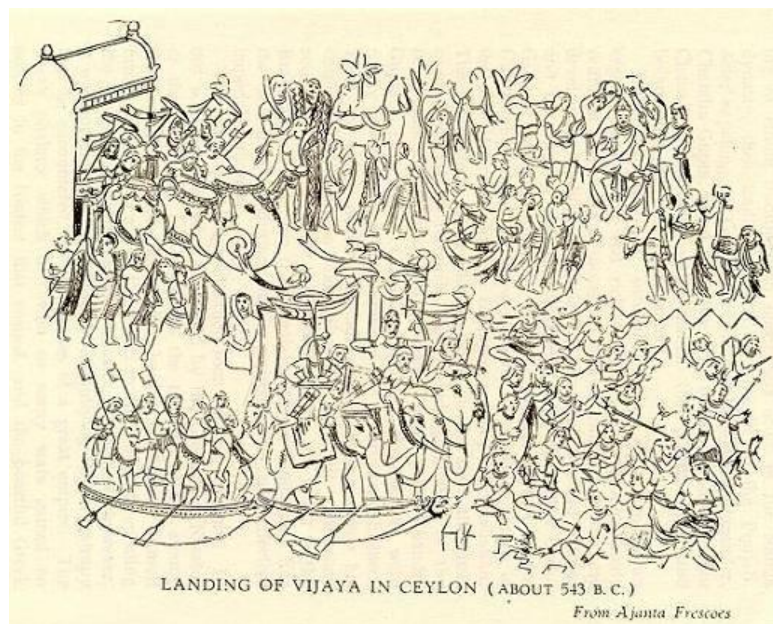


Fig. 1.2. Landing of Vijaya depicted in the Ajanta fresco  
*Ilankai Tamil Sangam*, Sabaratnam T, 4 Aug 2010,  
[https://www.sangam.org/2010/08/images/clip\\_image003.jpg](https://www.sangam.org/2010/08/images/clip_image003.jpg)

The legend of Vijaya thus provides a peek into the early settlement and philosophical development of the island. It established the Indo-Aryan origin of the Sinhalese people and of the Tamil involvement in the form of maidens received, as consorts, by the rulers. It also speaks of an early migration of artisans and tradesmen to Sri Lanka. The tale of Vijaya and Kuveni, reminiscent of Greek legend, may have a shared origin in ancient Proto-Indo-European folklore. Although the legend of Vijaya is treated as a



factual account of a historical event in Sri Lanka, many scholars consider the legend to be dubious. For instance, Satchi Ponnambalam, who was a leading Sri Lankan Tamil lawyer and judge, called it a "pure flight of fantasy" while for Gavin Thomas, it was "at best questionably-biased, and at worst totally imaginary", aimed at establishing the royal lineage of the Sinhalese and the Buddhist credentials of the island (*The Rough Guide* 415).

The *Culavamsa* (*Lesser Genealogy or Dynasty*), a chronicle attributed to the thirteenth century poet-monk Dhammakitti, later expanded in the fourteenth and late eighteenth centuries by monks, describes how the Sinhalese-Buddhist culture weakened and paved way for Tamil invasions. *Mahavamsa*, for all intents and purposes, is a chronicle of the early Sinhalese-Buddhist royalty on the island, and hence, it conveniently forgets the multi-ethnic mosaic the island was in the early times. Sources from Tamil literature record dynamic trading hubs in the southern parts of India, even in the third century BC and the odds of these centres having contact with settlements in northern Sri Lanka is high. Though it is unclear whether the Dravidians preceded the Indo-Aryan speakers in settlement, the fact that the island was, from its earliest recorded history, a multiethnic civilization is undeniable. Moreover, even the peaceful co-existence of Sinhalese and Tamils during the early centuries can be substantiated.

Buddhism was introduced in Sri Lanka in the third century BC from India, following Ashoka's conversion. Buddhism grew as the main vehicle of Sinhalese philosophy and ethics. Buddhism, unlike Hinduism which favoured the priestly class and royalty, appealed directly to the common man, thereby paving way for the establishment of a collective consciousness in the Sinhalese culture. Buddhism, with its missionary activities, opened a new door into mass education and had an enormous effect on the literary development of the Sinhala language. The faith thus became an icon that connected the past with the present. Their ideology is shaped by two distinct elements, namely *sinhaladipa* (connection of the island with the Sinhalese) and *dhammadipa* (island of Buddhism), which designates the Sinhalese as custodians of Sri Lanka. It is this premise that finds persistent recurrence in the chronicles composed by Buddhist monks. It is evident in the Sinhalese versions of every historical event, from the mythological naissance of the "lion" race to the surrender of the Kingdom of Kandy in the early nineteenth century. Any discussion on Sri Lanka would be incomplete without a discourse on *Theravada* Buddhism. It is the conservative tradition of Buddhism which is considered the oldest school. Monks of the *Theravada* school have preserved Buddha's teachings in the Pāli canon. Ashoka's offsprings Mahinda and Sanghamitta are considered to be the founders of the school in Sri Lanka. There was a Buddhist

revivalism against Christian missionary activities during the colonial period.

Ancient Ceylon also features as a presence in Classical writings. Nearchus and Onesicritus, commanders of an armada dispatched by Alexander, brought into Europe the first information regarding the Island of Ceylon, or Taprobane. The early travelers did not have a proper idea of the size of the island that they magnified it a lot in their writings. While Dionysius mentions its breed of elephants, Ovid speaks of Taprobane as a part of the world removed almost beyond the perimeters of human contact. The origin of the modern name of Ceylon can approximately be credited to Ptolemy's era. Pliny says that Taprobane was long supposed to be another continent, the travel to where is difficult as the North Pole becomes no longer visible to the eye.

A flawed description of the island can be seen in the account given by the embassy of four ambassadors from Ceylon to the imperial city of Rome during the era of Emperor Claudius. Either the ambassadors gave a magnified account of their wealth or it might have been a genuine error by the Roman interpreters. The island is described as:

The ambassadors from Ceylon . . . mentioned that no one among them had any slaves. They did not take any repose after sun-rise, or during the day. . . Provisions were never at an extravagant price; and' they were free from the evils of judicial strife. For a king, they

chose from amongst the people one. . . Their fields were in a high state of cultivation. (Philaethes 3)

Greek historian Diodorus Siculus records a temperate climate in the island and the astonishingly long life span of its natives. They had a stern law according to which the mutilated or deformed were put to death. There was also a decree which put a limit to the life span and those who transgressed it would choose a voluntary death by a plant which makes them fall asleep and die. Polygamy was the norm and the natives had a community of wives. Children were regarded as common stock and were interchanged in their early years. The account of Cosmas Indicopleustes describes how, in the sixth century, Ceylon became the chief seat of trade in the Indian Ocean. In the latter part of the thirteenth century, Ceylon was visited by the Venetian Marco Polo, dubbed the 'Columbus of the East', who mentions that a number of pilgrims from remote parts visited Adam's Peak, where some holy relics of this great ancestor of mankind, consisting of his foretooth and one of his dishes, were preserved. Marco Polo also says of Ceylon that:

it is the finest island in the world ; the king is called Sendernaz; the men and women are idolaters, go naked, save that they cover their loins with a cloth; have no corn but rice, and oil of sesamino, milk, flesh, wine of trees, abundance of brasil, the best rubies in the

world, sapphires and amethysts, and other gems. (*A Complete Collection* 621)

Coming back to the native accounts, it was in 237 B. C. that two explorers from the southern parts of India, Sena and Guttika, seized the Sinhalese throne at Anuradhapura and marked the first Tamil rule in the island which lasted 22 years till they were killed and the Sinhalese royal dynasty reinstated. In 145 BC, a Tamil general named Elara, of the Chola dynasty, took over the throne at Anuradhapura and ruled for forty-four years till Dutthagamani, a Sinhalese king, overthrew him after a fifteen-year campaign. In biased accounts, Dutthagamani's war against Elara is given the picture of a key ethnic conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese, but the large reserve of support Elara had among the Sinhalese suggests that the war was a purely political dynastic struggle. Anuradhapura became the power locus of the island and the conflict marked the beginning of a spirit of Sinhalese nationalism. According to some historians, the story, an affirmation that the island was a preserve for the Sinhalese and Buddhism, is still potent in rousing the religio-communal zeal of the Sinhalese.

During the fifth and sixth centuries AD, the three prime Hindu empires in southern India, namely the Pandya, Pallava, and Chola, became more forceful and the fact that Buddhism in India was susceptible to the pressure from Hinduism magnified the sense of threat in Sinhalese minds. It was also the time when a Dravidian consciousness strengthened in the

Tamil psyche. *Mahavamsa* mentions Kashyapa, son and murderer of the Sinhalese king Dhatusena, who moved the capital of the kingdom from Anuradhapura to Sigiriya, a fortress and palace which is beyond doubt a fine exhibit of true architectural and engineering accomplishment. The capital was moved back to Anuradhapura after Kashyapa was dethroned by his brother. In the seventh century A. D., Sinhalese Prince Manavamma seized the throne with Pallava aid and instituted an empire which was heavily indebted to Pallava benefaction. The dynasty was in rule for almost three centuries and during this time, Tamil influence became firmly set in the island's way of life, even in architecture and sculpture, both of which abound in obvious Hindu motifs. The Pandys, who rose to power by the middle of the ninth century, occupied northern Sri Lanka and insisted payment as a price for their pulling out. The Sinhalese, with the aid of a rival prince, attacked Pandyas and sacked Madurai. In the tenth century, the Pandyan king who battled against the Cholas with Sinhalese support was defeated. He fled to Sri Lanka, moving the royal insignia with him. The Chola king Rajaraja, eager to bring back the royal insignia, sacked Anuradhapura in AD 993 and annexed Rajarata to the Chola Empire. Under Rajendra (1018—35), the Chola Empire grew stronger, and Sri Lanka was ruled directly as a Chola province for seventy-five years. During this period, Hinduism prospered in the island. The Cholas set up their capital at Polonnaruwa, a strategically defensible location, which was

maintained even after the Sinhalese kings recaptured the governance. King Vijayabahu I drove the Cholas out of Sri Lanka in AD 1070 and his forty-year rule witnessed the renovation of Buddhist temples and monasteries. Following a period of instability and a civil war, the island saw the rise of King Parakramabahu I, who is considered to be the greatest hero of the *Culavamsa*. Parakramabahu's reign was an era of Buddhist renaissance as well as religious expansionism abroad. Though venerated in Sinhalese annals, he is supposed to have significantly strained the royal treasury and contributed to the fall of the Sinhalese kingdom. The city he established was later destroyed by his successors. During the reign of King Nissankamalla (AD 1187-97), the caste system began to conform to the Brahmanic law and land ownership conferred high status. Caste, which was work-related, became hereditary and regulated societal codes. It also became obligatory for the Sinhalese king to be a Buddhist.

Dynastic disputes and instability weakened the kingdom in the years that followed and the invasions from India added fuel to fire. In the thirteenth century, following a campaign by Kalinga, there was an exodus of the Sinhalese who abandoned the northern zone and left for the southwest. King Parakramabahu VI (1412-67), a progressive ruler who revolted a Vijayanagara invasion, reunited Sri Lanka, and earned repute as a benefactor of Buddhism and the arts. He was the last Sinhalese king to rule the entire island. The reasons attributed to the Sinhalese migration are

Tamil invasions, decline of public works in the dry-zone which demanded great organisation and huge labour, and the outbreak of malaria in the thirteenth century. During this time, the vast stretches of jungle that covered north-central Sri Lanka separated the Tamils and the Sinhalese. This geographical separation had important psychological and cultural implications. The Tamils of the Jaffna Kingdom (*Aryacakravarthi*) in the north developed a more distinct and confident culture, backed by a resurgent Hinduism that looked to the traditions of southern India for its inspiration. They secured control of the valuable pearl fisheries around Jaffna Peninsula. Conversely, the Sinhalese were increasingly restricted to the southern and central area of the island and were fearful of the more numerous Tamils on the Indian mainland. Foreign rulers also took advantage of the disturbed political state of the Sinhalese kingdom. The migration caused the Sinhalese culture to experience a fundamental change as the wet zone did not demand large-scale administrative co-operation as before. Foreign trade became important and cinnamon became a prime export commodity because of the value of which Kotte became the titular capital of the Sinhalese kingdom in the mid-fifteenth century. Still, the Sinhalese kingdom stayed scattered as several rival inconsequential principalities. At the onset of the sixteenth century, there were three centres of political command in Sri Lanka, namely the two Sinhalese kingdoms of Kotte and Kandy, and the Tamil kingdom at Jaffna. Though Kotte, the



prime seat of Sinhalese power, claimed a fundamentally imaginary supremacy over the entire island, none of the three kingdoms, in reality, had the potency to affirm itself over the other two.

The history of the Portuguese colonisation of Ceylon marks the commencement of European colonial expansion in the East. The Portuguese, consumed by the twin objectives of religious conversion and spice trade, had the new sea-route open to India. The island was a strategic point for international trade. Expelled from the country a hundred and fifty three years later, they left the Sinhalese a wrecked race, destroying their ancient civilisation and culture. Portuguese invasion was a failure in Ceylon. When the naval supremacy of the Cholas declined in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim traders asserted a key share of business in the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese flaunted open antagonism towards Muslim traders and it ignited suspicions about their monopolistic goals. The cause for this enmity was far deeper than mere trade rivalry. It was the Roman Catholic Church, intolerant to Islam, which encouraged the Portuguese to break the monopoly of the Moors in the shipping trade.

The Kingdom of Kandy, the only Buddhist kingdom that remained independent of Portuguese control, attained novel importance as the guardian of Sinhalese nationalism. The Portuguese tried to put a puppet ruler on the throne as they did in Kotte and Jaffna, but the queen who they baptised and installed could not retain power. Even though they tried for

the next 50 years, the Portuguese could not expand their power in Kandy. Though the Portuguese maintained the basic configuration of local administration, they fanatically tried to force religious and educational transform in Sri Lanka. Sixteenth-century Portuguese Catholicism was narrow-minded. They shattered Buddhist and Hindu temples and bestowed the temple lands to Roman Catholic religious orders. Buddhist monks fled to Kandy, which became an asylum for people disillusioned with the colonial rule. What can be termed the main legacy of Portuguese rule in Sri Lanka was the first of its kind religious conversion of a large number of Sinhalese and Tamils, especially those from the fishing communities, thereby paving way for the upward mobility of the castes associated with this means of livelihood. There was also a simultaneous advance and standardisation of educational institutions. In order to convert the masses, mission schools were opened, with instruction in Portuguese and Sinhalese or Tamil. Portuguese became the tongue of the upper classes of Sri Lanka and many Sinhalese converts took Portuguese names.

Following the Portuguese, it was an era of Dutch rule in Sri Lanka. It was in the first half of the seventeenth century that the king of Kandy sought the help of the Dutch in fighting the Portuguese. After the Portuguese surrendered their last stronghold in Jaffna in 1658, the era of Dutch domination in the Indian Ocean dawned. The king of Kandy, having realised that all he had done was substituting one enemy with another,

stimulated an uprising. He even endeavoured to befriend the British in Madras in his fight to throw out the Dutch, but these endeavours ended in a severe rebellion against his rule in 1664. The period of instability was made use of by the Dutch who extended their territory. After the political control of the island, the Dutch exercised their monopoly in trade. The Dutch East India Company, a joint-stock corporation, was vested with sovereign responsibilities. The Dutch tried, in vain, to replace Roman Catholicism with Protestantism offering rewards and promises of upward mobility, but Catholicism was too acutely entrenched in the Lankan soil. Compared to their predecessors, the Dutch were far more tolerant to the indigenous religions that they did not interfere with the Buddhist and Hindu practices in rural areas. Roman Catholic practices, however, were banned as they regarded Portuguese authority and Catholicism as co-dependent. Catholics were harassed and Protestant chapels were erected on properties seized from the Catholic Church. The Dutch made significant contributions to the advancement of the legal and organisational systems on the island. Though the Dutch followed a pattern of minimal interference with indigenous social and cultural institutions, they codified native law and customs, altered the conventional land grant and tenure system, and tried to allure their fellow countrymen to settle in Sri Lanka. The lower-ranking soldiers responded to the incentive of free land. Their marriages to local women added another group, the Dutch Burghers, to the island's

already small but established population of Eurasians, namely the Portuguese Burghers. During the Dutch period, the lowland and highland Sinhalese, thanks to the western influence, enjoyed a higher standard of living and greater literacy while the highland Sinhalese, proud to have preserved their political sovereignty from the Europeans, considered themselves superior.

England's earliest documented contact with the island nation of Sri Lanka was in 1592 when one of its privateers attacked the Portuguese off Galle. Ralph Fitch, a decade later, became the first identified English visitor to the island. Around the mid-seventeenth century, a ship was docked for repairs near Trincomalee and Robert Knox, a sailor, was captured by the Kandyans. After being kept a prisoner for years, he escaped and later penned *An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon*, a popular book in which he described his captors as "decadent". Since the loss of the Indian port of Madras to the French in the mid-eighteenth century, the all-weather port at Trincomalee captured British interest. The Dutch, who supported the French in the American Revolutionary War, refused to grant consent and it resulted in British action which led to the expulsion of the Dutch from the island. The treaty which the Dutch made the Kandyans sign in 1766 had, according to the latter, harsh terms that they sought British assistance. What they did not realise was the fact that all they had done was to trade a comparatively weak master with a more

commanding one. Over the 150 years of British rule, the island witnessed great infrastructural advancement with new roads, rails, schools, hospitals and hydro-electric projects. The highlands of the nation soon became abundant in coffee, tea and rubber plantations. Ceylon tea won over the British market, and it also witnessed a large influx of Tamils from South India to work in the estates as labourers. They lived in impoverished conditions and soon rose in numbers to 10% of the island's population. Though they favoured the mixed-blood Burghers, it was the British who launched the fundamentals of democracy in Sri Lanka. Even over the protests of the elite, universal suffrage was introduced in 1931 and common people got the right to vote.

By the nineteenth century, a new society of an educated and conservative middle class emerged in Sri Lanka. These anglicised urban professionals supplied executive services and surpassed divisions of race and caste. It was also the time of a Buddhist revivalism. *Sanghas* were organised by the Buddhist monks against Christian missionary activities. Colonel Henry Steele Olcott, the American abolitionist who later co-founded the Theosophical Movement, visited the country to organise a campaign. He established educational institutions to impart Buddhist teachings with a nationalist prejudice. Tamil Hindu revivalists also tried to oppose the Protestant missionary activity and, led by Arumuga Navalar, used literacy as an instrument to broaden the scope of Hinduism. The

native struggle against the British crown began in 1817 with the Uva Rebellion, which was a failed uprising by the aristocracy. Though there was an attempt at upheaval in 1830 and yet another in the Matale Rebellion in 1848 which was essentially a peasant revolt, it was the westernised middle class which initiated the independence movement against Britain around the turn of the 20th century. The revival of Buddhism and the call for temperance began to be linked with the national consciousness. The anglicised elite class created by the imperialists stood against their own countrymen and even opposed universal suffrage. The populists who followed the Buddhist Revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala sought freedom and justice for the island. It was in 1921 that the British Governor William Manning shaped the reformed legislative council which incorporated the scheme of 'communal representation'. The efforts for independence that surpassed the two world wars culminated in the handing over of the island, in 1948, to a coalition government formed by the United National Party (UNP) of D. S. Senanayake, the Sinhala Maha Sabha of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and the Tamil Congress of G. G. Ponnambalam.

The British had already sown the seed of separatism in the island before their departure and it was fuelled by the policies of the new government which supported the majority Sinhalese. It grew to the gargantuan dimensions of a civil war which plagued the nation for decades. The new parliament, in 1948, passed a divisive decree called the 'Ceylon

Citizenship Act', which made it practically impossible for the Indian Tamils to obtain nationality in the country. A huge number of them were made stateless and deported to India. The 'Sinhala Only Act', passed in 1956, made Sinhala the sole official language of the country, thereby discouraging the Tamil-speaking minorities from joining the public services. This discrimination resulted in the Gal Oya riots of 1956 and those of 1958 which witnessed many civilian deaths. In the late 1960s, the idea of a separate Tamil state of "Tamil *Eelam*" began to circulate (see fig.1.3.) and it was then that Anton Balasingham, a member of the staff of the British High Commission in Colombo who later migrated to Britain and became the chief theoretician of the LTTE, began to take part in separatist activities, along with the Tamil youth Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Under the policy of standardisation introduced in the 1970s, the number of admissions to the universities was to be calculated based on the number of students who appear in a particular language. It discriminated against the Sri Lankan Tamil students who were, in consequence, required to score higher marks than the Sinhalese students to gain admission to the universities. Though discarded in 1977, the policy had its share in fuelling up the separatist tendencies and drove many a Tamil youth into militancy. These, along with other forms of official discrimination against the Sri Lankan Tamils, witnessed the formation of an outfit named the Tamil New Tigers (TNT).

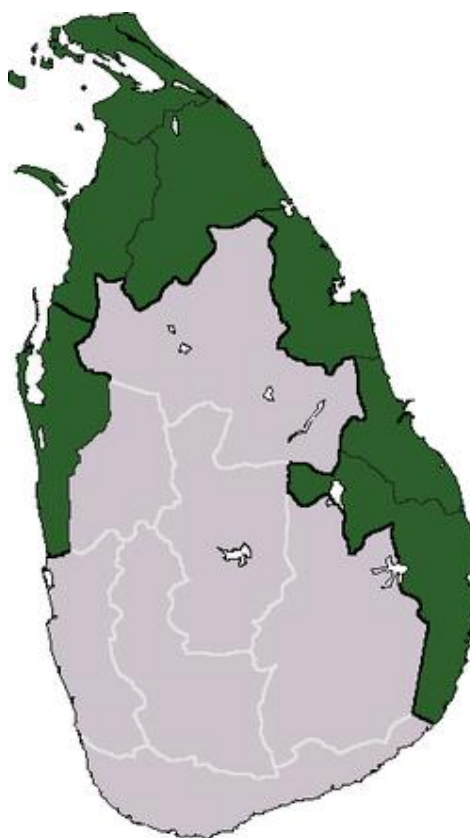


Fig. 1.3. Location Tamil *Eelam* territorial claims  
 QuartierLatin1968. “Location Tamil *Eelam* territorial claim”. *Wikimedia Commons*, June 2012, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/45/Location\\_Tamil\\_Eelam\\_territorial\\_claim.png/250px-Location\\_Tamil\\_Eelam\\_territorial\\_claim.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/45/Location_Tamil_Eelam_territorial_claim.png/250px-Location_Tamil_Eelam_territorial_claim.png)

Velupillai Prabhakaran and Chelliah (Chetti) Thanabalasingam, a well known criminal from Jaffna, in 1972, formed TNT centering on the philosophy of the ancient Chola Empire of which the tiger was the emblem. TNT changed its name to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Eelam*, or the LTTE, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May in 1976. In an open letter to Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa, on passing of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) in 1979, Vellupillai Prabhakaran wrote about themselves as:



We wish to state clearly and emphatically that we are not a group of amateur armed adventurers roaming in the jungles with romantic illusions, nor are we a band of terrorists or vandals who kill and destroy at random for anarchic reasons...on the contrary we are revolutionaries committed to revolutionary political practice...we are the armed vanguard of the struggling masses, the freedom fighters of the oppressed. (Bose 84)

The conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the separatist outfit LTTE (also known as *Eelam Wars*) can be classified as four phases, peppered with interludes of failed discussions on peace. The first phase (1983-1987) began with the ambush of the Sri Lankan Army patrol by the rebels in Jaffna, on 23 July 1983 at around 11:30 pm, which killed fifteen soldiers and a number of rebels. It was meant to be in vengeance for the murder of Charles Anthony, one of the founder members of the outfit, and also for the abduction and rape of some Tamil school girls. It led to violent riots by Sinhalese civilians who targeted houses and shops by Tamils. There was an exodus of Tamils out of the country (see fig.1.4.).



Fig. 1.4. Black July 83 – Boralla

Amarasingha, Chandraguptha. “Black July 83 – Boralla”. *Colombo Telegraph*, Gunasekara Tisarane, 25 July 2013, <https://i0.wp.com/www.colombotelegraph.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Black-July.jpg?w=450&ssl=1>

The peace talk conducted in Bhutan in 1985 proved futile. In 1987, the Sri Lankan Army cornered the LTTE in Jaffna as a part of its *Vadamarachchi* Operation and India, for the sake of its Tamil citizens, intervened with requests of halting the action. When the Sri Lankan government turned a deaf ear to it, India intervened by airdropping supplies to Jaffna (Operation *Poomalai*.) As a result of the talks held between Sri Lankan President J. R. Jayewardene and the Indian government, the Indo-Sri-Lankan accord was signed on July 29, 1987. Sri Lankan troops withdrew from the north and the Indian Peace Keeping Force took control of the area, thereby putting an end to the first phase of the conflict.

The second phase of the war (1990-1995) was primarily against the Muslim population of the country and witnessed many a brutal civilian

killing. The LTTE used female and child cadets in its warfare and the government could not protect its citizens from the brutal massacre at Palliyagodella. The third phase (1995-2002) saw the LTTE capturing the Sri Lankan army base at Mullativu. There were mass murders of Sinhalese civilians at Kallarawa and Gonagala. Almost 30% of the entire island came under the control of the rebel outfit. The final phase (2002-2009) of the war followed the failure of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and the ceasefire agreement between the army and the rebels, mediated by Norway. The Sri Lankan Civil War ended on 18 May 2009 with the Sri Lankan Army wiping out the LTTE, following the death of Velupillai Prabhakaran. The story of this violent bloodshed has its roots in different ideas of nationalism that formed in the minds of the population, as:

Sri Lankan Tamils have quite a different approach to their history as compared with the Sinhalese. Their claim to ancient origins in the island was mainly a reaction to the claim made by Sinhalese nationalists to be the island's original inhabitants. The debate about who came first, who was the original inhabitant, what expanse of land was under Tamil control, and hence who had more claims to part or totality of the land was a late development. (Wickramasinghe 272)

While the Sinhalese Buddhists believed the island to be the chosen haven for *Theravada* Buddhism and used mytho-histories to set its strong

foundation thereby perceiving the minority as 'other', the Tamil minority reacted against the ethnocentric and militarist discriminatory stances taken up by the state. The Sinhalese politicised Buddhism, the religion of tolerance and peace, and paradoxically used it to establish a so-called patriotic nationalistic sentiment which viewed others as nothing more than trespassers. The Tamils reacted with a separatist and intransigent move which culminated in the bloody civil war.

Having dealt with the religious and political history of Sri Lanka, let us move on to another important aspect that has contributed to the civil war in the island- nationalism. Sri Lanka is said to be a nation with different nationalisms. What is nationalism? Nationalism is a societal, political and economic system which represents the endorsement of the welfare of a particular nation and is closely linked to patriotism. Nationalism seeks to conserve a nation's culture by striving to achieve and uphold sovereignty and national identity based on communal characteristics, such as culture, religion, politics, language and the notion of a common ancestry. Anthony D. Smith, in *Theories of Nationalism*, defines nationalism as "an ideological movement, for the attainment and maintenance of self-government and independence on behalf of a group, some of members conceive it to constitute an actual or potential 'Nation' like all others" (171). According to Prof. R. I. Rothberg, "Nationalism as a concept is a "morass of misapplication" and along with "nation" and "nationalism" has

been used "to describe a multitude of situations, human conditions, and state of mind"(33). Kenneth R. Minogue depicts nationalism "as a set of ideas. . . a form of self expression by which a certain kind of political excitement can be communicated from an elite to the masses"(153). Prof. Hans Kohn, considered the most influential theorist of nationalism, defines it as "a state of mind permeating the large majority of people and claiming to permeate all its members; to recognize the nation-state as the ideal form of political organisation and the nationality as the source of all creative cultural life and economic well being" (16). Dominique Schnapper explains:

the nation is defined by its sovereignty which is exercised internally to integrate the populations that it includes and, externally, to affirm itself as a historic subject in a world order based on the existence of nations and political units and the relationship that exists between them. But its specific characteristic is that it integrates the populations into a community of citizens, whose existence legitimizes the internal and external action of the state. (45)

Two schools of thought, namely objectivism and subjectivism, are important in the study of nationalism. Objectivists stress the role of culture, especially language, in the description and creation of nations, while according to subjectivists, nations are formed by popular will and political action. To comprehend the concept of nationalism, the following

three paradigms are widely employed. The 'primordialist' perspective is based on the early, primordial essential roots and sentiments. This 'cultural' or 'naturalist' view proposes nationalism as a natural occurrence and puts forth the idea that nations have always been in existence. Nationalism is viewed as something that is ever present in the populace and gets stirred up under political self-consciousness. The concept is based on evolutionary theory which identifies nationalism as a result of the evolution of human beings into identifying themselves with factions, such as ethnic groups. Roger Masters in *The Nature of Politics* (1989) considers these group attachments as unique, emotional, intense, and durable, because they are based upon kinship and promoted along the lines of common ancestry. Hutchinson and Smith (1994) identified the three elements based on which human social communication occurs as kin selection, reciprocity and coercion. They consider ethnic groups to be 'super-families' the members of which will be biologically inclined towards co-operation and reciprocity with their own kin while also resorting to some forms of coercion. They discuss Pierre van den Berghe whose socio-biological point of view holds that nationalism is a creation of ethnic and racial connections, explained as an 'extended and attenuated form of kin selection'. Socio-biologists also assert that heritage and ethnicity is passed on genetically. The notions of belonging and indirectly excluding others feature in these theories. The popularity of this paradigm lies in its recognition of the need for

identification with the familiar and known. Primordialism offers the framework for the concepts of ethnic nationalism and cultural nationalism. Perennialism, a branch of primordialism, opines that nations have existed since antiquity, though in uncommon and unnatural phenomena happening in crests and troughs.

The second paradigm, ethnosymbolism, is an intricate, historical viewpoint that elucidates nationalism as an evolutionary occurrence instilled with historical significance. It puts emphasis on the significance of symbols, mores, ethics and myths in the conception and continuance of nations and the perception of nationalisms. Anthony D. Smith distinguishes between ethnic or ethno-cultural communities (*ethnies*) and ‘nations’, and validates the study of early civilizations. In *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986), he defined ethnic communities (*ethnies*) as “named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity” (32). Ethnosymbolists see nations as modern entities but gives importance to pre-modern roots. Thus, this approach is seen as a ‘middle-ground’ between primordialism and modernism.

The third paradigm, modernism, proposes nationalism to be a recent social phenomenon. It argues that nationalism occurs and thrives only in modern societies. Theorists of this school believe that traditional societies, with its lack of a modern self-sustainable economy, undivided authority,

and common language, do not possess the fundamentals for nationalism. This idea is reflected in civic nationalism and ideological nationalism. Some of the well-known theorists of this school are Carlton J. H. Hayes, Henry Maine, Ferdinand Tönnies, Rabindranath Tagore, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Arnold Joseph Toynbee and Talcott Parsons. Benedict Anderson's theory of 'imagined communities', relevant to the Sri Lankan situation, is also modernist.

Nationalism, as it is based on different ideologies or movements, is considered to be a concept which has many categories. It should be noted that this grouping does not warrant mutual exclusivity. The different categorisations of nationalisms are:

- (1) Cultural nationalism (pan nationalism), civic nationalism (political/progressive nationalism), left-wing nationalism (socialist nationalism) and secessionist nationalism. Civic nationalism is further subdivided into civic-territorial and socio-political nationalisms
- (2) Ethnic nationalism, religious nationalism, cultural nationalism, civic nationalism and ideological nationalism.
- (3) Liberal nationalism, conservative nationalism, expansionist (Eurocentric) nationalism, Anti-colonial (Third-world/postcolonial) nationalism



- (4) Racial nationalism, democratic (Jacobin) nationalism, traditional nationalism, liberal nationalism, integral (biological/totalitarian) nationalism
- (5) Liberation nationalism
- (6) Revolutionary/radical nationalism
- (7) Economic nationalism
- (8) Diaspora or long-distance nationalism.

Some of the above-mentioned nationalisms which are within the scope of this thesis are explained in detail below.

Ethnic nationalism's basic foundation is ethnic association which includes shared language, culture, tradition and lineage. It is intolerant and can lead to conflict. Religious nationalism centers on a religion or doctrine that has a political implication. Considered irrational due to intolerance, it focuses on religious unity by resisting divergent viewpoints. Civic nationalism promotes social unity, individual rights and liberty. Tolerance, choice, social equality and justice are key elements of this form of nationalism. It can cause a weakening of the native values in traditional societies. Ideological nationalism argues for the capability of nations for self-governance. In cultural nationalism, the nation is defined by a shared culture. It is a middle ground between ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism and encompasses the feeling of cultural pride. When, in an ethnically diverse society, common culture gets prominence over a

common race or ancestry, it is an example of cultural nationalism. Unification of different races is an advantage of cultural nationalism. Socio-political nationalism is a form of civic nationalism in which a community can represent a nation. Michel Seymour, in his 1999 work “Plaidoyer pour la Nation Sociopolitique” in *Nationalité, citoyenneté et solidarité*, says that the socio-political nation represents a political community with recognised territorial boundaries within which there is a majority national community that considers itself to represent a nation, and that shares a common language, culture or history. Third world nationalisms occur in those nations that have been once colonised. Resistance is an important aspect of such nationalisms. It also attempts to ensure that the identities of the people are authored by themselves, not imperialist powers (153). Diaspora nationalism refers to the nationalist feeling among a diaspora. Benedict Anderson terms this “long-distance nationalism”(12) and states that this sort of nationalism acts as a “phantom bedrock” for people dispersed from their (real or imagined) 'homeland' and want to experience a national connection.

Sri Lanka is a melting pot of different nationalisms. Under the two factions of Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms, multiple ‘nationalisms’ are in play. It has forged the identities of the residents. As mentioned in the Introduction, identity politics, also called identitarian politics, are political arguments that centres around the interest and points of view of societal

factions of which inhabitants recognise themselves as a part. Identity politics also deals with the ways in which people's politics may be fashioned by characteristics of their identity. “‘Identities’ are crucial tags by which state-makers keep track of their political subjects; one cannot keep track of people who are one thing at one point, another thing at another,” (Verdery 37).

National identity comes under the umbrella term ‘cultural identity’, which is the sense or feeling of belonging to a group, and it also has many alternate manifestations. The island nation, being a multi-ethnic country, offers the scope for many cultural identities. Ethnic identity, one among those, is of utmost importance in the Sri Lankan scenario. Camilla Orjuela, in *The Identity Politics of Peacebuilding Civil Society in War-torn Sri Lanka*, distinguishes between the constructivist and essentialist perspectives to discuss the question of ethnic identity. The constructivist perspective views ethnicity as a political construction and discusses how only some differences between groups get highlighted as politically significant. It was the British idea of census-taking based on race that sowed the seeds of ethnic tension in Sri Lanka. Race substituted caste as a marker and an ethnic mosaic of Sri Lanka was mapped. The Sinhalese majority, speakers of Sinhala, mainly Buddhists, with an Aryan ancestry from northern India, dominated the southern and western areas while Sri Lankan Tamils, Tamil speaking Hindus or Christians, Dravidians from

southern India, populated the north-eastern parts of the island. Indian Tamils from southern India, workers brought from India by the British to work in tea estates, were those who populated the central highlands and were of an underprivileged class and 'subordinate' caste. Sri Lankan Moors and Malays were Muslims, who spoke Tamil or Sinhalese depending on their area of residence, and were descendants of Arab or Indian traders, or Malay soldiers and artisans brought by the Dutch. Burghers, descendants of the Europeans, offsprings of their mixed marriages with the indigenous population, were mainly English-speaking. Ethnicity seeped into other areas of civic administration and though it was discarded by the British before Sri Lanka's independence, it had already become politicised and later paved way for a 'Sinhalisation' of the state resulting in a minority struggle. Thus, it is evident that ethnicity in Sri Lanka is mostly a political construct.

The essentialist viewpoint, comprising ethnonationalist historiography and discourse, deals with the reimagining of the past by ethnic communities. The ancient Buddhist chronicles like *Mahavamsa* record the Sinhalese to be the earliest settlers on the island thereby tracing back a Sinhala 'national consciousness' to historical times. This idea is further disseminated through scholarly narratives, dialogues and academic texts. When K. M. de Silva describes the lengthy, uninterrupted (till 1815) and successful record of 'resistance to the foreigner' as one of the most

outstanding features of the island's history (145), he speaks of the 'Tamil invaders' from southern India and the colonial powers. The Tamil history is thus obscured in the Sri Lankan historiography as an invasion. The Tamils, in a revivalist movement, countered the Sinhalese efforts to monopolise history by claiming an arrival preceding that of the Sinhalese settlement in the island, bringing forth the idea of a traditional Tamil homeland. Tamil nationalists in India had used the myth of Lemuria to establish that *Kumari Kandam*, an ancient Tamil society, was the cradle of human civilization and it also inspired the Sri Lankan Tamils to imagine a Tamil *Eelam* as a distinct autonomous space. The decades-long Sri Lankan Civil War, a dark interregnum of brutality and bloodshed, was the price paid for this quest for a collective identity.

There was a Buddhist revival against Christian missionary activities, English language and European habits, which also affected the minority groups. The revivalist movement saw the amalgamation of the Sinhalese/Buddhist identity and the state which later resulted in the exclusion of minorities. The British left Sri Lanka, in 1948, a unified territory which was to be ruled as a democratic nation. As the educational institutions established by missionaries were predominantly concentrated in Tamil areas, there had been a lopsided representation of Tamils in civic administration and jobs. 'Sinhalese' of the Sri Lankan state produced both concrete and symbolic repercussions for the marginalised minorities

who became 'second-class citizens' in their land. Instead of a 'Ceylonese consciousness', Sri Lanka witnessed the development of ethnic identities. Sri Lanka's growth as a welfare state made the nation the ultimate provider of everything and hence, the state policy of exclusion witnessed large scale protests from the minorities and the formation of a Tamil consciousness.

Disenfranchising Indian Tamils in 1948 (though a matter of class interest), the Sinhala Only Act of 1956 declaring Sinhala the only official language of the state, the policy limiting youth from over represented areas in the university admission system in the early 1970s, giving land to the landless Sinhalese in the Tamil dominated north-east territory and granting a foremost position to Buddhism in the Sri Lankan constitution ,and the usage of Buddhist rituals and symbols in state affairs, triggered protest from the minorities. The protests, which began as non-violent petitions and sit-in strikes, escalated to a full-fledged Tamil struggle for separation. Thus, in effect, the process of nation-building in Sri Lanka produced two nationalisms. Religion, language and historical heritage are the key elements in Sinhala nationalism. Sinhalese, the progeny (and/or slayer) of a lion, the first human settlers of Sri Lanka, the people on whom Buddha bestowed the duty of guarding pure Buddhism on the *dhammadipa* (the unique island of the *dhamma*), are considered to be a majority with a minority complex. They argue that the island is the only place they have in the whole world. Unlike the Tamil separatists who fought for an exclusive

space, there is a place for minorities in Sinhalese nationalist view, though an inferior one. It is described as:

In Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist cosmology the nation and the state compose a unity. In cosmological conception the state protectively encloses the nation of Sinhalese Buddhists, whose integrity as persons is dependent on this encompassment. The state in such a conception encloses other peoples or nations who are not Sinhalese Buddhists. But critical here is that these peoples are maintained in hierarchical subordination to Sinhalese Buddhists. The encompassing and ordering power of the state is hierarchical, and the integrity of nations, peoples, and persons within the Sinhalese Buddhist state is dependent on the capacity of the state to maintain by the exercise of its power the hierarchical interrelation of all those it encloses. (Kapferer 7)

The paradox of Buddhists engaging in war is discussed in *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka* edited by Mahinda Deegalle. Though the Buddhist scriptures condemn all forms of mental, verbal and physical abuse, whether directed towards oneself or others, as examples of 'violence', the fear of threat to the Sinhalese Buddhist identity in their homeland makes the combating terrorism their obligation and right in the building of 'a democratic, multi-ethnic and united Sri Lanka'.

Tamil nationalism boasts of a Tamil national consciousness which was there in the island for thousands of years. The Tamils had their own culture, territory, language and faith. Being considered 'second-class citizens' in a country where they have such strong roots has created the trope of the 'Tamil suffering' in their minds. Discrimination in all walks of life for being racially different from the majority and the suppression of all attempts towards self-determination has added to the Tamil identity of suffering. Tamil resistance was based on an essentialist ethnic identity boosted by the heroic images of martyrs. The question of the Tamil identity became a weapon in mobilising the masses against the suppression by the state but in the course of fighting oppression using nationalism, new forms of oppression were created. Although Tamil militancy failed, Tamil nationalism is sustained in the global arena in the minds of the Tamil diaspora exemplifying Benedict Anderson's concept of 'long-distance nationalism'. The mass media, organisations and cultural events keep the 'imagined community' of *Eelam* Tamils together. Genocides kill bodies, not sentiments. When imagined communities become a part of the collective identity of a people, it becomes a matter of survival for them. It cannot be crushed using force. In this era of intense chauvinism and vicious conflicts, identities are instrumentally politicised, polarised and threatened. Efforts in the line of promoting inclusive identities, cross-ethnic sympathy and harmony are the need of the hour.



Any discussion on the cultural scape of Sri Lanka would be incomplete without the mention of the current state of affairs there. How is life for the civilians in postwar Sri Lanka? What were the challenges before them posed by the decades-long war and have they been successful in overcoming those? Sri Lanka, a shattered nation, declared itself free of terrorism in 2009. The final stages of the war which unfolded behind the iron curtain of secrecy later brought forth many stories which were claimed to be fabricated. The government was not ready to acknowledge those tales of sufferings. Rehabilitation and reconciliation were sidelined in the race to establish a Sinhalese Buddhist authoritarian state. Accounts of war which were different from the official records were rubbished. The wounds were not acknowledged and were left untended. It still lies in the core of the Sri Lankan psyche, throbbing and ready to shoot pain at the slightest of stimuli. The anti-Muslim riots in Kandy (2018) and those following the Easter bombings (2019) show how ethnicity and communal distinctions are still matters of concern in the island nation.

Sri Lankan nationalism is a creation of imagined geographies. The space called Sri Lanka is perceived/ imagined by the two groups differently. Their cultural histories prompt them to consider it as their exclusive space. Be it the Sinhalese *Sihadipa* or Tamil *Eelam*, both are perceived entities. This thesis discusses how traumatic events are

represented in Sri Lanka. The civilian angle of the Sri Lankan War would be mapped through films, as studied in detail in the next chapters.

## CHAPTER II

### OF WOUNDS AND SCARS

*“Unlike other forms of psychological disorders,  
the core issue in trauma is reality.”*

- Bessel A. van der Kolk

The twentieth century is marked in the history of mankind as an era of cataclysmic debacles. Europe witnessed the rise of new powers that rivalled against each other with imperialistic aspirations garbed in nationalistic sentiments. Colonies disintegrated to form fresh federations and newer power structures began to evolve in the Asian continent. For the first time in the history of imperialism, European powers tasted defeat. Japanese militarism and industrial advancement of the United States began to carve out a significant space for those nations in world affairs. Although many wars were fought, the century was marked the most violent in history by the two world wars that transformed the power structures in world politics. A multitude of changes ensued, and by the close of the first two decades of the century, there were regimes overthrown, ideologies strengthened, and maps redrawn. The dominant nations tested their military prowess and technological advancement in the fields of ‘the Great War’. Trench warfare, with its defending mechanisms like barbed wire and mines, laid bare ‘no man’s lands’ where many a life was lost. New nations, as ethnic homelands, were formed to avoid a similar war in the future.

The severe economic depression that preceded the fall of capitalism in 1929 resulted in the strengthening of ideologies like communism and fascism as alternatives. The emergence of the politico-economic doctrines of governmental intervention and welfare state paved way to the rise of totalitarianism and dictatorship which were accountable for brutal episodes like the Holocaust and the Great Purge. The world witnessed yet another global war from 1939 to 1945 which incorporated the use of nuclear weaponry, bloodbaths, genocides, and deliberate death from under-nourishment and disease. The line between what was considered civilian and military was blurred and the death rates recorded show that the number of civilian casualties were double that of soldiers. Events like torture and death in the Nazi concentration camps, forced labour in the Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and plunder by enemy occupation marked the war as deep wound scars in the psyche of generations of survivors. The century progressed to see more wars on one side and innovations that revolutionised human life on the other. Along with the surge in technological fields that made space shuttles and the World Wide Web possible, the century also found the globalised world immersed in new threats like terrorism, new deadly viruses and global warming.

Shoshana Felman, in *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*, has rightly defined the twentieth

century as ‘a century of trauma’ (171). The events, which in itself were traumatic to the core, were also seeds sown in the minds of future generations which carried on the wounds to the next century. The most important dialogues in Trauma Studies are always centered on the ‘Holocaust’, making the century a vital point of reference in trauma theory that emerged as a discipline much later.

The last two decades of the century witnessed the outbreak and progress of the Sri Lankan Civil War from an ethnic riot into a full-fledged war that challenged even the global power structures. The ethnic tensions between two communities in a tiny island nation blew out of proportion and the world witnessed a brutal genocide along with other human rights violations. The fateful event on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1983, a deadly ambush on the Sri Lanka army patrol *Four Four Bravo* by the rebels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Eelam* (LTTE), killing thirteen soldiers, was the harbinger of a series of riots against the Tamil minority which escalated into the civil war. When the rich benefactors of the island froze development aids as a reaction against the atrocities inflicted on civilians, Sri Lanka formed new ties with China and Iran, which became a matter of great concern for India and the US.

Bombings, kidnapping, extortion, confinement and torture, at the hands of the State as well as the rebels, became part and parcel of the Tamil civilian life. The Sinhalese civilians too had their share of losses.

The war ended in a bloody genocide which triggered an exodus of Tamils as refugees into other countries. The loss of lives, living, land and peace have wounded the psyche of Sri Lankans, the scars of which are yet to be healed. Efforts at reconciliation and rehabilitation become effective only when the concern of psychological well-being of the survivors is addressed. The trauma of the war has left massive black holes in the lives of many, which would, if left unaddressed, suck in and destroy their future. The stepping stone in the addressal of the issue is to get an understanding of trauma, its nature and inherent complications, and formulate ideas on how to move on from it.

A detailed discussion on the theoretical aspects of trauma warrants the question of what trauma is. The concept of trauma, growing larger than its clinical origins, has entered popular culture as a metaphor, encompassing the challenges of a vicious and frenzied life fixated on pain and persecution. The word 'trauma', which meant the piercing of skin in Ancient Greek, signifies wound or damage. Occurrences, beyond the edges of normal experiences, both exterior and emotional, will shatter the normal working of one's mind and hurl the person into severe disorder. It transcends the perceptible realm into the depths of the subject's identity and may seem to substantiate the most persecutory of one's unconscious fantasies. The anxiety or fright following an appalling episode causes the crushing of sense and order in one's inner self and slithers into other facets

of daily life, breaking down the natural walls against anxiety by validating and giving a new life to the universal fears and primordial paranoid ideas deep within. The individual's trust in the basic goodness of the world collapses. In various instances, the person may not even make out a way to act in response to the event and may even be in denial of its effects. Writers have distinguished between impersonal trauma (as caused by natural disasters, road accidents) and interpersonal trauma (like rape, sexual abuse, war) and argue that traumas connected with the latter are more challenging and probable to end in grave psychological disorders. Sri Lanka is a nation where the people have suffered both these kinds of traumatic experiences.

The term "post-traumatic stress disorder" came into use in the 1970s, mostly due to the diagnoses of the experiences and conditions of US military veterans of the Vietnam War, and was formally accepted by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in 1980 in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III). The fourth edition of the manual (DSM-IV), in 2000, revised the criteria for the diagnosis of PTSD. The condition being a result of a traumatising event, presence of symptoms like re-experiencing, avoidance, emotional numbing and hyper arousal, and having significant impact on social/family/occupational functioning, were included along with a temporal scale that classified the disorder as acute (less than 30 days), chronic (less than three months) and delayed onset (after six months of event). Apart from the

impact on persons, the cultural politics of trauma, i. e., how it affects entire cultures or lands is also to be considered. As man is a social being, it is tough to disconnect individual and collective trauma. The political and ideological contexts within which traumatic events take place mould the impact, making the need to share it vital.

The distinction between stress and trauma is also to be considered as the latter is overwhelming and causes the formation of traumatic memory. Other than by being a victim, witness or living in proximity to where a disaster ensued, people can encounter trauma from other vantage points too. They can experience trauma vicariously, that is, by feeling empathy towards a friend or the subject in a news report in the media. It makes the study of the role of media in translating traumata essential. Media coverage of traumatic events, with all its sensationalism and melodrama, be it to spread information or to aid the society in scrutinising the event thereby enhancing disaster preparedness for the future, is a necessary evil in today's world. It causes stress in survivors and induces what is known as 'the second wound'. The breach of an individual's privacy, insensitivity to his/her grief, inaccurate portrayal and hasty judgments by the media can cause collateral damage which adversely affects the survivor's path to recovery. At times, it is seen that the seductive power of a 'scoop' dims all humanitarian sympathies and reduce distressed human beings into commodities that can be sold in the news market. The faulty and



insensitive coverage of traumatic events can create consequences that can last a life-time in the minds of survivors. It induces damage of manifold proportions that heavily outweigh the positive effects of ethical reporting.

While international media coverage of the Sri Lankan War concentrated by and large on humanitarian issues and human rights violations, there were propagandist moves and cold-blooded murders happening in the country. Both the government and the LTTE exerted influence on journalists and could not stand views that were divergent from their own ideologies.

Krishna Jayashanka Siriwardhana has, in his thesis, analysed Sri Lankan newspapers and portrayed how the media was involved in framing the war. While trying to put forth the idea that there is no ethnic problem in the country between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils, these newspapers used catchphrases to brand the LTTE as vicious terrorists. Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of LTTE, was named a 'megalomaniac killer' and 'homicidal maniac'. Metaphors were used to dehumanise LTTE as animals or monsters and the West as enemies of the country. The war was hailed as a humanitarian mission and the soldiers were valourised as heroes.

According to Nigel C. Hunt, the responses to traumatic events would be varied and he lists four probable scenarios. The first scenario is where the individual cannot function properly any more. The second is

about those who suppress the memory of the event and try to avoid reminders that point to it. The third type is the ones who actively think about the event and create narratives. They evolve wiser after the long-experienced traumatic situations. The final group is of those who are not affected by the traumatic event at all (*Memory, War* 8). When studying the effects of a war on the survivors, the first and third among these are to be considered. Trauma emerged from psychiatry/psychoanalytics and later seeped into the realm of the Humanities. Literary theory, at least till the later part of the twentieth century, was considered to be indifferent towards historical and political realities. New theories, interdisciplinary in scope, mushroomed across the stream of humanities which also led to the conceptualisation of trauma.

Structuralism, a 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual movement, views reality or 'the Real' as chaotic. Human beings, in order to shield themselves from the traumatically antagonistic reality, construct meaning which is a part of the Symbolic Order. The construction of meaning can serve therapeutic purposes too. Structuralism argues how all human behaviour and expressions, including language, are determined by social, cultural and psychological structures. Saussurean theory of language puts emphasis on the idea that meaning is an arbitrary concept. Jacques Derrida's post-structuralist semiotic analysis took the arbitrariness of language a step ahead. He proposed a lack of centrality and argued that signs existed in

relation to and always referred to one another for meaning, which formed out of their synchrony or diachrony. He called this state of postponement of meaning as 'différance'. According to Derrida, in his interview with Julia Kristeva:

*Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other. . . the a of différance also recalls that spacing is temporization, the detour and postponement by means of which intuition, perception, consummation-in a word, the relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a being-are always deferred. (*Positions* 21)

Thus, a text is never a distinct whole but a medley of meanings, some of them even contradictory. It re-enforced the unreliability of language and put a limit to the scope of interpretative reading of texts. Interpretations, in the web of language, which are based on tradition, shift every time a text is read. Derrida's philosophy is a quest for this other of language. This unreliability of language works in the study of trauma too. How someone sees or experiences an event would be unique and exclusive to the individual. The event can thus create different meanings and perspectives which cannot be represented in one 'common' language.

The study of culture is also of importance in this work. There are different methodologies employed to study culture. While 'culturology'

(coined by American anthropologist Leslie White) or ‘the science of culture’ (defined by English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in 1872) deals with the systematic understanding, explanation and scrutiny of cultures, it is Cultural Studies that probes into how culture generates and alters individual experience, daily life, relationships and authority, thereby coming into terms with the past, social life, and the future. Cultural Studies explores how meaning is produced, circulated, and disputed in the social system. In cultural studies, the notion of ‘text’ is used not only in relation to the written language, but to all significant relics of culture, like TV programmes, movies, pictures, etc.

Sri Lanka is an ethnically diverse nation which has myth ingrained into every aspect of its cultural history. The Sinhalese culture, with its supposed Aryan origin and strong Buddhist leaning, moulds the perspectives of its people and makes them experience the geographical space very differently from how those following the Dravidian, predominantly Hindu, Tamil culture do. Those minorities, even within these divisions, would have varied experiences. Though all the citizens occupy the same geographic space, their cultures urge them to lead different lives. Cultural psychology, the study of how cultures mirror and mould the minds of its members, is based on the theory that mind and culture are undividable and mutually constitutive. It puts forth the idea that people are shaped by their culture while their culture is shaped by them.

Richard Shweder defines cultural psychology as " the study of the way cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, and transform the human psyche, resulting less in psychic unity for humankind than in ethnic divergences in mind, self, and emotion "(*Thinking* 73). This branch of study, in agreement with the indigenous psychology approach, takes into account the over-representation of the Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic populations (dubbed WEIRD in social science research) in psychological research and argues that Western theories and findings on psychology are not relevant to explain the psychological behaviour of non-Western subjects. Cultures are not universalistic entities. There are inherent differences deeply entrenched in the roots of different cultures that need to be considered while studying its components. For instance, there are cultures which are individualistic and collectivistic. Countries like the United States, Germany, Ireland, South Africa, and Australia are individualistic and focus on personal achievement of individuals while cultures of countries in Asia, Central America, South America, and Africa tend to be more collectivistic in nature where the focus is on the group, rather than individuals (Henrich 29). Concepts of cultural empathy and ethnocultural empathy are also important in this area.

Yet another important aspect in Cultural Studies which is relevant to this thesis is the idea of 'Cultural Memory'. According to Jan Assmann, Honorary Professor of Religious and Cultural Theory at the University of

Konstanz and Professor Emeritus at the University of Heidelberg, cultural memory is the faculty that lets us construct a narrative picture of the past and develop an image and an identity for ourselves through its course. Shaped by the symbolic institutionalised legacy present in memorials and other media that acts as mnemonic triggers to instigate meaning into the past, cultural memory can invoke even mythical origins in a community and work as a collective uniting force. He also considers how cultural memory can become a menace to totalitarian governments which may, in turn, destroy artifacts and monuments in an attempt to undermine the memory of the people and make cultural identity a *tabula rasa* from which a new identity can be forged. Wiping out cultural memory is, thus, a way to destroy the past and future of a community. According to Aleida Assmann, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Konstanz, memory protects the past against the corrosive action of time and can act as a backing for societies to construct its futures. Adding to French historian Pierre Nora's concept of *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory), which may refer to concrete or symbolic objects, places or ideas ingrained with historical importance in the popular collective memory and can be used in the building of a national memory, Assmann says that the local memories that should not be ignored. In the homogenisation of memories, alternative narratives of trauma and suffering may be

overlooked (Meckien). The concept of cultural memory and its scope in memory studies will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter.

Another concept worth considering in this work is that of cultural trauma. Neil Smelser defines trauma as “an invasive and overwhelming event that is believed to undermine or overwhelm one or several essential ingredients of a culture or the culture as a whole” (Alexander *et al.* 38). A process of meaning-making, cultural trauma arises when a group of people feel that they have been subjected to a dreadful occurrence that produces deep-seated marks on their collective consciousness, memories and identity, causing irreversible alterations. The theory states that events are not intrinsically traumatic and trauma is a collectively mediated creation. Trauma materialises through narration. Imagination represents experience, thereby constructing trauma which becomes the fresh cultural narrative, modifying collective identity. Smelser explains that “A memory accepted and publically given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is a) laden with negative affect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions” (Alexander *et al.* 44). Cultural trauma is both an emotional experience whereby deep emotions are triggered by the shock of an event and an interpretative reaction to it. Like individual trauma, cultural trauma can only be understood retrospectively. A traumatic event

can bring together imaginary collectives and sketch scripted identities.

‘Carrier groups’ express and signify trauma, making it accessible to communication. It moulds feelings into words and images. Responses and representations are interpreted in the light of culture structures and taken in as collective representations, which becomes a part of memory.

Having set the ground for theoretical considerations, it would be useful for this thesis to explore how the concept of trauma evolved through time and disciplines into the stream of Humanities. The novel concern in trauma can, according to Lerner and Micale, be categorised into three. The first group, as two distinctive schools with positivist and historicist leanings, dealt with intellectual histories of the notion of trauma in medical science and offered a critical history of psychiatry; the second exhibited a concern with the practices and sufferings in institutional psychiatric settings and used case histories, hospital records, etc. as sources; the third group concentrated on trauma as represented in arts and literature (6). In the Humanities, there are different schools and models of Trauma Theory, the most prominent being the psychoanalytic post structural (deconstructive) Lacanian classic model popularised by Cathy Caruth *et al.* which pairs neurobiological and semiotic theories. Revisionist theories or alternative approaches are psychological and covers the area of social psychology too. Some of the prominent figures who belong to this school are Ruth Leys, Ann Cvetkovich and Michelle Balaev. The neo-Freudian



and neo-Lacanian pluralistic models concentrate more on the social apparatus and cultural perspectives of trauma. While some thinkers like Michael Rothberg and Greg Forter club neo-Freudian and postcolonial ideas, others like Roger Luckhurst and Irene Visser deal with the social and political implications of trauma. There are some like Laurie Vickroy and Paul Arthur who look at trauma through the perspective of cultural studies. Even though the development of trauma studies as an academic discipline in the humanities is a comparatively recent phenomenon, it would be useful to search for a comprehensive account of ideas and contributions across multiple disciplines like psychoanalysis and psychiatry.

In 1866, John Erichsen, a British surgeon, described that powerful ‘shocks’, or simple shuddering ensuing from rail accidents, may cause bruising of the spinal cord and injuries imperceptible to the naked eye can cause a state of ‘natural perturbation of the mind’ resulting in ‘railway spine syndrome’, the main symptoms of which were ‘pallor, faint, tremor and palpitations, unmotivated crying and insomnia’, etc. J. M. Charcot classified these cases of ‘railway spine’ under the category of ‘hysteria’ (*Trauma and Migration* 10). Organised psychological medicine first took up the concept in the 1870s and the notion of trauma surfaced as an already assumed concept in the work of Sir Sigmund Freud and his peers on hysteria. Explaining the processes of hysteria, Freud, in 1893, said that the human mind holds back the remembrance of certain very extreme or

excruciatingly painful incidents by dissociating from it. The ‘bottled-up’ feelings then manifest as ‘hysterical symptoms’ symbolically representing the repressed memory. Following the practices developed by French clinicians J .M. Charcot and Pierre Janet, Freud used hypnosis in his work with hysterical patients and began to experiment with his ‘talking cure’, concluding that the process of catharsis can cure a person. He believed that bringing back the memories and painful feelings associated with a traumatic event would help in recovery. Clinicians later introduced the notion of ‘traumatic hysteria’ as opposed to ordinary hysteria and traumatic neuroses.

Catharsis, with a Greek root meaning ‘purification’, initially used in a ritualistic sense in Hellenistic culture, is a term employed, since Aristotle, in theatre to denote how art (mainly tragedy) can cleanse the audience by evoking feelings of pity and terror. The excessive passions in the human mind are thus purged out using the stimulus of art. Developing on the word as a medical metaphor, Aristotle’s *Poetics* became the starting point of a lot of scholarly discussions and debates that emerged over centuries on the nuances of the term. Sigmund Freud’s mentor and colleague Josef Breuer introduced the term into psychology when he found out ‘chimney sweeping’ (term used by his patient), or verbal therapy, as an effective alternative to hypnotic suggestion in treating hysteria (*Studies in Hysteria* 33-34). It was then that Freud renamed it ‘talking cure’ to portray the act

of putting across, or more precisely, experiencing the profound sentiments linked with events in a person's past which had been inhibited, disregarded, or never been dealt with. Individuals employ emotional sharing as a way to deal with the traumatic effects of an event. This social catharsis has been considered as the base for different therapeutic strategies that have developed over the years, like expressive writing, narrative therapy, etc.

Coming back to the origins of theorising trauma, it was Freud who gendered the concept of trauma and originally proposed that sexual seduction and a repressed libido contributed to traumatic anxiety, and later added on the element of 'phantasy' to his theory. His interest began to concentrate on psychic reality and how traumatic events became a part of the internal world of an individual ("Introductory Lectures 16" 368). Using his new structural model of the human mind as consisting of associations between three modes of psychological operation, namely the id, the ego, and the superego, Freud placed anxiety within the ego. He differentiated between automatic anxiety as the feeling experienced during an actual situation and signal anxiety which occurs when danger threatens. Certain sensory stimuli that remind the mind of the traumatic events put it in a state of flash back where signal anxiety may be experienced. Having identified annihilation to be man's most basic anxiety, he put forth the idea that survivors of traumatic events, who have witnessed the death of others, may

come down to chronic melancholia as a mechanism to avoid survivor guilt. Survivor guilt or survivor syndrome, identified in the 1960s, defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (DSM-IV) as a symptom of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is a psychological condition that arises when individuals experience guilt and blames themselves for surviving a traumatic event when others did not. It may be associated with feelings of staying alive, not having done enough, or having done something that might have caused others to die. Some may even be pushed to commit suicide.

Freud pointed out that one's response to trauma is dependent on the individual psychic history and discussed how traumatic incidents which are forgotten resurface, mixed with fantasies, later in life. He saw trauma in historical terms as strata of repressed memories that cause deferred action, which he named *Nachträglichkeit*. According to him, a memory becomes traumatic only after the event, much later, when it is revived by a successive encounter (Laplanche and Pontalis 111-112). Therefore, it is not the real nature of the original event that is important, but the way it affects the psyche of the survivor. The response of the survivor, not the event, determines the traumata. The concept of *Nachträglichkeit* leaves behind the question whether trauma is something primordial, 'in the Real', or is a symbolic, retroactive construction.

Jacques Lacan considered trauma to be an absence affecting an unconscious severance from linguistic signifiers. The Real denies signification and when there is an encounter with it; trauma is initiated, which occurs belatedly and through repetition. Lacan, in one of his seminars, said:

there's an anxiety-provoking apparition of an image which summarises what we can call the revelation of that which is least penetrable in the real, of the real lacking any possible mediation, of the ultimate real, of the essential object which isn't an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence" (*The Seminar* 164)

In order to come out of the traumatic experience, the event has to be transported to the sphere of the Symbolic. When a subject fails to symbolise a distressing event, it remains beyond the realms of cognition but leaves behind a mnemonic trace which is imprinted in memory. At the time of a later event which acts as a trigger, the subject realises the void created by the 'original' experience and becomes traumatised by it.

Deconstruction scholars of the Yale School- Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman- accepted the Lacanian theory and focused on language, not emotion, in their work.

Theories based on neuroscience, put forth by psychiatrists like Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, suggested that trauma produced dissociated selves as the meaning-making part of the human brain or the cerebral cortex shuts down during a traumatic event, keeping only the amygdala, the sensation sector, active. Caruth based her theory on this premise and proposed trauma to be something unspeakable, the meaninglessness of which haunts the survivor as nightmares, hallucinations or flashbacks. Cathy Caruth's work initiated the theorising of trauma in the Humanities. She argued that the traumatic experience is so overpowering that it cannot be represented, and hence remains unavailable to narratives. The traumatic experience is a pre-symbolic inscription on a mind unprepared to receive it. She accepted the central position of dissociation in trauma. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, trauma is defined as:

a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event. . . solely in the structure of the experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. (Caruth 4–5)

Staying true to the Lacanian tradition, Caruth proposes trauma to be an unfathomable dilemma of the unconscious that sheds light on the intrinsic inconsistencies of language and experience. Trauma is seen as a 'recurring

sense of absence' that splits apart knowledge of the severe experience, putting off a linguistic significance other than just a reference. There exists an 'unspeakable void' of trauma in the centre of any discourse in this school of thought. Trauma, which repudiates representation, also causes dissociation and irrevocable injury to the human psyche. This model claims that language is unable to find truth of the experience. The human mind, which fails to process and symbolise the traumatic event when it is witnessed, revisits the experience, in what is known as latency or delayed action, as flashback, nightmare, or other repetitive behaviour. Trauma is thus part of the human unconscious. In *Unclaimed Experience – Trauma, Narrative and History*, Caruth explains the Freudian theory that human consciousness, which has once encountered the risk of annihilation, can do nothing but replicate the destructive event over and over again in a vicious circle, which in itself is a traumatising experience. Confrontation of the threat of death over and over again can pose a risk to the natural chemical configuration of the brain leading to its deterioration. An example of this would be the survivors of concentration camps who committed suicide after they were safe. This never-ending repetition of violence forms a history which imposes itself on the human mind. It is pushed into the paradox of survival which becomes a testimony to the unfeasibility of existence. Caruth believed that trauma could never be understood but only witnessed through action and involvement. She was against theories like

‘traumatic realism’ and believed that though testimony to trauma may be achieved through the function of language, the narrative's betrayal is unavoidable in signifying trauma. In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, she explains PTSD as:

The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. (4–5)

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub added the concept of testimonial narratives into trauma theory. The Fortunoff Video Archive Project, headed by Dori Laub and Geoffrey Hartman, which video-recorded interviews of Jewish victims of the Holocaust, added a novel psychological vantage point to the study of trauma. Beginning in 1979 as a Holocaust Survivor Film Project by an organisation at grassroots level, it was handed over to Yale University after three years and was opened to public later. The project has more than 4400 testimonies (10,000 recorded hours) of willing survivors of the Holocaust. It focuses on the importance of testimony in marking the past. In a testimony, a speaker verbalises his/her experiences of a traumatic occurrence, in public, on behalf of those who have endured the same and gives witness to the inexpressible trauma of survivors. Testimony is not just a method of collecting information; it is



also a story with multiple denotations, reactions and alternatives. It has a therapeutic role in the field of psychoanalysis and aids in reconciliation as well as historical documentation.

Having discussed Cathy Caruth in detail, the most prominent among those who theorised trauma in the Humanities, what follows is a quick look at the work of some of the major theorists in trauma studies. Works of Dominic La Capra and Michael Rothberg furthered Holocaust studies in the stream of humanities. Memoirs began to receive attention and many were written and translated to cater to a global audience. For Dominick La Capra, “Trauma is a shattering experience that distorts memory ... and may render it particularly vulnerable and fallible in the reporting of events” (61). He adapted psychoanalytic ideas to historical study and made use of socio-cultural and political evaluation to explain trauma and its effects on people and culture. He called traumatic experiences as “limit experiences” and explained the concept of universalised trauma as a perplexity between the deficiencies of a structure of trauma to depict the loss which is historically definite. According to La Capra, the reason why trauma is not registered during an experience is because the “mode of aggression departs so far from expectations that it is unbelievable and met with incredulity and a total lack of preparedness” (*History and Memory* 41). In *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*, Michael Rothberg defines and explains ‘traumatic realism’ as “of understanding the traumatic

realist project as an attempt to reflect the traumatic event in an act of passive mimesis, I would suggest that traumatic realism is an attempt to produce the traumatic event as an object of knowledge and to program and thus transform its readers so that they are forced to acknowledge their relationship to post-traumatic culture" (103).

Though Kaja Silverman had implicitly theorised cultural trauma earlier in her work on film studies like *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983) and *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (1988), it was Janet Walker who ushered in the explicit use of trauma theory in film studies. Her famous works include *Couching Resistance: Women, Film, and Psychoanalytic Psychiatry* (1993), *Feminism and Documentary* (with Diane Waldman, 1999), *Westerns: Films through History* (2001) and *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (2005). Trauma theory entered the realm of the interpersonal through the revelations about child abuse that were published much later and picked up by film scholars. Kai T. Erikson, in *Everything in Its Path* (1976), distinguishes individual and collective trauma as:

By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively. . . . By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the

prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with “trauma”. (153–4)

Let us now move on to the application of the theories on trauma discussed above into the real world scenario of a war-torn nation. In this thesis, the Sri Lankan War is studied in detail through the vantage point of trauma. The plight of the civilians during the war and the different kinds of trauma they suffered is studied. Visual narratives of the Sri Lankan war feature both the individual and collective kinds of trauma. Chamari in *Ira Madiyama* suffers from a personal loss. Her husband, a soldier with the Sri Lankan Air Force, has gone missing. Though many a woman has suffered the sorrow during the war, it has not become the experience of a distinct group to call it collective. The plight of the little Muslim boy Aralath is a blend of individual and collective trauma. The Tamil Muslims were ordered by the LTTE to flee their homes with only very few belongings. To add to it was the shelling they had to suffer. Running to the safety of bunkers and holes dug on the ground was something that has become habitual. The shock, pain and helplessness were common to the group, while the boy’s sorrow of having to leave his dog behind is an instance of individual trauma. Kamani facing her brother Duminda at the brothel

counts as individual trauma while the pain of all those girls who had to take up prostitution because of the war is collective.

Shiva, in the movie *In the Name of Buddha*, gets very much affected by what he witnesses all around him. The plight of his fellow beings deeply saddens him. He is seen talking to the rebel leader who promises a better tomorrow. What happened to the Tamils due to the repressive measures undertaken by the government has caused traumatic injuries in their collective psyche. At the same time, when Shiva's father is taken into unlawful custody and killed, the trauma becomes personal. When his lover is raped by soldiers of the Indian Army and he is forced to flee his country, Shiva's trauma is a result of individual experience. Similar cases of individual trauma that happen to a group of people make it collective.

Amudha of *Kannathil Muthamittal* goes to the war-infested Sri Lanka in quest of her biological mother. Though lovingly reared by her adoptive parents, the child wishes to find her mother out. She has prepared a set of questions to ask her mother when they meet. Her mother Shyama, who had to leave her new born in India and return to Sri Lanka in search of her husband, is another example of how trauma works at personal levels. Shyama's husband Dileepan, who is a Tamil nationalist, suffers deeply by what happens around him. He tells Shyama that he does not want to father a child unless there is peace for his people. Here it is evident how sufferings of a collective nature can affect and alter individual lives.

Coming back to theorising trauma, there were challenging reactions to the emergent attention in trauma in the discipline of humanities. Scholars like Michael S. Roth objected to the deconstructionist trauma theory and argued that the sudden interest in trauma studies in the Humanities was a way to link the abstract critical theory to material events. Elaine Showalter criticised trauma studies for bringing in a ‘victim culture’ in the US. Susannah Radstone, favouring psychoanalysis of the Freudian school, argued that trauma theory speculates a linear registration of events without considering the complex process of how the present prompts the remembrance of past. She accuses humanists of favouring PTSD for steering clear of the complications associated with the unconscious. She is against the concept of a traumatic event receiving its significance only in retrospect. Rather than emphasising on dissociation and the traumatised mind’s incapability for association, the conviction that the traumatic event can be recovered from memory is essential (*Memory and Methodology* 89). Radstone also argues that when any kind of marginality is linked to historical events in the course of reconciliation, it produces long-term effects on groups. Such analyses of histories from the perspective of victimhood can result in, according to Showalter (*Hystories* 35), a “victim culture.” Ruth Leys, in her 2000 work *Trauma: A Genealogy*, recognises and investigates some of the most complicated recurring questions in modern trauma theories, blending history and theory.

She writes:

I do not proceed as if trauma has a linear, if interrupted, historical development. Rather, I shall take a genealogical approach to the study of trauma, in an effort to understand what Michel Foucault has called 'the singularity of events outside any monotonous finality' and in order to register their recurrence, as he put it, not for the purpose of tracing 'the gradual curve of their evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles. (8)

She exposes the contradictions within Freudian theories on trauma, thereby asserting its uselessness. She also argues that any violation in the textual depiction becomes potent in registering trauma. It suggests the potential of traumatic texts to victimise all those who experience the representation in listening or reading. David Becker (2006) cautions against the universalisation of the term 'trauma'. He argues that social context create traumatic situations to which people react. It cannot be isolated from the political and cultural contexts. The same applies to the different scholarly discourses on trauma, be it of any school. Trauma should be defined within the framework of the context, the situation or the discourse (*Berghof* 1-21). Wilfred Bion, a victim of war trauma, put forth the concept of the 'inability of knowledge' into the sphere of trauma studies. According to him, not having someone who can and is willing to contain one's unbearable fragments of feelings creates an inability in the subject to know these

experiences. It results in efforts to wipe out links between associations, creating secluded 'islands of knowledge' that cannot be reproduced in thoughts or words. Though the desire to know is intrinsic in individuals, the ability to contain and the link to associated experiences may be lost in the face of a traumatic event, an 'unbearable experience'(101). Many symptoms of trauma, like flashbacks, loss of the sense of time, the inability to put the traumatic experience into words, etc. may result from the confrontation. Other reactions, such as numbing, can also manifest as resistance against the incapability to associate experiences.

Other than the propaganda films made by the two factions, there are no combat movies that feature the Sri Lankan war. The war took place in an area which was made inaccessible to outsiders. Journalists and members of international agencies (like the Red Cross and the UN) were asked to leave the area. The genocide is nothing to be proud of and hence is not counted as victory. Moreover, unlike the other wars where military strategies or prowess made a side win, both factions tried to shift the blame of the civilian deaths on to each other. How the war affected the lives of citizens for more than three decades can be seen in the movies made, but there is no action movie in Sri Lanka like those Hollywood war movies. Soldiers feature in many a movie. For instance, Sarathsiri of *Oba Nathuwa Oba Ekka (With You, Without You)* by Prasanna Vithanage is a former army man who is affected by the war. He is a silent man who broods

forever, and spends his time by watching professional wrestling matches on television. Though it is not explicitly mentioned, it is evident that the war and its experiences have changed him.

E. Ann Kaplan developed a model which favours empathic ‘sharing’ that helps in the recovery from trauma. She believed that each theorist before her had focussed on only one mechanism in defining trauma, thereby turning a blind eye to the complex processes that might be involved. She distinguishes three likely categories of brain function in trauma. The dissociation function is where the trauma is inaccessible to cognition or remembrance. The event is understood to be external and unmediated by the unconscious. The second engages both dissociation and cognition, placing the trauma in conscious memory. Last, a function where the victim partly identifies with the perpetrator and is thereby implicated and may also cause the triggering of memories or fantasies. She also discusses vicarious or secondary trauma, which affects witnesses or therapists. She explains how vicarious trauma becomes relevant in media. According to Kaplan:

watching a film. . . as a spectator one remains conscious. . . For most moviegoers, the cortex remains active, even if powerful emotions are being registered on the amygdala. . . . if the story deals with traumatic situations that the viewer may have experienced either directly or indirectly, his or her response to the images may be



more powerful. . . Vicarious trauma is but one of several kinds of response to media dealing with catastrophe. Whether or not a film or piece of journalism elicits this response depends very much on the filmic or literary techniques used by the director. (*Trauma Culture* 90)

To elicit such kind of a response from the spectators, the movies should be based on the truth. In the Sri Lankan scenario, truths were many and most of them were not allowed to be represented. Movies which tried to portray the events candidly were banned. For instance, *In the Name of Buddha* features a scene where soldiers of the Indian Army (IPKF) rape a Tamil girl in Sri Lanka. The Indian government would always treat it as a fabricated story, but testimonies speak a different tale.

Judith Herman compared the distress symptoms of survivors of traumatic incidents to what George Orwell called ‘double think’, an alteration of consciousness, which may result in hysteria. She, in her work *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, says:

The psychological distress symptoms of traumatized people simultaneously call attention to the existence of an unspeakable secret and deflect attention from it. This is most apparent in the way traumatized people alternate between feeling numb and reliving the event. The dialectic of trauma gives rise to complicated, sometimes

uncanny alterations of consciousness, which George Orwell, one of the committed truth-tellers of our century, called "doublethink," and which mental health professionals, searching for calm, precise language, call "dissociation." It results in protean, dramatic, and often bizarre symptoms of hysteria which Freud recognized a century ago as disguised communications about sexual abuse in childhood. (1)

Herman also discusses about how victims can be intimidated into silence which in turn can enhance the supremacy of the perpetrator. She believes in the role of political movements which can support the victims. She also states that the re-establishment of a 'safe space' is the first step in recovery (155-174). Safety can be a place as well as a person who can listen without being overwhelmed.

Marianne Hirsch worked on intergenerational trauma, concentrating on the concept of post-memory, and discussed how children of trauma survivors responded to the personal, collective and cultural trauma of their parents. Ann Cvetkovich's sex-positive queer approach to trauma highlights the significance of identifying as well as documenting accounts of trauma, mainly sexual, in the everyday life of individuals, particularly those of women and queers, which have been disregarded. She argues that the field of trauma studies is restricted by a splitting up between the civic and the personal. Amy Hungerford considered language and traumatic

experience to be similar. She argued that language's intrinsic confines on failure of reference, aggravated by the failure to comprehend the traumatic event, turned it into a site of trauma (81-83). For Melanie Klein, an occurrence becomes traumatic for the reason that it turns on the terror of extermination, known as death instinct, that is ever present within an individual, and which, in turn, gives rise to the emergence of one's primal defenses. She discusses the paranoid-schizoid position, a mental state in which the leading anxiety is for the survival of the self so that the person projects his fear outward into persecutory objects and people, and puts forth the depressive position in which the subject wants to recompense for all the damage done towards others, even if only in their imaginations. The latter finds examples in war veterans who suffer from the guilt of killing. For Klein, trauma is not a product of repressed memories that causes deferred action. She argues the non-existence of historical time in the traumatised mental state. Klein discusses symbolism arising from love of the individual towards others by which one tries to protect them from hatred (*Introducing Psychoanalysis* 39-47). Trauma, according to both Klein and Caruth, destroys the ability of an individual to symbolise and thus create a narrative account of the experience. According to Hanna Segal, symbolism is a tripartite relation among self, object, and symbol. While in a state of depression or stress, the mind's symbolic functioning will be disrupted. There may be a drop from symbolic functioning to

symbolic equation. For instance, a schizophrenic may not find any difference between symbols and the objects it symbolise. In other words, symbols becomes equivalent to the things symbolised. Segal postulated a theory describing the function of 'projective identification' in symbol formation. At the extreme of projective identification (which she later identified as pathological), part of the ego becomes identified with the object, and when, in the depressive position, the object is discarded, a symbolic representation of the object is formed in the ego in mourning, and the consciousness is plagued by symbols, as in hallucinations. Klein argues:

The consideration of the use of unconscious fantasy as a defense raises the problem of establishing what is its exact relation to the mechanisms of defence. . . interpretation. . . often ineffective until an opportunity occurs to interpret them so that they are meaningful to the patient in terms of what he actually feels. (*Introduction to the Work* 17-18)

War trauma is the response to war experiences and it depends on the person. The conditions which were named shellshock, battle neurosis, battle fatigue, etc. now come under the broad umbrella term of PTSD. War trauma, though the symptoms are similar, is not PTSD. The proportion of civilians affected by wars is on the increase. Unlike soldiers who are physically fit, trained, possess weapons, and have a limited control over the

situations, the magnitude of trauma in civilians is more due to their helplessness.

Giorgio Agamben's concepts of bare life, state of exception and *homo sacer* can also be used to analyse the life of Tamil civilians during the Sri Lankan War. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) and *State of Exception* (2005), Agamben, working on Aristotelian concepts, speaks about the power of a sovereign to classify its subjects as *bios* (qualified life) or *zoē* (bare life). He says:

If it is the sovereign who, insofar as he decides on the state of exception, has the power to decide which life may be killed without commission of homicide, in the age of bio-politics this power becomes emancipated from the state of exception and transformed into the power to decide the point at which life ceases to be politically relevant. When life becomes the supreme political value, not only is the problem of life's non-value thereby posed, it is as if the ultimate ground of sovereign power were at stake in this decision. In modern bio-politics, sovereign is he who decides on the value or non-value of life as-such. (*Homo Sacer* 142)

Every man is born as bare life and creates politics, a system, which helps him to have a qualified life. Law focuses on the latter and hence, the former can be neglected. During a state of exception, the sovereign acquires powers to suspend the rights of a group of people for a prolonged

time which can account for the denial of their citizenship. German philosopher Hannah Arendt has defined camp as the space where ‘everything is possible’ (*The Origins* 445) and Agamben argues that it comes into existence when the ‘state of exception’ is enacted and the bare life is detained by the sovereign. He explains further, “ Insofar as its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life, the camp was [...] the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation” (*Homo Sacer* 171). People are thus reduced to bare lives during the state of exception. Agamben theorises that “the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty” (83). It can also make a person *homo sacer* (a concept from Ancient Rome which proclaims someone as outlaw who can be killed but not sacrificed), someone who is excluded by the law from the system. He, in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, defines the *homo sacer* as:

has been excluded from the religious community and from all political life: he cannot participate in the rites of his *gens*, nor [...] can he perform any juridically valid act. What is more, his entire existence is reduced to a bare life stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him without committing homicide; he can save himself only in perpetual flight or a foreign land. (183)

The Sri Lankan Civil War created a camp out of the island nation, both in the literal and figurative sense. Tamils were reduced to bare lives, both by the Sinhalese government as well as the rebels. Their rights as citizens of the land were thoroughly limited. The army rained shells on their houses with no consideration of their lives while the militants used them as human shields, not allowing them to cross-over to safety. Their deaths were not acknowledged, nor accounted for. As mentioned by Agamben, the only way the civilians had to save themselves was to flee from their homeland.

There are social constructions, like history, which plays a significant role in how wars are marked. Certain events are considered on larger scales than the others because of the discourses created, mostly by survivors. The distinction between history and memory blurs in such discourses. The role of memory in a post-war society is discussed as:

War and victims are something the community wants to forget; a veil of oblivion is drawn over everything painful and unpleasant. We find the two sides face to face; on one side the victims who perhaps wish to forget but cannot, and on the other all those with strong, often unconscious motives who very intensely both wish to forget and succeed in doing so. The contrast. . . is frequently very painful for both sides. The weakest one. . . remains the losing party in this silent and unequal dialogue. (*Trauma and Recovery* 8)

The psycho-social impact of war is not universal. Society, culture and history influence how one memorises events. Due to this reliance on culture, support by the society is required by survivors, and it is where the importance of narratives lies. Narratives are personal interpretations of events which are fashioned by social discourse. Discourse has an important role in the individual/collective memory as it affects how something is memorised. The prospect of alternative discourses crops up at this point. What are alternative discourses? Syed Farid al-Attas, Malaysian author and academician teaching in Singapore, introduces the concept of alternative discourses as a set of discourses that emerges in opposition to, or subverts, the mainstream Eurocentric systems of thought, and are informed by indigenous historical experiences and cultural practices like indigenous philosophies, epistemologies, histories, art and other modes of knowledge, relevant to its surroundings, creative, non-imitative and original, non-essentialist, counter-Eurocentric, autonomous from the state, as well as other national or transnational groupings. In other words, it can also be explained as the creative application of a theory that originated in the West to the local situation. (Al Attas 1-12)

War is a universal phenomenon and the individual human responses to it would be similar everywhere. Fear is the most common response to a traumatic event. Unlike in a natural disaster or an accident, the civilians in the northern parts of Sri Lanka lived in a constant state of fear. At any



point of the day, shells would strike their homes, killing their beloved ones. They would have to rush to pits or bunkers and spend their day in the cramped spaces. Soldiers or militants may barge into their homes, killing or taking away a family member. There would be nothing much to eat as the rations provided would not suffice, if at all they manage to get it. A wrong fateful step would activate a mine that can shatter their bodies. Houses were bombed, people were gunned down, vehicles were set on fire with people inside. Even now, after eleven years since the war ended, survivors have not overcome their fears. Interviews and testimonies still appear with the 'name changed on request' tag. They never talk about the Tamil militants even if they were sympathetic to the cause. The continued presence of the Sinhalese military unnerves many. As if atop a volcano that can erupt anytime, they exist, guarding the light of peace that have finally seeped into their lives. Frequent riots always disturbed civilian lives in Sri Lanka. Velupillai Prabhakaran has said that the events he witnessed and heard of as a boy during the 1958 anti-Tamil pogrom has shaped his political views as an adult. In an interview to Anita Prathap, Prabhakaran said:

The shocking events of the 1958 racial riots had a profound impact on me when I was a schoolboy. I heard of horrifying incidents of how our people had been mercilessly and brutally put to death by Sinhala racists. Once I met a widowed mother, a friend of my

family, who related to me her agonizing personal experience of this racial holocaust. During the riots a Sinhala mob attacked her house in Colombo. The rioters set fire to the house and murdered her husband. She and her children escaped with severe burn injuries. I was deeply shocked when I saw the scars on her body. I also heard such stories of cruelty. I felt a deep sense of sympathy and love for my people. A great passion overwhelmed me to redeem my people from this racist system. I strongly felt that armed struggle was the only way to confront a system which employs armed might against unarmed, innocent people. (*Sunday*)

During the Black July riots of 1983, Sinhalese mobs, armed with copies of electoral rolls, burned down and looted Tamil homes. Those Sinhalese civilians who provided refuge to their Tamil friends were also in grave danger (see fig.2.1.). Considered as part of the spoils of war, female bodies are always considered to be arenas of war which are tortured and brutally raped to disgrace, control, extract information, scare or celebrate acquisition, masculinity and triumph. Some of the notable cases of murdered raped victims and the massacres associated with rape incidents are that of Krishanti Kumaraswamy, Arumaithurai Tharmaletchumi, Ida Carmelitta, Ilayathambi Tharsini, Murugesapillai Koneswary, Premini Thanuskodi, Sarathambal, Thambipillai Thanalakshmi, Kumarapuram massacre and Vankalai massacre. Accused of being LTTE sympathisers,

most of them were abducted, tortured, raped and murdered. Some had their bodies dumped in the wells or bushes. A woman had a grenade explode in her abdomen while another was shot through her vagina.



Fig. 2.1. Black July 83 – A Tamil boy stripped naked and later beaten to death by Sinhala youth in Boralla bus station, Amarasingha, Chandraguptha. ” Black July 83 – A Tamil boy stripped naked and later beaten to death by Sinhala youth in Boralla bustation”.

*Sri Lanka's Black July: Borella, 24th Evening, Colombo Telegraph*, Rajan Hoole, 24 July 2013, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/sri-lankas-black-july-borella-24th-evening/>

Worst are the cases of those who have to live their lives with the feeling of being violated. The physical effects of rape include traumatic wounds, venereal infections, gynecological and other diseases, undesired pregnancies which can result in maternal mortality or dangerous abortions, bone breakage causing physical and mental disability in future, etc. Added to it would be the psychological symptoms of fear, vulnerability, sorrow,

confusion and loneliness, which can lead to suicide and murder (as in honor killing). The social stigmata suffered by the children born of rape are also to be mentioned. Long term effects of rape trauma include depression, anxiety disorders, insomnia, nightmares, paranoia, shame, antipathy and self-loathing, trouble in re-establishing relations, etc. In the case of women refugees who have suffered rape, the problem of not having anyone to communicate it to remains. They get no legal representation and those who do may avoid giving testimonies.

Rape was not confined to women. Men were abducted in the notorious 'white vans', tortured and raped, while suffering unlawful detention. Survivors speak of how they were branded with tiger stripes, smothered with petrol-infused (or filled with chilli powder) plastic bags and threatened with guns pointed at their heads. There were torture rooms where victims were put through indescribable pain and torture. Authorities deny their role and do not acknowledge what the victims have gone through. They have spent months in custody while their families bribed the officials and agents who would smuggle them out of the country later. Shobha Shakti (Antonythasan Jesuthasan) has narrated the Welikade prison massacre in his 2004 book *IM (Hmm)*.

The war, especially in its final stage, witnessed mass displacements (some of them forceful while others were flights from death) and migration. Those who could not afford migration to other countries had to

leave in haste, moving to wherever they were herded to, with whatever they could carry in their hands. A lot of their hard-earned possessions remained scattered in the makeshift houses they erected on barren fields. Some travelled to India illegally on ferries, holding on to their dear lives. Some were accommodated in overcrowded refugee camps, while some sought asylum in foreign countries trying hard to adapt to the drastically different environs of their host countries. Life in refugee camps was worse, where they existed malnourished in unhygienic conditions. Life in war-infested areas was impoverished due to the lack of sufficient rations. It is said that gold ornaments were sold in exchange for groceries. Added to it were the extortions by militants and the looting by soldiers. Anita Pratap, the first journalist who interviewed LTTE chief V. Prabhakaran, in her book *Island of Blood*, has narrated how a poor Tamil fisherman in Jaffna has complained about the soldiers of the Indian Army (IPKF) have stolen a goat from his yard. Their already shattered lives were worsened by those who had power.

With the dearth of hospital facilities and the rising number of the wounded, physical and mental health of the civilians were in jeopardy. There were not enough medicines, even after the Red Cross trying their best to provide it. Hospitals were initially categorised as ‘no fire zones’ but were shelled. Infections were common. The unhygienic conditions in refugee camps were worse. Camps flooded during the monsoons, ushering

in epidemics. The families of rebels and those who the Sri Lankan Army suspected to be rebels suffered the ordeal of having their family members going missing. Abductions were so common, even after the war ended. Forced recruitments from schools by the LTTE were also rampant. Many children were forcefully taken away from their homes. Some were married off at very young ages by their families to avoid being conscripted by the rebels. Those who joined the rebels were indoctrinated and trained hard. The sight of young boys and girls walking around with guns were commonplace.

Dead bodies lay scattered in lagoons and marshes and for a community who believed in rebirth, not giving a decent burial to their dead was close to blasphemy. The number of widows continued to escalate exponentially. With widowhood came the socio-cultural stigma of being 'unlucky'. In rural Asian societies, widows were marginalised as bad omen by the members of their own community. The radical alteration in identity, coupled with grief and humiliation, pushed those young women into depression. They suffered 'social deaths' at the hands of their own people who discriminated as well as abused, branding them the bearer of ill- luck. With no support from family and the thoughts of their husbands having suffered violent deaths, women were pushed into long-term depression. Economic conditions forced some women to take over the role of the

breadwinner, which, in the highly patriarchal society, made them more vulnerable.

Tamil people suffered humiliation because of their very identity and they were suppressed, dehumanised, made scapegoats and stereotyped. Alienation and emotional numbing were common. The society turned sour with hostility, suspicion and indifference. During the last stage of the war, the LTTE is accused of having used civilians as ‘human shields’ by prohibiting them leaving the war zones. The most pathetic situation was of those who could not get closure. They were prohibited from mourning or remembering their dead. No memorials were erected to acknowledge the sufferings they have undergone. More than three decades of their pain became nothing but artifacts of war/ dark tourism. Their identities and positions in history remained unmarked, their cultural memories were shattered. By remembering the Sri Lankan Civil War as a series of bloody battles between the two factions and celebrating the victors by parading their motifs in every nook and corner, the losses of the vast majority of civilians were ignored. Their stories were not heard or shared. They had nothing to resist the monumentalism imposed by the Sinhalese authority, except their personal narratives.

When the road to Jaffna that remained closed during the civil war was opened, there was a wave of curious Sinhalese civilians who travelled north to see the soil that bred those rebels that soaked their island in blood.

The government had occupied the areas, converting zones of war into memorials and museums that celebrated their triumph. The houses that were damaged in bombing and shell attacks still stand as mute witnesses to the trials suffered by the common people. Though the end of the long war was a matter of relief to the nation, the way it ended, for the victims, was not something to be jubilant about. They were forced to flee from their lands to the trials and tribulations offered by a new country or a refugee camp. The immediate concern for the survivors was rehabilitation. The trauma they experienced might have kept their minds aloof from making sense out of their environs. The country was celebrating victory over ‘terrorists’, pushing into oblivion those who had lost everything in the struggle.

War was becoming a commodity in Sri Lanka that could be used as a tool to promote tourism. Added to charm of the idyllic beaches and sparkling sands of the exotic island that provided scenic beauty to travellers from around the globe, here was the possibility of turning the relics of a bloody war and genocide into tourist spots. The Sri Lankan Civil War was always shrouded in mystery, with very little information coming out of the island. The idea of ruthless militants with cyanide vials tied to their necks, to the outer world, seemed like something out of fiction. The chance to witness the places and whatever remained of the ‘Tigers’ was something very appealing to them. The army established a luxury resort



ashore the Nandikadal lagoon which had once turned red with the blood of fleeing civilians. *En route* Mullaithivu, about 4.5 km from the Puthukudiyiruppu junction, a war museum was installed which exhibited artillery, guns, suicide boats, bunker, armoured vehicle and submarine used by LTTE. The personal belongings of civilians, that lay scattered on roadsides, had stories in them too.

War movies can also be seen as a commoditisation where emotions are commercialised. For instance, *Kannathil Muthamittal* is the one movie which Indian spectators associate with the Sri Lankan war the most. It is a melodramatic work of visual art, which is intense with drama and made into a commercial product with songs shot in spectacular locations. For a community which suffered immense physical and mental trauma during the war, the government's policy of denying /not acknowledging the sufferings the civilians had gone through was a challenge to their very identity. Rehabilitation, according to the authorities, confined only to relocation. Like scattered beads, they existed in silence, in refugee camps and foreign countries, with nothing to mark their losses. Monuments cropped up in Sri Lanka to commemorate the war. Motifs celebrating Sinhalese heritage adorned those statues. When they installed statues of 'lions' in the soil of the 'tigers' they conquered, re-populated the area with Sinhalese families, the memorials they erected became one-sided. They were celebrating victory; when they mourned, it was the loss of their soldiers.

May 18, 2009 is a day that is remembered differently by the citizens of the island. The day the war ended with the death of the leader of the Tigers was a joyous occasion for the majority while for those who lost their kith and kin along with it, it was to be a day of mourning. Tamils were prohibited from mourning their dead, even if they were non-combatants. The day was celebrated as Victory Day (later renamed as Remembrance Day). It was only after the new government took over the authoritarian regime of Rajapakse that the civilians could build a memorial for their beloved. Symbolic sand tombs were made for those who lay in unmarked graves somewhere; prayers were conducted for their souls. Though very significant in the history of the Sri Lankan war, this day is not marked well in any movie.

There were narratives that had materialised during and after the war. Some recorded testimonies of survivors and witnesses while others represented it by fusing it with fiction. Different perspectives were addressed, some of which were discussed in the introduction of this thesis. When it comes to visual narratives, there are many films which use the Sri Lankan Civil War as its backdrop. Many a film has stirred up a hornet's nest and been subject to censorship or ban. Many documentaries that features testimonies and eyewitness accounts were released, some of them being *Crayons and Paper*, *White Van Stories*, *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields*, *Lies Agreed Upon*, *Demons in Paradise*, *I Witnessed Genocide: Inside Sri*

*Lanka's Killing Fields, My Daughter the Terrorist, No Fire Zone, Sri Lanka: The Search for Justice, Matangi/Maya/M. I. A. and No More Tears Sister.* Movies offer the scope for a creative analysis of the events as it offers the space for fiction too. Following is the discussion on how civilian trauma in Sri Lanka has been portrayed in select movies.

The horrors of rape were portrayed in *In the Name of Buddha* (2002), a film by Rajesh Touchriver. The controversial scene in which soldiers brutally rape a woman and place a grenade between her legs that blows her up is very haunting. To realise that it is not just a figment of fiction increases its magnitude. In the film, the protagonist's lover is shown to be raped by the soldiers of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) after stuffing her mouth with soil. Those who came to protect the soil and its people thus became foes. The film shows how the Tamils welcomed the IPKF with garlands and slogans. They considered the Indian soldiers to be their protectors. *Uchithanai Muharnthaal*, a 2011 Tamil movie by Pugazendhi Thangaraj, is the story of Punithavadhi, a 13-year old girl from Sri Lanka, who gets gang-raped by Sri Lankan soldiers. She, along with her mother, crosses over to India illegally and is looked after by a kind localite. The film ends with the death of Punitha, who has contracted HIV from her rape. The film offers scope for discussions on the questions of unwanted pregnancy and venereal diseases suffered by rape victims. Punitha's parents also die at the hands of the army. The war witnessed a lot

of children turning orphans or rebels (see.fig.2.2.) and families being shattered. *Vanni Mouse*, an award-winning internationally acclaimed short film by Tamiliam Subas, features rape, among many atrocities, in a refugee camp in Vanni. Subas has used a different narrative technique in his film. Not presenting any gruesome scenes directly, he has successfully driven home the point with the same poignancy by employing his art. When movies are censored and banned for violence in its content, the use of such alternate techniques can be promoted. Rather than watching something directly portrayed in the screen, it would help the spectators to imbibe the content more if the movie tries to make it a joint exercise by employing their minds too.

Killing features in almost all war movies. During the Sri Lankan War, anyone could be gunned down with the accusation of being a rebel. Heavily armed military men were present in every frame of their life. One of the most haunting killings portrayed onscreen is in the movie *In the Name of Buddha* where soldiers kill a baby in front of its mother. The thought of a family member having suffered a violent death scars the psyche of survivors deeply. The movie also portrays bombing where civilian homes are destroyed by the army.



Fig. 2.2. Still from *In the Name of Buddha* (1. 57)  
 Touchriver, Rajesh. director. *In the Name of Buddha*.  
 YouTube, uploaded by Rajesh Touchriver, 5 Sep. 2005,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj0ndcm7cIs>

The war shattered families. The trauma faced by the family members of the rebels, soldiers or the missing and dead has featured in many films. In *Ira Madiyama* (2005), by Prasanna Vithanage, the plight of Chamari, the young wife of a Sinhalese Sri Lankan Air Force pilot who was shot down during flight, is featured. She believes that he has been taken captive by the Tamil Tigers and goes in search of him. The documentary, *White Van Stories*, by Leena Manimekalai deals with the theme of enforced disappearances in the country. Many civilians, who have gone missing, allegedly kidnapped in the notorious 'white van', have never returned.

As mentioned earlier, the lives of war widows were extremely traumatic at many levels. The anthology film *Flying Fish* (2011) by Sanjeewa Pushpakumara, the story of a mother and son, portrays the life of

a young Sinhalese widow. The fact that the Sinhalese faction won the war does not mean that the Sinhalese civilians did not have their share of woes. Here, in the movie, the woman is in extreme poverty and tries to make both ends meet by selling curd. She falls in love with a man and the news of the affair reaches her son, who stabs her and his siblings. The psychological, physical and economic needs of a widow are not considered sympathetically in a patriarchal society. The son is enraged at his mother who had to take charge of the family after her husband's death. The burden on his shoulder is no less. The boy, still a child, works at the fish market to support the family. He cannot stand the humiliation he has to suffer due to the rumours about his mother's affair. When he witnesses her having sex with her lover, his mind reaches the breaking point of sanity. The ordinary lives of common people are thus affected by the miseries of the war, mostly at the psychological level.

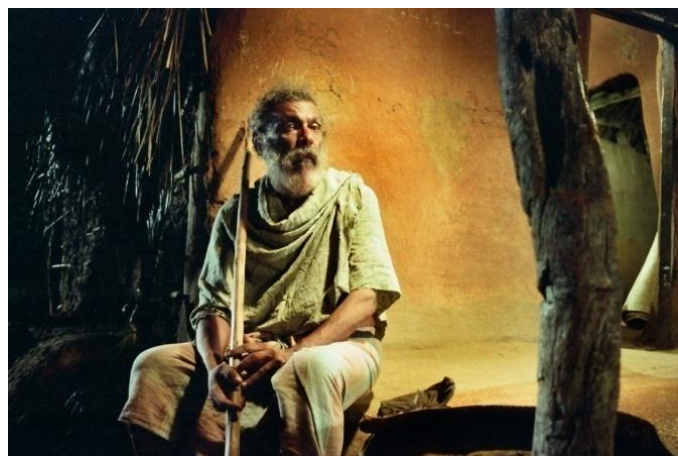


Fig. 2.3. The Blind Father: Scene from *Death on a Full Moon Day* “*Death on a Full Moon Day* (1997) Photos”. *IMDb*, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0188164/mediaviewer/rm3975227392>

Films like *Pura Handa Kaluwara*, *The Terrorist*, *Matha*, *Kannathil Muthamittal*, *Flying Fish* and *With You, Without You* features the suffering of family members. In *Pura Handa Kaluwara* (1997), Prasanna Vithanage captures the pain of a blind old man who loses his soldier son in the war, whose death he is not ready to acknowledge (see fig.2.3.). In *The Terrorist* (1997), there is a scene in which a young Tamil boy narrates to the protagonist how he lost his family. His father was a priest and was murdered, with all other members of his family except the boy. The lonely child still sees nightmares and cannot bear sights of death.

*Matha* (2012), by Boodee Keerthisena, shows how the LTTE cadres recruit new members forcefully, shattering families (see fig.2.4.). Young boys and girls were forcefully taken away from their homes who, in turn, would return for their siblings later.



Fig. 2.4. Tigress: Scene from *Matha*  
 “Matha Photos : Matha Movie Official”. RavePad, <http://i.ytimg.com/vi/1Y1KtF07M08/maxresdefault.jpg>

Mani Ratnam's *Kannathil Muthamittal* (2002), the first film that Indians associate with the Sri Lankan war, is the narrative of a kid of Sri Lankan Tamil parentage, Amudha, reared by her Indian adoptive parents, who yearns to meet up with her biological mother amidst the Sri Lankan Civil War. The questions which Amudha asks her mother reflects the mind of every child orphaned by the war. There comes a point when Amudha's innocence wins over her mother Shyama's seemingly tough mind. The film offers a child's perspective on the loss of her mother.

Tamils, a minority with strong cultural pride, suffered a great deal of humiliation under the system that suppressed, dehumanised and stereotyped them. In *Ira Madiyama*, the suffering of Tamil Muslims is portrayed. They were doubly marginalised. Even the LTTE was against them. A Tamil Muslim family is fleeing the village which is forced to be evacuated by a rebel army. Their helplessness is captured onscreen. Tamils had to face a strict pass system and check-posts that restricted their movement within their own country. *Flying Fish* depicts a haunting scene in which a Tamil girl gets her first menstrual period, which is revealed when checked by an army man, while she travels in a bus. *Alimankada* (2008) by Chandran Rutnam also shows the terrors of the pass system. Captain Wasantha, Sinhalese army man, gets a taste of it only when he travels in disguise through the Tamil areas with Kamala, a rebel of LTTE.



Wasantha and Kamala discuss the war, supporting their own sides and blaming the other, and finally falls in love.

Life in refugee camps was portrayed in *Vanni Mouse* as snippets of dialogues and shadow figures enacting brief scenes. It touches problems of impoverishment, lack of sanitation and facilities, suppression, physical torture, rape and murder. Health, physical and mental, was in deterioration in the Tamil areas. *In the Name of Buddha* shows the helplessness of a doctor who tries to attend to his patients with whatever medicines available. Post traumatic stress disorder or PTSD also features in the movie. Siva's lover, who witnesses her mother's murder and is herself brutally raped, becomes shattered and silent. Even Siva is mentally weakened by the situation in his place. *With You, Without You* (2012) by Vithanage also depicts reaction to trauma. When Selvi, a Tamil woman, comes to know that her new Sinhalese husband, Sarathsiri, was a soldier, she is depressed. Her past was tragic with the Sri Lankan army killing her two brothers and her parents fleeing the place to prevent her getting raped by them. She slips into depression, has frequent seizures and starts to wither away (see fig.2.5.). Guilt is also featured in the film in Sarathsiri. As a soldier, he had to give false testimony to save his fellow soldiers from being punished for the crime of raping and killing a Tamil girl. His temperament and lifestyle is evident of his mental state.



Fig. 2.5. Selvi in Trauma: Scene from *With You, Without You* Kay, Tony. “With You Without You”. *Seattle South Asian Film Festival: A Viewer’s Guide*. *City Arts*, 13 Oct 2015, <https://www.cityartsmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/With-You-Without-You.jpg>

Tamils believe in reincarnation and give much importance in providing a proper funeral to the dead. During the war, people suffered gruesome deaths, their bodies exploded or burnt, strewn somewhere in the marshes or buried in unmarked mass graves.



Fig. 2.6. The Coffin: Scene from *Death on a Full Moon Day*, “*Death on a Full Moon Day (1997) Photos*”. *IMDb*, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0188164/mediaviewer/rm3958450176>

*Pura Handa Kaluwara* depicts the community's need to offer a decent funeral to Wannihami's soldier son whose corpse had arrived in a sealed coffin (see fig.2.6.). Wannihami cannot believe that the war has killed his son and he breaks open the coffin to have himself proved right. The coffin did not hold a corpse. The villagers pressurise Wannihami to conduct his son's death rites.

In *The Road from Elephant Pass*, there is a scene in which Kamala buries the corpse of an LTTE rebel she encounters on her way (see fig.2.7.). Despite realising the risk that it pushes her into, she spends time there to bury him.



Fig. 2.7. Still from *The Road from Elephant Pass* (15. 37)  
Chandran, Rutnam.director. *Alimankada (2009) - Part 01*.Dailymotion,  
uploaded by RooSara, 5 Jan 2020, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7pnl09>

The trauma of migration is also portrayed in films like *Dheepan* and *In the Name of Buddha*. *Dheepan*, by Jacques Audiard, is the story of Sivadhasan, an ex-cadet of LTTE, who seeks political asylum in Paris,

travelling with a dead man's passport, along with a woman and girl posing as his wife and child. They try to begin their lives fresh in France.

Memories haunt them as they try to set up a family atmosphere. *In the Name of Buddha* begins with Siva reaching Britain as an asylum seeker. He narrates his story to the immigration official who empathises with his situation. She looks at a number tattooed on her arm and it is evident that she was once a refugee. The movie is based on the life of a doctor who escaped to England during the Sri Lankan war. It portrays the risks and struggles undergone by Tamils who were smuggled out of their country.



Fig. 2.8. Tamil Muslims displaced by LTTE: Scene from *Ira Madiyama* “Image ID: P0MWFK”. Alamy, 1 Jan 2003, <https://www.alamy.com/original-film-title-ira-madiyama-english-title-august-sun-film-director-prasanna-vithanage-year-2003-image206983495.html>

The loss of possessions when moving from one place to another was another matter of concern for the Tamils (see fig.2.8.). In *Ira Madiyama*,

eleven-year-old Tamil Muslim boy Arfath's struggle to keep his dog along when the family is fleeing the village and his sorrow is depicted.

Civilians suffered from poverty during the war. In *Ira Madiayama*, Duminda, a young soldier, meets his sister at a brothel and is enraged. Once he realises the circumstances that forced her into prostitution, he accepts the situation. When men were in battlefields, either in the army or rebel faction, or in some secret prisons, women had to resort to anything that would feed their families. In *Pura Handa Kaluwara*, Wannihami's younger daughter finds work in a sweatshop after the death of her brother. This irks her lover who holds on to patriarchal values of the rural society he is a part of. Along with poverty, the civilians also had to suffer extortion. Rebels would demand resources from them, in cash and kind. In *Flying Fish*, the rebels ask a Tamil family for money or their young daughter and when she escapes, they gun the rest of the family down.

As mentioned earlier, trauma is considered to be something 'unspeakable' and therefore 'unrepresentable'. It gets embedded into one's personality and stays there as a relic of the event. For survivors who suffered trauma, the first step towards recovery is the integration of his/her memories into the personal lives, creating meaning out of it. Like how a spirit in folklore cannot rest in its grave until its story is told, trauma cannot heal unless it is acknowledged and shared. After the Sri Lankan War, the sufferings of the civilians were not even acknowledged during the process

of rehabilitation and reconciliation. An impartial and sensitive probe into the traumatic experiences of the survivors can be facilitated by the production of more testimonies and narratives that create a collective sense of reality. Theories should not be Procrustean beds that cripple cultural nuances. Trauma and testimony do not begin and end with the Holocaust. Forms of representation suitable for the non-western cultural scene of Sri Lanka should be made use of to promote a cross-ethnic understanding.

### CHAPTER III

#### OF TALES AND TESTIMONIES

*The trauma said, "Don't write these poems.  
Nobody wants to hear you cry  
about the grief inside your bones. "*

*My bones said, "...  
Write the poems."*

-Andrea Gibson

The culmination of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009 was just a political winding up of the ethnic tensions in the country, making use of the military power to crush the rebels who had been fighting for more than three decades. The issue was not settled; only the people were subdued by brutal physical action. Remembering a war is like a two-edged sword. It is a matter of pride for the victors and their memories are always ingrained with values like sacrifice and nationalism. For the vanquished, the harsh realities of the loss of lives and identities matter. Observers may consider it to be a resource from which lessons should be learnt for the future. Wars, or memories of wars, may be commoditised for commercial purposes and used in ventures like dark tourism. Representing a war makes it a part of the cultural memory of a community. It is important to understand how a war is remembered and represented in order to address issues like reconciliation and rehabilitation.

The study of how the Sri Lankan Civil War is remembered requires insights from the field of memory studies. Giorgio Agamben speaks of remembrance as:

Remembrance restores possibility to the past, making what happened incomplete and completing what never was.

Remembrance is neither what happened nor what did not happen but, rather, their potentialization, their becoming possible once again. (*Potentialities* 267)

Culture of Remembrance (*Erinnerungskultur*) deals with how a social group preserves its history, as individual and collective perceptions in its consciousness. It can range from the subjective to collective, ranging from family tree investigations, anniversary celebrations, documentation, restoration, presentation and representation of information through memorial sites, museums and monuments. These representations of memory could be geographical and symbolic locations, to which a group of people allot a collective memory function, or narratives which configure impressions of the 'self' and the 'other'. Having a vital function in the configuration of a national identity, it can be manipulated for political purposes. In *Remembering War: the Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, Jay Winter discusses historical remembrances as a study that considers an amalgam of history and memory in documented and testimonial narratives respectively. Foucault,



in the interview “Film and Popular Memory”, said that: “Memory is actually a very important factor in struggle (really, in fact, struggles develop in a kind of conscious moving forward of history); if one controls people’s memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experiences, their knowledge of previous struggles” (28). Daniel Schacter, in *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*, notes:

We extract key elements from our experiences and store them. We then recreate or reconstruct our experiences rather than retrieve copies of them. Sometimes in the process of reconstructing we add feelings, beliefs, or even knowledge we obtained after the experience. In other words, we bias our memories of the past by attributing to them emotions or knowledge we acquired after the event. (9)

Memory can be defined in a wide range of contexts, from biological to socio-cultural. The study of memory entered into the Humanities from science. Astrid Erll calls it an “all-encompassing sociocultural, interdisciplinary, and international phenomenon” (*Memory in Culture* 1). It connotes both the past as well as the capacity of remembering it. There are two broad categorisations of memory based on the question of who are impacted by the recollections. Individual memories are personal and can assume the form of oral history, art, a conscious performative action, etc.

Public or collective memory is a part of the collective consciousness of a group of people. It is projected as statues, museums, parades or memorial days. Collective memories claim that an event occurred in a certain way in the past and it is the task of historical study to verify it. The fact that the past is continuously reconstructed accounts for different modes of remembering. Different persons or groups can remember and represent an event in multiple ways. For instance, for some, a war may be a fight for identity while for some others it might have been a traumatic experience. Trauma is one of the modes of remembering while memory is yet another. Memories are personal and extremely selective reconstructions of an event, dependent on the circumstances under which they are recollected, altering with every recall. Remembering is an act of amassing available data that takes place in the present and forgetting, paradoxically, is the very basic condition for remembering.

Collective memory is the common pool of knowledge in the individual memories of the members belonging to a social group. According to Astrid Erll, the concept was conceived in the 1950 work *La Mémoire Collective (The Collective Memory)* by Maurice Halbwachs as “the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts” (*Memory in Culture 2*). It deals with the construction and transmission of memory by groups. The collective memory of a nation is, in part, embodied in the memorials it chooses to install and constant constructions of representative

structures. Narratives are replicated, reframed and contested. Mediatisation of memory can also produce 'second hand memories'. The advent of motion picture produced a lot of images, scenes, words and music, which became ingrained in the collective memory of spectators. For instance, the last phase of the *Eelam* War is dubbed the 'war without witnesses'. The outside world got to know about the happenings there from footages and images. The images of people suffering became a part of the collective memory of Tamils all around the globe, though they had not witnessed it in real.

Maurice Halbwachs views collective memory at both personal as well as communal levels. It can refer to how the memories of an individual operate within the sociocultural framework as well as the collective adaptations of the past that arise from communication, media and establishments. When viewed at the individual level, the term collective memory can be linked to the field of social psychology. From intergenerational aspects of collective memory springs oral histories (*The Collective Memory*). In post-war Sri Lanka, personal individual memories were not allowed representation. People who lost their kith and kin were prohibited from mourning. What is more interesting is how the victorious government tried to create a narrative using one-sided, if not partially fabricated, collective memories. It built memorials for the soldiers and opened the Vanni area for tourists.

When seen as a carrier of cultural knowledge, collective memory is used in concepts like cultural memory (Assmann) and sites of memory (Nora). “History turns into memory when it is transformed into forms of shared knowledge and collective identification and participation,” notes Aleida Assmann (*The Oxford Handbook* 216). The transition from collective to cultural memory made memory studies enter the realm of culture. Cultural memory is an umbrella term which discusses the interaction between the past and present in a socio-cultural milieu. In the Introduction to his work *Framing Public Memory*, Kendall R. Phillips discusses how Halbwachs saw history and memory as contrasting ways of evoking the past. While history gives a singular and authentic account of the past, memory deals with multiple, diverse, mutable, and competing accounts of past events (2). As mentioned earlier, the victorious faction in Sri Lanka tried to create a collective memory at the cost of a thousand individual memories. It was also peppered with cultural elements. The many Buddha statues that line the A9 highway to Jaffna is an instance of how the government wanted the war to be remembered as a cultural victory too. Cultural memory selects and reconstructs according to the requirements of the present. It need not be a close replica of the event, as it would be closer to fiction than reality. Data is borrowed from the present in this construction of reality. Many movies featuring the assassination of the then prime minister of India Rajiv Gandhi have been made. It is due to the

recovered photographic images of the event that the events of the day could be clearly reconstructed in movies. We have in our minds a clear picture of how Thenmozhi Rajaratnam alias Dhanu detonated the explosive that killed the prime minister, herself and 14 others. The event, or its recreation, has become a part of the Indian psyche.

Pierre Nora's *Lieux de Mémoire* or sites of memory are those things (geographical places, edifices, memorials, art works, texts, actions) or historical persons and memorial days, which invoke the memory images of a place or event. These sites of memory are relevant only as long as people are ready to invest in it. In *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, Erll and Rigney quote Olick and Robbins as "if stories about the past are no longer performed in talking, reading, viewing, or commemorative rituals, they ultimately die out in cultural terms, becoming obsolete or "inert"" (2). Nora, in "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26, puts it as:

Memory is life, borne out of living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. (8)

Movies can serve as sites of memory as it keeps alive the memory of an event. Perspectives that were suppressed can find artistic recreation in

celluloid and can exist in the cultural space in the garb of fiction. When authoritative powers censor or ban movies, it is like putting knife on yet another way of remembering things. This thesis enquires into the potential of movies to act as memorials. There are differences between a physical monument and a movie. A monument marks a memory in space while movies do it in the mindscape of spectators. Movies have the scope of assuming multiple perspectives depending on the spectator.

Abraham Moritz (Aby) Warburg, German cultural theorist and art historian, studied how motifs from earlier cultures returned and worked as cultural triggers to evoke memories. These symbols had an ancient pathos or emotional intensity, named as pathos formulas (*Pathosformeln*) by Warburg, which made them agents of imagination. Their power does not fade with time. He considered them as cultural ‘engrams’ or ‘dynamograms’, which accumulate ‘mnemic energy’ in a symbol. It is upon the memory of such symbols that culture exists. Warburg’s concept of cultural memory was that of images and he named it ‘social memory’. For him, works of art, not oral history, which could continue to exist for extensive time periods and go across vast spaces, were vital as medium in cultural memory.

The Sri Lankan War is a part of the nation’s collective consciousness in multiple ways. The long war has created many generations of memory. The imagined nation-*Eelam*- has become a site for

memory for the Tamils, especially after the war. It exists in the collective cultural memory of Tamils who are scattered around the globe. The war generated individual memories of suffering which transcended in scope to the collective. The trauma faced by the common man was a collective phenomenon. Stories were told to represent the pain and individual tales of trauma became a part of the collective. Cultural memory was active in Sri Lanka for a long time. As a multi-ethnic society, the nation always faced the enigma of who came first. The Sinhalese believed Sri Lanka to be their haven while the Tamils claimed equal rights as they were, as they claim, a part of the country since mythical times.

*Eelam*, though it does not exist in the physical map of the world, is very much alive in the mindscape of Sri Lankan Tamils. What *Eelam* is for Tamilians is Buddhism for the Sinhalese, but the fact that they were the victors in the war has made a huge difference. Buddhism is an integral part of the Sinhalese psyche. The myth of Simhabahu, fathered by a lion, is their founding myth and the motif of lion has become a vital part of Sinhalese nationalism (see fig.3.1.). Just like the lion, the tiger has become a cultural motif for Tamilians. The tiger was the symbol of the Chola Empire (see fig.3.2.). Thus, both the lion and the tiger are symbols which evoke the cultural memory of the communities.



Fig. 3.1. Sri Lankan Flag.

“Flag of Sri Lanka”. *Wikimedia Commons*, 1 Apr 2010, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_Sri\\_Lanka.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Sri_Lanka.svg)

It stores the mnemonic energy of a gallant past which triggers feelings of nationalistic pride in them. Both the symbols are part of the myth-making process that occurred in the island and invoke cultural memories of gallantry in the members of the respective groups. When the lion takes the Sinhalese mind to its supposed ancestry from Simhabahu or the lion symbol in the flag carried by Prince Vijaya, the tiger reminds the Tamils of their Chola pride. Both thus account for the historicity of the race’s existence in the island.



Fig. 3.2. LTTE flag

RajaRajaC. “Flag of Tamil Tigers”. *Wikimedia Commons*, 27 Nov1990, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Tigers.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Tamil_Tigers.png)



Epic movies can aid in mythopoesis of history. For instance, there are movies which portray rulers with superhuman dimensions that will, later, be treated as the truth. Propaganda films also use the concept in white-washing their side and demonising the other. Post-war Sri Lanka is a melting pot of different versions and memories of the past. The victors promote their version as the truth at the cost of other existing narratives. Remembering war, in Sri Lanka, has become a one-sided affair. Politics, media, academics and art are not free from the authoritarian power structure that stifles different versions that might challenge the official discourse. There should be an active memory discourse in Sri Lanka which would take into consideration the different memories of survivors. In a nation like Sri Lanka, claiming homogeneity would be farcical. Every person has seen the war differently. Unless one has the voice to present his/her version, psychological rehabilitation would remain a pipedream.

Literature, the creative re-conception of the past, is an autonomous ‘symbolic form’ (Cassirer 73) of cultural memory, like myth, science, religion, history and law, which generates meaning by narrativising events. John Bodnar’s chapter in *Places of Public Memory The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* discusses the need of remembering wars, as:

Encounters with state-sponsored trauma—as Jenny Edkins has argued—usually serve as a “revelation” to people because such events “strip away” the faith many have in their political community

and expectations that belonging to such communities or nations will provide them with a safe and stable home and, for that matter, a future. Grievous losses in wartime can undermine the bonds of loyalty individuals have to a nation-state. That is why the public remembrance of war is such an important subject in postwar cultures. (140)

Wars cause cultural struggles over the generation of meaning. What ensue are debates, different strata of meaning and a range of emotions that are at variance. The need for organising knowledge around something is supreme in such dialogues. Survivors tend to drift towards the mythical from the tragic literal world when trying to generate meanings. Jay Winter calls it ‘traditional motifs’ (*Sites of Memory* 5). It helps in providing answers to the ‘why’ of suffering and erases regret. There is a difference in how communities remember wars. While the nation erects memorials or museums, at the local level, it would be a listing of names of those who died. Personal sorrows are thus mourned more effectively in private.

Were there any traditional motifs available in Sri Lanka to organise knowledge around? A decade since the culmination of the war, has the ‘why’ of the war been answered now? Unlike most wars, the Sri Lankan Civil War was an internal conflict which was fought at many levels. It was a political, religious, cultural, ethnic as well as economic struggle for power. Though they were citizens of the same country, both the Sinhalese

and the Tamils were very different from each other. Both the communities were proud of their heritage and resisted any threats to it. When the war was fought, as well as when it is remembered, traditional motifs never served the purpose of uniting these communities. Traditional images and words have also entered the realm of art. In many movies, there are Buddhist imagery and chants used. *Pura Handa Kaluwara (Death on a Full Moon Day)* uses Buddhist chants effectively in setting the tone. The movie begins with the chanting of Buddhist *gathas* in the background. It repeats when the burial rites of Wannihami's son is shown on screen. People, clad in white, as is the custom on a *poya* day, are shown visiting Wannihami's house. There is a monk who, ironically, praises the war.

The Tamils, members of the second community in question, are very different from the Sinhalese. Their traditions and memories were different and sadly contradictory. Their histories begin with the settlement in the island which was placed in the mythical past. The Sinhalese myth of Simhabahu and the Tamil concept of *Kumari Kandam* cannot be mixed. There is nothing for the Tamils to explain the war. They lost everything in the war. The Sinhalese had the excuse of protecting their culture, so did the militants. The winning side has the solace of victory, but one which is stained by the blood of fellowmen.

The movie *Yazh* (2017), by M S Anand, portrays how the imminent war affected the lives of six people in the island. The movie, for the first

time in the history of Tamil cinema, features dialogues and songs in *Eelam* Tamil. Yazh was an ancient musical instrument which was an integral part of Tamil culture, now thrust into oblivion. There is a legend among Sri Lankan Tamils about the history of their place (see Introduction). Like how the Tamils had a rich musical culture with Yazh, the movie by the same name also inaugurates a trend in national cinema which focuses on the Tamils. It is true that there has always been a Sri Lankan Tamil cinema parallel to the Sinhalese mainstream one, but it always faced the threat of war. Films that truly reflect the Sri Lankan culture are the need of the hour.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Sri Lanka follows the *Theravada* school of Buddhism, the oldest of the lot. The followers adhere to the scriptures and strive to preserve *dhamma*. They are conservative in nature and believe in their pure lineage from Buddha. Buddhism in Sri Lanka is essentially different from the *Mahayana* kind in India. *Theravada* Buddhism is the official religion of the country, which is followed by the majority of citizens. Sri Lankan Buddhism has fought divisive trends since early history. The *Maha Viharaya* tradition gained an upper hand over the other two *Theravada* traditions which imbibed *Mahayana* elements. The nineteenth century saw Christian missionaries in the island as part of the British colonisation and there occurred a Buddhist revival at the level of the laymen. A renewed interest in Buddhism was cultivated in ordinary people.

Sri Lankan culture is essentially Buddhist. Full moon day of every month is observed as *poya*, which is a holiday. There are rules which even tourists have to observe in Sri Lanka. Images of Buddha should be treated with respect and no accessories featuring Buddhist artwork or body tattoo of Buddha is permissible in the island nation. One should not even pose for photographs with his/her back facing the Buddha statue. The Sinhalese respect their religion and tries to keep the tradition unbroken. Voices of dissent are not tolerated, even within the same sect. After the war, the Sri Lankan government erected many memorials with traditional Sinhalese motifs. Many new Buddha figurines adorned public spaces. Statues of soldiers holding guns and Sri Lankan flags were erected in jubilation of victory (see fig.3.3.). A community that was excluded from the mainstream remained in the country. Their personal sufferings were ignored. They did not have the rights to mourn their dead, let alone erect a memorial.



Fig. 3.3. Memorial at Elephant Pass, Jaffna  
Priyadasa, Vachintha. “Iconic monument that immortalizes our war heroes”.  
*Tripadvisor, Tripadvisor LLC, Aug 2018, [https://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g304135-d3628765-i338488189-Elephant\\_Pass-Jaffna\\_Northern\\_Province.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g304135-d3628765-i338488189-Elephant_Pass-Jaffna_Northern_Province.html)*

Samanth Subramanian, in his work *This Divided Island*, writes about how he saw names of the dead written on the walls of a mosque that was bombed. Listing out the names of their dear ones was in itself an act of making them visible. Their deaths should be acknowledged and mourned too. They did not get their due space in public memorials or remembrances. Moreover, they were banned from being remembered in private. Remembering is an integral part of reconciliation and rehabilitation. The Tamils did not get a closure due to the lack of their losses being remembered.

When the sufferings of the Tamils were dismissed by the authorities as fabricated tales, the representation of those became problematic. No movie was ever made in Sri Lanka which portrayed the truth from their side. Though there were representations of Tamil civilians in movies, none could bring out what really transpired during the last days of the war. As movie-making is more of a commercial enterprise than art, the fear of censorships and bans affected the nature of visual representations in the country. Movies made in other countries, if it attempted a candid portrayal of events as described in testimonies, were banned in the country. Alison Landsberg puts forth the concept of 'prosthetic memory' in the 2004 work *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. It discusses how remembrance occurs in 'experiential sites', as opposed to being experienced directly. These sites, like museums

and cinema, are formed by commoditisation and the use of technology.

Prosthetic memories are placed between the individual and the collective.

It helps in the individual experiences of the collective remembrance. She

writes:

[M]emories... 'speak' to the individual in a personal way *as if* they were actually memories of lived events. ...Prosthetic memories are neither purely individual nor entirely collective but emerge at the interface of individual and collective experience. They are privately felt public memories that develop after an encounter with a mass cultural representation of the past, when new images and ideas come into contact with a person's own archive of experience. (19)

Are there prosthetic memories of the Sri Lankan Civil War? Historical

films can create prosthetic memories. For instance, the film named *Aloko*

*Udapadi/Light Arose* (2017) by Chathra Weeraman and Baratha

Hettiarachchi is an epic historical film. It features the story of King

Valagamba who ruled Anuradhapura (89 – 77 BCE). It describes how the

king was overthrown by the Cholas from South India and how he regained

his throne after fourteen long years by defeating them. It also portrays how

*Buddha-sasana* or Buddha's Dispensation was recorded in writing by

Buddhist monks, for the first time, in a turbulent historical backdrop (see

fig.3.4.). The film, which is both a celebration of Sinhalese nationalism as

well as Buddhism, would create prosthetic memories in the audience. It

visually represents a time from history which is not accessible for direct experience and the images created add to the individual as well as collective memory of the audience.

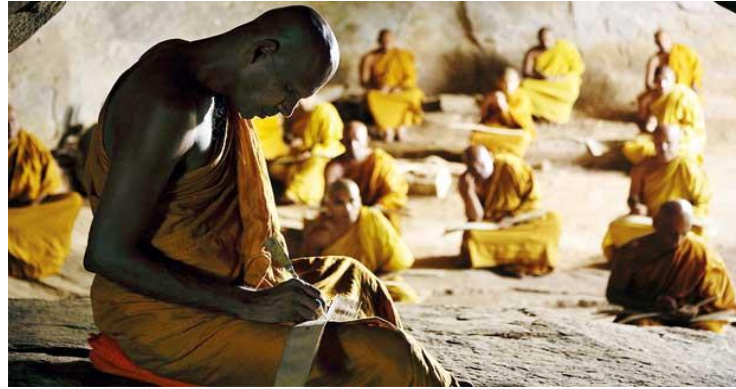


Fig. 3.4. Monks compiling Buddha's dispensation: Scene from *Aloko Udapadi* Devapriya, Uditha. "Aloko Udapadi" The light That (Almost) Arose. *Daily Mirror Online*, 9 May 2017, [http://static.dailymirror.lk/media/images/image\\_1494267171-f0c9d7f16e.jpg](http://static.dailymirror.lk/media/images/image_1494267171-f0c9d7f16e.jpg)

How a Sinhalese person sees the film is very different to how a Tamilian perceives it, which makes the viewing of the movie an individual as well as a collective experience. It is an individual experience as each person might interpret it differently; it is collective as it binds a specific group together on account of their shared history and mythology. It taps alive the feelings of historical and religious pride of the Sinhalese, thus making it collective.

Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory' denotes how the next generations of survivors relate to the trauma of their forefathers. It is like remembering the event through the memories of their parents/ancestors. The concept began as a problem of familial inheritance which later grew to



become cultural, which transcends boundaries of nationality and ethnicity.

According to Hirsch:

Postmemory therefore is ‘defined through an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by an unbridgeable distance that separates the participant from the one born after. ... Postmemory would thus be *retrospective witnessing by adoption*. It is a question of adopting the traumatic experiences – and thus also the memories – of others as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one’s own life story’. (*Visual Culture* 10)

As an example to show how postmemory works in the Sri Lankan scenario, one could consider the case of the Tamil diaspora. Many Sri Lankan Tamils sought refuge in foreign lands during the war. They became part of the new country and most of them settled in the host country with their families. A child born to such a person would grow up hearing the trauma suffered by his/her parent. Though he/she has not experienced the event directly, the person’s mind can develop memories of the war. In Trauma Studies, it is named ‘Intergenerational Trauma’. It can also be an epigenetical phenomenon, as suggested in the study (2015) by Rachel Yehuda's team at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and the James J. Peters Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Bronx, N. Y. Though criticised as improbable by biologists, the epigenetical explanation to the heritage of trauma is being studied. Those who argue for the epigenetic

side of the debate claims that trauma can leave a chemical mark in one's genes which alters the mechanism of gene expression, without causing mutation. A parent's traumatic experience may change an offspring's stress hormone (cortisol) profiles. Trauma can affect the descendants who can get postmemories of the event. Apart from that, there is also the scope of certain prosthetic memories becoming postmemories, say, like the concept of Tamil pride and *Eelam*. It was a part of Tamilian lives during the time of LTTE and was rooted deep in their collective consciousness. *Eelam* can be a burning dream in the minds of their progeny, though they have not even seen their parent's country of birth. Thus, postmemories assume familial as well as cultural dimensions.

The Sri Lankan Civil War ended in 2009, with the majority of survivors still being first generation. Those who had to flee the country would share oral histories to their children who, in turn, would imbibe the memories without witnessing or experiencing it. Almost all movies discussed in this thesis speak about characters who faced trauma. Amudha of *Kannathil Muthamittal* can be an exception who, though living in the safety of India can always have postmemories of her biological mother's experiences. Shyama does not elaborate on what she went through and Amudha, being the child she is, cannot understand it either. The character, once she grows up to an adult, may know more about the war and her mother. Many traumatic experiences are marked by movies for the future

generations of survivors. When it accommodates multiple perspectives without limiting or shaping it according to the Procrustean beds of political correctness, it becomes fertile grounds for postmemories.

In the Introduction to *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, editors Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney write about the uses of cultural memory. It crafts and supports the identity formation of a nation, processes collective trauma, re-interprets the past according to new paradigms, and resists forgetting and suppression of memory by hegemonic forces. Cultural artifacts play an important role in preserving memory. When it forbade the Tamils from mourning their dead in post-war Sri Lanka, the authoritarian government was trying to silence the 'other' versions of the war. It wanted the official record of the war to be the one and only version that existed. What it failed to realise was that memories cannot be erased by force. Its manifestation can be suppressed, but it will remain unhealed within the minds of the survivors. It is through the representation of their memories and telling of their stories that the trauma is bound to be addressed.

Astrid Erll, in the Introduction to *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, discusses the two levels on which memory and culture meet. The first level of cultural memory is concerned with biological memory, which is personal and is shaped by sociocultural context. The second level refers to the symbolic order, the

constructed past shaped by external factors like media, practices, etc.

‘Medial externalisation’ spawns collective adaptations of an event.

Different forms of representation elicit diverse modes of cultural remembering, namely the experiential, the mythical, the antagonistic, and the reflexive (390).

Experiential mode signifies the past as a current experience. The use of first-person narrative and techniques like the stream-of-consciousness are common in this mode. It features a very exhaustive portrayal of daily life in the wartime and uses oral speech, chiefly sociolects. Mythicising mode represents a mythical past which serves as a foundation to the current events. Jan Assmann’s concept ‘cultural memory’ is a good framework for such representations. In antagonistic mode, one version of the past is represented as the truth, rejecting all other perspectives. Negative stereotyping and bias are common in this mode of representation. Reflexive mode discusses methods and tribulations of remembering. Narratives featuring the mechanism of memory, mosaic of diverse versions of the past, etc. are some of the techniques used in this mode.

Erll also speaks about “premediation” and “remediation”, the former being how already existent media can provide a framework for future experience while the latter is about how events which are represented again and again would become sites of memory. For instance, a propagandist film featuring the *Eelam* could have been a premediation while the

portrayal of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in many Indian films has become a site of memory as part of remediation. Erll, in *Memory in Culture*, discusses the role of media and mediation in the remembrance of events. Two processes, externalisation and internalisation, places mediation somewhere midway between the individual and collective. When personal memories get relevance and are distributed through media, it is externalisation and when an individual gets access to shared collective knowledge via media, it is internalisation. Mediation constructs versions of the past and encodes it. According to Sybille Kramer, mediation does not just put across messages, but instead build up an energy which outlines the modalities of our philosophy, perception, remembrance, and communication. 'Mediality' expresses the idea that our relationship to the world is shaped by the possibilities for distinction which media open up, and the limitations which they thereby impose. In *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan launched the celebrated phrase 'the medium is the message' in the area of media theory, emphasising that "the personal and social consequences of any medium ... result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by extension of ourselves" (8). According to McLuhan, a medium has the ability to alter the message. Cultural remembrance is thus shaped by media.

The Malayalam movie *Mission 90 Days* begins with a narration of the history of the induction of the IPKF. It says that Prime Minister Rajiv

Gandhi, who understood the real motive of certain big powers who were eyeing the island of Sri Lanka in the garb of rescuers, set up and sent a peace-keeping force from India. The Tamils misunderstood, or the Sinhalese made them believe, that IPKF was their enemy. It also says that the IPKF returned from Sri Lanka where peace was reinstated. *In the Name of Buddha* shows the same event, but in a different light. The movie shows how soldiers of the IPKF were welcomed by Tamil civilians with garlands. IPKF was looked upon by the common man as a force that could return the island to a peaceful state. The soldiers, in their attempt to wipe out the LTTE, later targeted the civilians too. The movie shows how they rape a girl after stuffing her mouth with soil. The same medium called cinema has portrayed an event in two different ways. Survivors know which one is the truth, but for someone who is an objective observer, these present contradictory perspectives. An Indian may feel proud about the country's military force for successfully conducting operations to bring peace to a foreign land but the second narrative raises many a question.

Inez Hedges, in *World Cinema and Cultural Memory* (2015), talks about the different categories of memories. What she calls 'living memory' can be associated with what the survivors of an event remember and carry forward through generations. It is what Paul Ricoeur discusses in *Memory, History, Forgetting* as Halbwachs' concept of "transgenerational memory" (394). Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" is also along the same

lines. Amnesiac memory is that memory which is suppressed due to trauma and denial associated with the event. It is converted into active memory when the amnesia is overcome. It is considered to be one of the symptoms of PTSD, as discussed in the previous chapter. Performative memory deals with the narrative and linguistic aspects of memory. It discusses how the facts of the past cannot change, but their meanings can, over time. It suggests the interpretation of a memory and is very important in communities which are affected by trauma. For instance, in *Ira Madiyama*, we see Duminda enraged when he sees his sister in a brothel. He is shattered but soon realises that the war has pushed those girls into prostitution. He talks to another girl who comes to his room about her past and choice of job. We see a change in Duminda when he gives a gift to his sister once he is back home. Convulsive memory exists in the realm of the surreal. It is created by subversive texts and films. In radical memory, a conflict-ridden group's quest for identity by re-discovering its cultural roots is dealt with. It is also important in the study of the Sri Lankan War. When the memories of struggle are kept alive for inspiration for future generations, it is termed as 'obstinate memory'. Productive memory is that memory which is put to use in revolution. All the three types of memories are active in the Tamil diaspora who considers themselves to be stateless. They dream of the *Eelam* and has kept the embers of traumatic memories active in their minds. Reclaimed memory refers to the effort to retrieve a

group's memory. It features re-readings of the cultural pasts from a group's viewpoint by situating the group within the past narratives to affirm a distinctive identity. Epic films make use of reclaimed memories. When there are multiple histories that coincide in a public setting, the probability for one to become dominant is quite high. Rothberg calls it 'competitive memory'. In remembrance, what should be active instead of competitive memory is, according to Rothberg, 'multidirectional memory' which constitutes different memories of multiple groups (3). It is a product of borrowings and cross-referencing. Multidirectional memory is possible only through dialogue. Freud's concept of 'screen memory' speaks of how certain memories are distorted as defense mechanisms. Certain bland memories get created as screens that block out the traumatic event. When the Sri Lankan War gets remembered through the single perspective of the victors' side, it limits the scope of the evolution of a multidirectional memory. A single narrative gets prominence at the cost of hundreds of personal ones. The history of the war would never be complete without reaching a consensus. Different memories should be engaged in dialogue and no version ought to be silenced. The other problem is of how only the trauma of the genocide of Sri Lankan Tamils by the Army gets highlighted when the trauma of Sri Lankan War is discussed. There are multiple personal memories which should be considered. The plight of the Sri Lankan Tamil Muslims and the suffering of Sinhalese civilians are always



considered in the background. No memory should be allowed to become a screen that obstructs other memories.

Sri Lankan movie makers like Vithanage and Pushpakumara have employed the use of multiple narratives that run parallel to each other. No story gets the upper hand as the main plot. There would be representatives from both factions, ordinary civilians whose lives are affected by the war. In *Ira Madiyama* and *Flying Fish*, there are Sinhalese as well as Tamil characters. In films like *The Road from Elephant Pass* and *With You, Without You (Oba Nathuwa Oba Ekka)*, we see the protagonists as belonging to two different factions. No perspective is treated as the right one. These films pose the scope for objective discourse on the subject of war.

The concept of ‘memorialisation’ is also important in the scope of this study. Once an event is remembered, it should be preserved by being represented in a specific form. Memorials physically mark the memory of an event into the mindscape of a community. Monuments are physical installations which mark the memory of the event. A monument is defined as:

A construction or an edifice filled with cultural, historical and artistic values. The conservation and maintenance of monuments is justified by those values. Historically, the idea of the monument is closely tied to commemoration (of a victory, a ruling, a new law). In

the urban space, monuments have become parts of the city landscape, spatial points of reference or elements founding identity of a place. Monuments can be enriched by educational and political functions [...] as well as artistic ones and those centered on commemoration. (*Encyclopedia of the City* 318)

In a war-torn country like Sri Lanka, remembering as well as representing the war is equally important. Memorials were constructed by the victorious side to flaunt their hard earned victory. According to Foucault, “in every society the production of discourse is simultaneously controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures whose role is to avert its powers and dangers and to cope with chance of events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (210). Post-war Sri Lanka did not encourage discourses on the war, unless it was the glorification of the winning side. The government prohibited Tamils from remembering their lost kith and kin in public. Activists were silenced, representations were censored.

Inger S. B. Brodey, in *The Philosophy of War Films*, talks about the ‘Vietnam Veterans Memorial’, designed by Maya Lin, which is in the form of a wall that sinks into the land, heavy with the weight of the names of the dead. It is an interactive experience which encourages the onlooker to walk through and participate in the experience of loss and personal mourning. The tribute of human loss is prioritised over the conservation of national

repute. Such monuments can provide a final closure on this event (287). Memorials should thus be specific to the locality. A tall statue of a soldier can just commemorate the victory of the Sri Lankan Army but it fails to touch the lives of ordinary people who have lost a lot to the war. For them to remember the war, it should be represented in personal ways. For them, finding the name of a beloved one who died in the war listed would be a thousand times better than seeing an impersonal statue.

A statue erected to mark the spot where Velupillai Prabhakaran was murdered (see fig.3.5.) radiates only power, forgetting how the Nandikadal lagoon turned red with the blood of the Tamil civilians. During the final phase of the war, civilians were apparently used as human shields by the LTTE and were prohibited from crossing-over to safety. The army, in order to capture the Tigers whom they believed to be hiding among civilians, attacked civilian areas, including hospitals and other no fire zones. The civilians moved towards the shores till they were caught in the tiny strip of land in Mullivaikkal where the army allegedly dropped shells on them and the Tigers shot those who tried to escape. Over 40,000 Tamils were massacred on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May, 2009.



Fig. 3.5. Victory Memorial in Sri Lanka

Nandakumar, Viruben. "Reconciliation in Sri Lanka". *Asia Dialogue*, 05 Nov 2018, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2018/11/05/reconciliation-in-sri-lanka/>

The space is different for two factions. For the army, it denotes the end of a long conflict that ruined the country but for the Tamils, it is the site where they lost everything. Not considering the civilian memories with compassion and overshadowing it with authority is also like a war crime.

The Sri Lankan Civil War is considered to be one of the conflicts most shrouded in secrecy. Spanning for about three decades, the arena of brutal war was shut off from the world. No journalists were allowed into the warzone that witnessed the mass genocide of Tamils. It was a war between the authoritative government and the firebrand rebels which considered the civilian lives to be collateral damage. Civilians had

disowned the war. Once it was over, the process of remembrance saw only the Sinhalese side being honoured. They made heroes out of the military and the victory was considered to be that of Buddhism. In such a multicultural society, a lot of people who lost everything were ignored because they were the minority. No edifices were erected for the civilian lives lost in the war. Their sufferings were denied recognition. When they lived as refugees in the misery of camps or in foreign lands, their past was declared to be a fabricated one. Benedict Andersen, in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, writes: “The nation’s biography snatches. . . exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts. But to serve the narrative purpose, these violent deaths must be remembered/forgotten as ‘our own’” (206).

Memorials were erected in Sri Lanka, on national, community, as well as personal levels, after the war. Most of them were meant to venerate the personnel of the armed forces who fought hard against the LTTE. Some of them are Kilinochchi War Memorial, Elephant Pass War Memorial erected in memory of Gamini Kularatne, War Heroes Monument / War Memorial Tower (Museum in Tangalle), Kokavil War Hero Memorial, Mailapitiya National War Memorial in Kandy, the memorial for the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) located in Sri Jayawardenapura Kotte, the renovated memorial for the IPKF in Palaly, Jaffna and the victory

monument in Puthukkudiyiruppu. Some of the monuments feature the weapons used by the LTTE, like the war museum at Mullaitivu and the site of the fallen water tank in Kilinochchi. Atrocities against the major religion were also commemorated. The memorial museum to remember the monks killed by the LTTE in the Aranthalawa massacre of 1987 was opened in 2013 while there were about 28 new Buddha Statues that were built along the A9 highway to Jaffna, some of them in close proximity to Tamil *kovils* (temples).

Most memorials in Sri Lanka feature the imposing figure of a Sinhalese army man in fatigues. Though it is not uncommon for nations to venerate their military men, the case is different in Sri Lanka where the other side is not represented at all. For many, the sight of soldiers would trigger memories of the war and cause trauma. The civilians from both sides inhabit the same terrain. Soldiers' patrolling the roads in huge vehicles is a common sight in Sri Lanka even today. It flaunts the authority of the government.

Movies which portray a military operation would elicit emotions of pride only in the victorious side. In Sri Lanka, civilians were forcefully involved in the war. They did not want to oppose the system, but they had to suffer the consequences of the actions done by those who wanted to. The group of people which suffered the most during the war was the civilians of the island nation.



Fig. 3.6. Civilian Memorial at Nandikadal  
 Fernando, Ruki. “A Memorial for civilians”. “The May 18 disconnect”.  
*Sunday Observer*, 20 May 2018. [http://www.sundayobserver.lk/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/news/2018/05/19/z\\_p11-The-May.jpg?itok=LxKwkIeZ](http://www.sundayobserver.lk/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/news/2018/05/19/z_p11-The-May.jpg?itok=LxKwkIeZ)

A monument, ‘Shrine of the Innocents’, was built in the mid 1990s, dedicated to those civilians who were victims to terrorism but it was pulled down to create a Water Park during the reign of Mahinda Rajapaksa. The Tamils were banned from mourning their dead or conducting any memorial services. It was much later during the rule of Maithripala Sirisena that civilian memorials were established at Mullivaikkal. It features a cemetery of stone markers and a statue which portrays a man holding a woman’s corpse in his hand with a child standing nearby (see fig.3.6.).

There are creative memorials which commemorate the ordinary lives of people during the war. For instance, artworks as *The Incomplete Thombu* and *History of Histories* by Sri Lankan artist T. Shanaathanan belong to this category. He collected the sketches of ground plan of houses

drawn by civilians from Tamil areas and compiled it. He also collected things which remind the war from 500 homes and exhibited in the Jaffna library. There are also virtual memorials in the cyberspace, like '30 Years Ago', an online initiative on the effects of the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom, the preserve of audio recordings, transcripts, submissions and newspaper reports of the public hearings at LLRC Archives, archives like 'Websites at Risk' that preserve sensitive content of websites which are at risk of censorship or deletion, etc.

Monumentalism is the practice in which establishments of power set up monuments in civic spaces to embody themselves or their system of belief, and maneuver the narratives of the history of that place into their version. It hijacks civic spaces and projects dominant ideologies on to it. Counter-monumentalism or anti-monumentalism is a standpoint in art that rose up against monumentalism. It contests the existence of any imposing force in civic spaces. It uses novel prototypes to commemorate and resist the monumentalist tradition. There is no dominant meaning in counter-monuments but a multitude of possibilities for interpretations (Robey *x*). Rafael Lozano-Hemmer defines anti-monument as that which "refers to an action, a performance, which clearly rejects the notion of a monument developed from an elitist point of view as an emblem of power" (155). It brings out the omissions in official narratives and recreates memory discourses that were abandoned or silenced by the authorities.



Counter memorials in Sri Lanka can be actions like the scattering of flowers at Nandikadal lagoon by the Northern Provincial Council member, T Ravikaran on May 18, 2018. It was a remembrance of the Tamils who lost their lives there. The day was declared as Tamil Remembrance Day (see fig.3.7.). Counter monuments can help enact the trauma suffered and pave way for closure.



Fig. 3.7. Commemoration of Tamil Civilians in Mullivaikkal  
 “Tamils mark 'Tamil Genocide Day' on May 18”. *Tamil Guardian*, 18 May  
 2016, <https://www.tamilguardian.com/sites/default/files/Image/pictures/2017/Commemorations/170518%20Mullivaikkal%20remembrance/Mullivaikkal%20NPC%20event.jpg>

From remembrance, we now pass on to the next stage which is that of representation. The event, along with the trauma associated with it, is represented once it is remembered. Narratives are created which represent the event, either realistically or fictionally. Literature, films, art and

testimonies are some of the important ways of representing an event. There is the presence of narrative in how concepts of history, race, identity politics, religion and time are constructed. It was, earlier, linked to legend and myth. There are different media which can be employed to circulate a story. Literature and cinema are important among those. When it comes to cinema, the distribution and presentation on a mass scale makes it accessible to more people. It can persuade as well as inspire by creating potent illusions of reality. It creates a memory in the audience which is not part of their personal experiences which, as it is shared, becomes cultural. These cultural memories can, according to Stephen Heath, contribute to cultural identity (*Ciné-Tracts* 35). Foucault warns of how films can substitute a false remembrance for a genuine memory. According to Astrid Erll, literature and cinema can affect cultural memory, both at individual and collective levels. On an individual level, it helps create mental images of the past while at the collective level, it gets a wide and high reach, igniting discussions on the images it create. For those who did not go through or witness the Sri Lankan War, mediated images work as good as the real scene. Their minds would place these images for memories. It becomes risky in the case of images produced as parts of propagandist movies where one's side would be white-washed and the other would be demonised.

When a war is documented, the stories of survivors gain importance as first-hand reports. War testimonies can serve other functions too. It can put into words the trauma induced by the atrocities of the war. Trauma is, as discussed in the previous chapter, considered to be a loss of language. It carries along a tug of war between the need to speak out and the will to deny. Testimonial narratives can address the ghosts of the war who cannot rest until their tales are told. Apart from facilitating recovery, testimonials can also play a vital role in reconciliation by inaugurating dialogues on alternate perspectives. Testimonies produce new witnesses. It can promote emotional healing, at both individual as well as collective levels. Gillian Whitlock, in *Postcolonial Life Narratives*, writes:

Humanitarian storytelling has the power to create spectators of suffering who engage empathically with terrible events. It generates compassion and benevolence, and elicits donor support. At the same time, it can be called to account for the part it plays in representing communities and people as inhabitants of a 'developing world', and as subjects of 'distant suffering' offered for western benevolence and spectatorship, and there is now an extended scholarship about this. (110)

What is testimony? How is it defined and what is its scope? How has the genre of testimonial narratives helped in documenting the Sri Lankan Civil

War? Dori Laub's definition of testimony can be seen in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, as:

Massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction. . . testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence. . . . [T]he trauma – as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock – has not been truly witnessed yet, has not been taken cognizance of. The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to – and heard – is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the 'knowing' of the event is given birth to. (72–79)

In *Can Literature Promote Justice? Trauma Narrative and Social Action in Latin American Testimonio*, Kimberly A. Nance describes testimony as an account of injustice in first-person mode, with unwritten rules of rhetoric, presented directly or via a writer, where the subject's experiences represent those of a larger group and envisages a more just future (2). According to Cathy Caruth, there is an initial temporal delay in trauma, which tags along a compulsive yet unwilling coming back. To overcome trauma, one should work through the event in retrospect and add it to memory as well as history by storytelling. Later, these become ingredients of cultural memory by featuring in narratives. As a socio-literary and political genre,

*testimonio* can include film, television, arts, music, architecture, etc. in its scope. War memorials can also be included under the umbrella term of testimony.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, in *The Differend* (1984), puts forth the concept of “testimonial contract,” the necessary relationship that should exist between the reader and the subject/ witness which will drive the testimony towards social action. Elzbieta Sklodowska, Professor at Washington University in St. Louis, summarises Lyotard’s conditions for effective testimony as “an addressee, someone not only willing to listen and accept the reality of the referent, but also worthy of being spoken to;” “an addressor, a witness who refuses to remain silent;” “a language capable of signifying the referent”; and “a case, or the referent itself” (*Can Testimony* 48). Most of the times, a community which is battered by a traumatic event would have neither the necessary resources nor the requisite time to produce or pursue testimonies. The intended readers are mostly not those who had suffered the trauma but an educated, middle-class audience separated geographically and/or temporally from the event. The testimonies would be published mostly in English, an international language, which the subjects might not even comprehend.

The meta-linguistic condition of suffering, as elucidated in Trauma Studies, produces testimonies which can be exceedingly expressive, ambiguous, and disjointed. It summons new witnesses to an event. It brings

the event to the cultural memory of a community, producing ethical responses and performances in quest of social justice. According to Shoshana Felman, testimonies must be literary as its role is to employ the reader in the task of being a (belated) witness to the event, to trigger ‘the imaginative capability of perceiving history—what is happening to others—in one’s own body, with the power of sight (of insight) usually afforded only by one’s own immediate involvement’ (108). Kali Tal argues that trauma narratives pass through the three stages of sacralisation, assimilation and appropriation. First regarded as ritualistic artifacts, it later becomes history and moves further to aids to self-help.

Stevan Weine, in *Testimony After Catastrophe: Narrating the Traumas of Political Violence*, discusses how testimony can be dialogic. Dialogism is a core concept in the contributions of Mikhail Bakhtin who believed that “Life by its very self is dialogic” (*Problems* 293). Caryl Emerson, Professor Emeritus of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Princeton University, who translated the work, explains Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism. Words, carriers of meaning, accumulate more and more meanings when they are repeatedly used, which in turn creates ever more complex webs of voices, memories, emotions, and experiences. In the dynamic interactivity of multiple voices and points of view, truth is sought. In a dialogic relation, one voice/point of view/word is shaped by its connections to the others. In terms of dialogic work, testimony is a creation

of both the subject and the addressee, the latter being the supplier of a structure to the narrative. The recipient receives, gathers information, reads between the lines, re-articulate, and communicate the message. Thus, from an open-ended catastrophe, a polyphonic dialogic narrative is shaped which in turn create new meanings and purposes. A new consciousness is shaped in the subject who can then transcend the traumatic experience. A limitation of testimony, when considered as dialogic work, is that there is no promise or guarantee of action. It changes the receiver's mindset about the world and suggests positive action, but it is not a definite outcome to be expected out of *testimonio*.

What are the different testimonial narratives that have emerged from Sri Lanka after the war? Who is the addressee in those narratives? The concept of 'addressee' is different from that of 'reader'. Anyone can read a text, but an addressee is one who is expected to act upon the material and bring out a positive change in society. In Sri Lanka, where the traumatic experiences of the Tamil civilians were denied as fabrications, testimonials serve the purpose of providing visibility. It would invite the attention of objective individuals towards the issue in the hope of initiating a dialogue on it. A testimony is not to be read like fiction. It holds the silent cry of personal lives within it. The question of when testimony is taken is also very vital. Stories change with time. A testimony taken during war would be very different to one taken immediately after war. The language in

which the testimony is taken is not always the one in which it gets published. Nuances are lost in interpretation and translation. Movies can serve as testimonio if it represents multiple voices. There are voices that are silenced in the official documentation of events there by creating gaps in history. Movies, with its freedom of artistic expression and modes of creative presentation, can accommodate and juxtapose these voices onto different narratives.

The movie *Ira Madiyama* features an incident (see fig.3.8.) which Samanth Subramanian has featured in his book *This Divided Island*. The trauma of having to leave behind everything that is a part of one's life is finely portrayed. The child who wants to take his dog along and the adults who try to prioritise things to carry are shown. Movies can be made use of in the process of mythmaking as it reaches a wider audience. However, under an authoritarian government, as in post war Sri Lanka, those who possess power can monopolise the industry. Dissenting voices and versions can be nipped through bans and censorship. Thus, in a sense, those who wield power can create or silence myths.





Fig. 3.8. Still from *Ira Madiyama* (1. 17. 00)  
 Vithanage, Prasanna,director. *Ira Madiyama* (*August Sun*).  
 YouTube,uploaded by Loku Movies, 2 Apr. 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnTw33XjjVY>

Sri Lankan war poetry, a genre which has produced many an intense piece of literature, has also represented the trauma of civilians, as discussed in the introduction. Most images featured in the poems have been represented visually in films. For instance, the very title of *In the Name of Buddha* resonates the sentiment in Nuhman's poem. A large statue of Buddha is shown in the movie which becomes the silent witness to the atrocities committed in his name. The trauma of displacement is featured in films like *Ira Madiyama* and *In the Name of Buddha* where it is shown how the Tamils moved from their villages with what they could gather. The child's perspective of war, as mentioned in Sivaramani Sivanandan's poem, is shown in movies like *Saroja*. Sarojini, the little girl, witnesses the murder of her mother. Armed men barge into their humble homes at night

and shoot their parents. War thus shatters the peaceful inner world of children (see fig 3.9.). It steals away the hues of innocence from their eyes.



Fig. 3.9. Still from *In the Name of Buddha* (3. 13)  
 Touchriver, Rajesh. director. *In the Name of Buddha\_Song*. YouTube,  
 uploaded by Rajesh Touchriver, 31 Jul. 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asaPmEHvktQ&t=252s>

The inner plight of a refugee is shown in the climax of *In the Name of Buddha* when the immigration official who interrogates Siva looks at the number tattooed on her arm. She herself would have been a refugee from some other part of the world, displaced by some other war. The tears in her eyes show how the pain of leaving one's whole world behind is same for any one. Many women like Krishanthi were brutally raped and/or murdered during the war.



Fig. 3.10. Still from *In the Name of Buddha* (3. 57)  
 Touchriver, Rajesh. director. *In the Name of Buddha\_Song*. YouTube,  
 uploaded by Rajesh Touchriver, 31 Jul. 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asaPmEHvktQ&t=252s>

*In the Name of Buddha* features a scene in which a Tamil girl is raped by the soldiers of IPKF. They stuff her mouth with soil to stifle her screams (see fig.3.10.). The use of soil as an imagery is a brilliant move on the part of the movie-maker. It poignantly shows how those who came with the excuse of protecting the land unleashed cruelty on women.

The loss of a loved one is also featured in many a film. Like how Cheran mentions, in one of his poems, the plight of a widow who has nothing to tell her child who asks for his father was the social reality then. In *Kannathil Muthamittal*, one of the questions Amudha asks Shyama is about her father. Shyama knows that her husband, Amudha's father, is dead but she does not answer the question. The war has created many such poignant silences to fill the voids of lost beloveds. Documentaries are yet

another strong representation of trauma in Sri Lanka. *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields* featured amateur video clippings by civilians and soldiers from the war zone. While the footages from civilians featured shelling as well as interviews with survivors, the one filmed by the soldiers had instances of horrific war crimes. It had visuals of blindfolded victims being executed and naked corpses of women being insulted. The Sri Lankan government condemned the documentary as fake and created a documentary named *Lies Agreed Upon* to counter the allegations. The documentary ignited international reactions. The Sri Lankan War is called 'a war without witnesses'. *White Van Stories* discusses forced disappearances in Sri Lanka. Family members of the missing persons give testimonies and show their protests. Abductions and illegal detentions were rampant in the country, even after the war. Tamil civilians had nowhere to go to complain. A documentary, aired on a renowned international media, would garner international awareness in the issue. It gives voice to the family members of the disappeared persons.

Testimonial narration can also be seen in movies featuring the Sri Lankan War. The characters in the film would narrate the traumatic events they have suffered/ witnessed in sorrow or rage to sympathetic listeners or those who they think belong to the other faction. The movie *The Road from Elephant Pass* features a scene where the characters Kamala Velaithan and Captain Wasantha Ratnayake, an LTTE cadre and an army man, talks

about the atrocities perpetrated by the opposite factions. Kamala talks in rage of the Sri Lankan Army which prosecutes Tamils while Wasantha is disturbed by the violent actions of the LTTE. Though, on the superficial level, the scene portrays how they try to shift the blame to each other, it is evident that a space for dialogue has opened up where points of view, however contradicting they are from one another, can be put forth. Two characters assume the responsibility of representing their communities. It is such a space that is lacking in areas torn by wars. Though both the characters cannot alter their ideological perspectives, we can see that they become more open to the opposite stance in the course of time. Acceptance of the other, which is one of the prerequisites in reconciliation, is facilitated through dialogue.

In *The Terrorist*, the character named Lotus is a young boy who helps Malli, the LTTE cadre on the suicide mission to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi, cross the forest. Though he tries to put up a brave face, Malli sees through him to what he actually is- a scared and lonely child who lives in the forest. Lotus tells his story to Malli, who reminds him of his elder sister (see fig.3.11.). Lotus's father was a priest in the temple who lost his life in an attack by the Sinhalese army. Lotus lost his entire family in the attack. The whole of his village was burned. He says that he does not feel like going away from there. In daylight, he is the tough boy who helps the rebels through the forest but at night, he becomes the scared and forlorn

child who cries to sleep and is haunted by nightmares. Here, testimony acts like therapy. The extreme trauma suffered by the child needs a sympathetic listener as an outlet. Most of the survivors who try to live a normal life might have unaddressed issues within. They might have stories to tell which they keep hidden behind the façade of normalcy.



Fig. 3.11. Still from *The Terrorist* (26. 13)

Sivan, Santhosh, director. *The Terrorist* (1997 film) | Santosh Sivan Movie. YouTube, uploaded by Cinecurry Tamil, 3 Dec 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m\\_wKQ9pq1EQ&t=1575s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_wKQ9pq1EQ&t=1575s)

The movie *In the Name of Buddha* is also structured in the form of a flashback which ends on a positive note where the asylum seeker, Siva, from Sri Lanka, narrates his traumatic experiences to an immigration official and is granted refuge.



Fig. 3.12. Still from *In the Name of Buddha* (0. 22)  
 Touchriver, Rajesh. director. *In the Name of Buddha*. YouTube, uploaded  
 by Shiju Rasheed, 28 July 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PO5hnjLD7n4>

The immigration official, who appears sympathetic, bears a string of numbers tattooed onto her hand which suggests her being a refugee in the past (see fig.3.12.). Leaving one's own country, clutching onto one's dear life, is an experience which a lot of Tamils experienced during the Sri Lankan Civil War.



Fig. 3.13. Still from *In the Name of Buddha* (1. 45)  
 Touchriver, Rajesh. director. *In the Name of Buddha*. YouTube, uploaded  
 by Rajesh Touchriver, 5 Sep. 2005, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj0ndcm7cIs>

The trauma of migration also carries the inability of the survivors to be heard in the host country. Apart from official procedures, facilities for psychological support and rehabilitation are not easily accessible to the majority of refugees. The cases of those underprivileged who cannot afford to travel to developed nations are worse (see fig.3.13.). The need to tell one's story after encountering a traumatic event is one of the basic needs of the survivor. Breaking the cocoon of denial and expressing the pain one has been through is an act of courage which requires immense support from fellow beings.

Trauma literature and testimonials are important for their cathartic value and call for action, but critics argue that it is not enough. They put forth that though art can give meaning to the grief suffered by the victims, a place for people to grieve is also a requirement. It is where the scope of memorials comes into picture. Monuments are markers of memory onto a landscape (or mindscape) which remind of an event and help celebrate the success or mourn the losses. When such physical spaces are denied to a group of people, movies can take its place. A movie also marks the memory which a spectator can re-live. When the Sri Lankan war is projected by the authorities as a successful military action which wiped out terrorism from the nation, it ignores the plight of civilians who lost everything. The genocide is not acknowledged by the authorities, and the other faction may also use it for political gains. The real victims are



silenced. In such a country, movies can serve as memorials. As the theoretical foundations for this study have been laid, it is time to move on to the detailed analytical study of some of the movies. Though these movies have been discussed before, in parts, as instances, a more detailed reading would be imperative to get the complete picture. As already mentioned, this thesis does not go into the technical details of cinema. Movies are treated as texts and analysed here.

*Ira Madiyama*, the bilingual movie by Prasanna Vithanage, is an attempt at portraying how the war affected the emotional lives of civilians in Sri Lanka. It follows three narratives and is set in mid 1990s. To be precise, the movie features the happenings that occur on the day Sri Lanka won the Cricket World Cup in 1996. The English title of the movie is *August Sun* but a literal translation of '*Ira Madiyama*' would be 'midnight sun'. The events that feature in the movie took place in the month of March. August is the month of monsoon in Sri Lanka and the appearance of the sun is a welcome change. The movie also portrays rays of hope entering the lives of people during the bleak days of war. The second interpretation of the title is also apt as the midnight is synonymous with darkness. Thinkers like Jung equate the sun with human consciousness. The movie thus portrays how different individuals find their selves during tough times.

The setting of the movie features parts of Sri Lanka, both the cities and dry coastal areas. In one of the narratives, the expulsion of Tamil Muslims of Mannar by the rebels of the LTTE is depicted, but the events happened in 1990. The cricket match places the narrative as happening on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, 1996. Chamari, a young woman, seeks the help of a journalist Saman Gunawardena in locating her soldier husband Niroshan who has gone missing. They travel to the northern areas of the country. Through the narrative, it is revealed that Chamari is not legally wedded to Niroshan. His parents were against the match and hence the young couple lived together without marriage. Chamari believes that Niroshan is alive and cannot rest without finding him. She needs closure to move on in life. She describes how Niroshan's parents blame her for bringing bad luck to their son. Chamari is ready to go to any extent to find her husband and even tries to seduce Saman, falsely professing love to him.

Duminda, a young soldier, visits a brothel and is shocked to find his sister Kamani there. He reacts violently, but later comes into terms with it. He accepts the fact that the war has forced women out of their houses in search for jobs, some even resorting to prostitution to earn food for their families. He talks to other women and decides to forgive his sister. Aralath, a young Tamil Muslim boy, is sad to leave his dog behind when they are evacuating their village. The LTTE has forcefully evicted Tamil Muslims from their homes. The movie poses poignant questions on faith, the worth

of one's belongings, etc. The movie portrays many traumatic incidents that happened during the civil war in Sri Lanka. Women who lost their partners to the war suffered alone. The society was also cruel to them, blaming them for the bad luck. Here, Chamari is in a worse state of mind than a war widow. Niroshan went missing somewhere in the Tamil areas of the country. Without finding him or knowing about him, she cannot get a closure. The lack of closure is very traumatic to the human mind. It becomes the vortex that sucks in everything else in life. Duminda's sister Kamani had to take up prostitution to earn for her family. When the able-bodied men were recruited by either the army or the rebels, the women had no other way than find work. Aralath's family is among those who were evicted for their faith. They were forced out of their homes with the meagre belongings they could carry. Aralath wants to take a dog along, which he feeds daily. His sorrow, in the backdrop of a more severe event, presents a child's perspective.

Journeys form an important motif in this movie. The background changes between busy cities to barren rural lands. The journey undertaken by Chamari and Saman to the northern parts of Sri Lanka, Duminda's journey in search of his sister, and Aralath's family's journey followed by their forced eviction are important in the sense that these are not limited to mere physical transportation. The characters discover themselves or find hope in their journeys. Chamari, though she does not find her husband,

realises the probability of a new love in her life. Once she gets closure, the spectators would realise that she will move on with her life. It is interesting to note that Chamari is shown as carrying a bag whenever she meets Saman. She clutches on to it, and it can be viewed as a manifestation of the emotional baggage she carries within. There is a scene in which Chamari and Suman embraces each other and is about to kiss. In the poster of the movie which features this shot, Chamari's bag is seen lying on the ground, while it is still on her in the actual scene in the movie. She has to lose the emotional trauma she suffers and get a closure to get such a picture-perfect new love in her life.

The question of the real worth of belongings is featured in Aralath's narrative. When the Tamil Muslims of northern Sri Lanka were ordered to leave their homes, they were allowed to carry only a bag and some amount of money, as mentioned by Samanth Subramanian in his book. The pain of having to choose from one's belongings, to set priorities on what to take from one's home, is depicted in the movie. Aralath's mother tries to stuff all the money she can into the folds of her saree and blouse. The villagers come with big bundles which are thoroughly frisked by the rebels. Aralath is the only one who is concerned about the dog which he feeds daily. He is not old enough to bother about material possessions. The main characters are seen as always on the move. Be it a bus full of soldiers or tired civilians, a boatful of broken people who were thrown out of their homes, a

cycle which carries a father and son who tries to survive in a new space, or a car which takes a young man and woman who care about each other, moving on is an important theme in the movie.

There are homecomings, and dream of homecoming, in the movie. Chamari returns home to her loneliness and hope of finding Niroshan, Duminda to his mother and sister, and Hasan promises Aralath of returning to their village. The movie is all about surviving the tough time of war. Faith, or symbols of faith, is peppered in the narrative. A mosque, kids studying Quran, Chamari breaking a coconut at a shrine and Duminda watching the spiral of a *vihara* from his lonely dark room signify how people hold on to their faiths. They find hope in different ways. For Chamari, any news of a soldier let free from an enemy camp is a matter of hope. Duminda accepts and tolerates the fact that war has changed their lives. He finds hope in forgiveness. For Aralath and his family, a new place where they make a new home, and the hope that Allah would protect them, is hope.

The sea is another image that stitches the narratives together. Duminda and his friends gambol in the sea shore to celebrate their break from military service. Aralath, with his family, travels in a boat to a new place where they have to start life anew. The sea there translates to their woes and sorrow. Saman and Chamari embraces on a sea shore but is soon separated by their realisation of the other person. The sea, with its vastness,

seems to reflect the great void of uncertainty that divides them. The characters in the movie are shattered individuals, whose agony is portrayed with intensity by close-up shots of their faces. Their expressions, or the subtle lack of it, reflect the inner turmoil. The actors who played Aralath and Hasan are real survivors of the war. When Muslims were evicted by the LTTE, they understood that the religious aspect of their identity is becoming prominent. In the movie, Hasan tells his son that it is against Islam to keep dogs as pets. The child used to feed the dog daily and his father had nothing against it. Once he lost his home due to his religion, he has reshaped his sense of identity accordingly.

There is cricket commentary in the background in most of the scenes. It was the day Sri Lanka won the World Cup. It suggests how there are different layers of meaning in a common man's life in war-infested Sri Lanka. Unlike what the media presents, normal life also happened for most. Those who could not, learned to accept their fate as normal. There is another side to the coin too. When the day was marked in history as a day of victory, there were lots of people who lost everything in their lives. When the nation won in a match, it was losing itself to the war. It shows how a prominent event becomes projected as a memorial at the cost of different personal memories. Though there are no structural monuments shown, certain cultural aspects which have become a part of the nation's socio-cultural foundation are questioned or challenged in the movie.

Counter-monuments need not always be structures or pieces of art; a word or even silence can become one. When Chamari talks about how Niroshan's parents consider her a bad luck, Saman rubbishes the thought as 'stupid'. The concept of good and bad luck associated with women is common in patriarchal societies and it is this established norm that Saman challenges with a line. Nature too seems to challenge the established boundaries there. When many check-posts are established along the road, the sea lies in the background, connecting all shores together. How is the movie placed in the socio-political and cultural map of the island nation? How effectively has it featured civilian trauma? Does it portray the truth, or the possibility of different truths, when discussing war? Does it have the potential to function as a memorial for the experiences of common man? These are the questions that need to be answered as a conclusion to the analysis of this movie.

*Ira Madiyama* won many an international award and acclaim. The movie presents multiple perspectives and is not limited to one side. It is objective in nature and the good cast has done well in portraying trauma on screen. It has portrayed the experience of the Tamil Muslims who were forcefully driven out of their villages, which has not found much representation in other movies. It marks their anguish in the timeline of the war. Aralath's narrative, an innocent take on the traumatic events associated with the war, can evoke empathy in the spectators. Without

visualising violence, the movie has effectively portrayed how a war affects common man's life. It ends on a positive note too. The characters have survived their ordeals and have hope which will take them forward in life.

*In the Name of Buddha* is a plea in the name of the icon of peace to end the brutal war. The movie features the country during the initial days of the war. It views the LTTE sympathetically. The story is based on the real life experiences of a doctor who sought asylum in the United Kingdom. The character Shiva is seen to be suffering from vicarious trauma. The happenings in his country against his fellowmen becomes too much for him to handle. The events portrayed in the movie are violent in itself and the candid representation has added to the effect. Brutal murders, rapes and bloodshed are portrayed onscreen. The movie is potent enough to arouse vicarious trauma in spectators. The effect it would have on those who suffer war trauma would not be cathartic as it is too violent. There is melodrama, especially in the scenes which feature Shiva and the character reminiscent of Velupillai Prabhakaran. The rebel leader is depicted as giving powerful speeches, true to how Prabhakaran was. Characters are based on real life and the cast is an assemblage of good actors who brings reality to the narrative. The movie resulted from the testimonial narration of a doctor's experiences in Sri Lanka.

There are instances of actions, events or objects becoming personal memorials in the movie. The number tattooed in the arm of the



immigration officer in London is a memorial of her days as a refugee. When Shiva flushes his passport and enters the new country as an asylum seeker, his action is a resistance against the established norms of nationalism prevalent in Sri Lanka. The episode featuring how the soldiers of the IPKF rape a Tamil woman stands against the Indian narrative of its army becoming saviours in a foreign land. There is a monument in Sri Lanka for IPKF veterans. The scene serves as a counter-monument to how the IPKF is memorised. *In the Name of Buddha* is a very dated and one-sided narrative which has the potential to be complete if there would be sequels. The movie presents civilian trauma in the best possible way but offers nothing in the form of hope for the spectators. The movie itself can be viewed as a counter-monument as it offers a different interpretation of the past. It goes against the official narratives and boldly challenges the version put forth by authorities.

*Flying Fish* is an anthology film which features three narratives.

Flying fish is a fish with wings. It can fly short distances above water, like the people of Sri Lanka who try to escape their predators with the limited power they have. When trouble comes from outside elements in their natural habitat, flying fishes fly out of water and land at a distance. The title can be thus read as an apt one for the movie. The movie touches upon many an important feature of the war-infested Sri Lankan society. It has depictions of trauma and features very relevant issues like child

recruitment by the rebels. It portrays patriarchy and masculinity very realistically. The son who stabs his widowed mother and the father who commits suicide due to shame are two victims of the societal pressure of conforming to the norms of masculinity in a patriarchal society. The movie ends in sorrow and defeat. The characters lose to establishments of authority. The women cannot survive the norms of patriarchy. The movie is thus a memorial to trauma, not to survival. In a war-torn society, more movies featuring successful survivals are to be made to aid in rehabilitation. The movie presents the societal conditions of the times truthfully and can serve as a marker of memory in the timeline of war. Any constructive result in the therapeutic use of the movie for trauma survivors is doubtful.

*The Road from Elephant Pass*, adapted from a novel of the same name, tells the story of a Sri Lankan soldier and a Tamil rebel who fall in love with each other. Elephant Pass is referred to as the 'gateway to Jaffna' and connects the Jaffna peninsula to the mainland. It was the arena of many a battle fought between the army and the rebels. It can be considered to be a threshold where the two factions come together. The movie, with its theme of love, also acts like the Elephant Pass. Unlike the battles that occurred there, the union of two individuals results in love and understanding. Kamala is a Tamil rebel whose brother was killed by the Sri Lankan Army. She hates the army and even the Sinhalese for their

suppressive measures on her fellow Tamilians. She, in the guise of surrendering to the army with an important inside information, meets Captain Wasantha, a young soldier. They travel together, through forests and villages, and the journey changes them. Survival is a theme in the movie and their journey through the forest acts like a rite of passage. They shed their prejudices and return to their essence- a young man and a woman. They talk about the war and share their opinions of each other, gradually discovering themselves. The journey offers a space for dialogue for them. The movie too is such a space of mediation, created by media. Memories form an important theme in the movie. Kamala has a lot of disturbing personal memories which she has projected as cultural. It made her a rebel. Tamils value a decent burial as they believe in reincarnation. There is a scene in which Kamala buries the corpse of a rebel. A burial is a matter of respect towards the dead body and a grave, even if it is unmarked, would be a memorial to the life lived.

It is interesting to note that how their child can be seen as a monument of love. When two rivals, who would not come together under normal circumstances, fell in love, they established a family. The baby is, at the same time, a counter-monument too. It challenges the established prejudices and opens a different interpretation and possibility of reconciliation. The movie ends on a positive note as they come together, but they have to flee the country. In Sri Lanka, they will always be a Tamil

rebel and a Sinhalese soldier. They pretend their death and escape to Toronto, where they live happily with their baby. In the movie, we see how the personal sphere wins over that of establishments. The movie and what it proposes can work only in the personal sphere. Love is too generalised a remedy for what happened in Sri Lanka.

*Kannathil Muthamittal* is an Indian movie which portrayed a child's search for her biological mother. Amudha was discarded by her mother Shyama, a refugee, who returned to Sri Lanka and took up arms. The child was reared by her adoptive parents with love and care. The movie features how they take her to Sri Lanka, against all odds, to meet her mother. The movie has marked itself as the most established visual Indian perspective of the Sri Lankan war. With its melodrama of a fabricated 'what-if' tale with clichéd ideals of motherhood, it is a commercially successful movie. It is an example of how traumatic emotions of a war can be commoditised. The movie features the use of cultural symbols out of their context too. Amudha, in a song, is seen wearing the robes of a Buddhist monk. Rather than trying to understand and analyse the real situation in Sri Lanka, an intensely personal story was woven. Peppered with songs and over-the-top gestures of patriotism, the movie treads through the safe terrain of domestic life. It views the LTTE sympathetically but puts forth the hope of the war coming to an end. It is thus a visual monument which limits interpretations of the war.

*Pura Handa Kaluwara*, true to the title, is all about death.

Wannihami's soldier son arrives home in a sealed coffin from the warfront but the father is not ready to acknowledge his death. The movie also portrays the role of faith in the Sri Lankan society. Elements of patriarchy are also visible in the narrative. The blind father fights alone against the society which tries to affirm the death of his son. The villagers want to make a martyr out of the dead soldier, and the family members, living in poverty, find hope in the money that the government would pay as compensation. The sealed coffin thus becomes a monument which the society tries to establish. Men of political power and religion are not immune to it. Wannihami's insistence on opening the coffin, even at the risk of losing compensation, is an act that can be read as a counter-monument. The coffin without the dead body opens alternative memories and possibilities of interpretations. The movie highlights the importance of truth over the need for a closure based on fabricated tales. Blindness is an important theme in the movie. Wannihami, with his intuitive power, sees the truth when all those with vision could not. The movie ends on a positive note. Though his son does not return, Wannihami is at peace. Different kinds of trauma are portrayed in the movie in a subtle manner. There is no violence portrayed on screen. The movie would arouse sympathy in spectators. The landscape of rural Sri Lanka is portrayed well, with a hint of pathetic fallacy.

*Vanni Mouse*, the short film which won international acclaim, is an experimental venture in which the narrative space is utilised in a novel way. It features two mice moving along a barbed wire fence which surrounds a refugee camp. There are shadows that can be seen inside the tents and voices heard, but there is no human form that appears onscreen. There is no fixed plot or story either. The first part of the title mentions the area which was once the stronghold of the Tamil tigers. The people of Vanni were shifted to refugee camps later. The use of mice in the movie relates to the symbolism where it represents survival, quickness and self-protection. The mice in *Vanni Mouse* can signify many ideas. It can be a symbol of the refugees in the camp who will, according to the maker of the movie, survive their captivity. It can also mean the outside world which sees everything that happens in the country but does not care to intervene. The story takes place in the background and the attention is focused on the mice. The life of the civilians who were confined in the squalid camps was pitiful. They were treated as bare lives. In this movie, a lot of things happen in the background which the spectators see only as shadows. There is rape, murder, torture, and prayer. The movie, with its unconventional style, is a counter-monumental take on what visual narratives have established so far in Sri Lanka. Movies which tried to portray different versions of the event were banned. Some movies portrayed too much violence which irked many a spectator. It is into such a scenario that the

movie is introduced. The white cloth of the tents represents the shroud of secrecy that existed in Sri Lanka. No international agency or journalists were allowed access into the northern parts of the country during the last stage of the war. Shadows appearing on the white cloth remind the spectator of a shadow play. The people in Sri Lanka were like puppets whose lives did not matter. The movie challenges all representations of the war that has been produced till then.

Guynn, in *Writing History in Film* (2006), writes: “Film can be a place of memory in so far as it engages the public in a collective recollection that revivifies or creates a meaningful link between a past event and the identity of the social group in the present” (178). Movies say more and have a greater reach than physical memorials. Celluloid memorials also have the potential to add newer ideas to it, unlike a physical structure. Movies prompt the audience to think how they would have reacted in the situation. Once represented, events are subject to dialogue and interpretation. This strengthens the need of different versions and voices being represented. It can ensure that historiography does not remain a propagandist exercise.

## CHAPTER IV OF ACTS AND AFTERIMAGES

*“The cinema is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand”*

-Christian Metz

The nineteenth century witnessed the invention of cinematographic moving pictures which projected a simulation of experiences in the social world which were meant to communicate, entertain, educate as well as indoctrinate. Films, that were a form of narrative, later became cultural artifacts that reflected culture and, at the same time, was altered by it. It was also a commercial commodity. In his *The Birth of the Sixth Art* (1911), Italian film doctrinaire Ricciotto Canudo explained cinema as "a superb conciliation of the Rhythms of Space (the Plastic Arts) and the Rhythms of Time (Music and Poetry)" (Abel 59). According to him, cinema was a blend of the five ancient arts, namely architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry. After his inclusion of dance in the list, Canudo later declared cinema 'the seventh art.' Cinema is a cultural event and its narratives and semantics hold the key to the ways in which culture makes sense of itself. Film Studies has also become a part of academia and is a part of the curriculum in various educational institutions.

The question of film as representation begets the need to define and distinguish it from presentation. While both representation and presentation presents an idea or event as images, signs and sounds, the former creates an



illusion of reality via editing techniques which allows the viewer to be a part of the situation. It raises the question of mediation in perception. If film represents something, perception of it becomes a 'representation of representation', like Plato's concept of mimesis which is twice removed from reality.

Both an art and an industry, filmmaking, the process, involves different stages of production before the release and exhibition of a movie. The scope of serious studies on this area has surpassed the passion of cineastes to become an academic discipline. Film festivals around the globe have ignited serious dialogues on the aesthetics of filmmaking. Film Studies, the umbrella term, describes all efforts under the different fields of theory, philosophy and criticism that provide an in-depth study of the discipline. Films reflect the culture of a community. It is a medium which constructs as well as replicates cultural impact.

John Ellis puts it this way:

Entertainment cinema offers the possibility of seeing events and comprehending them from a position of separation and mastery. The film is offered to the spectator, but the spectator does not have anything to offer the film apart from the desire to see and hear. Hence the spectator's position is one of power, specifically the power to understand events rather than to change them. This is the position of mastery that can shade into fascination, into the

fetishistic desire to abolish the very distance and separation that makes the process of seeing possible. (*Visible Fictions* 81)

Cinema, a part of culture, generates meanings out of it and constructs realities. It can be, according to some film theorists, treated like language as it spawns significance through systems. According to Roland Barthes, any system out of which we can gather elements to communicate can be called a language (31). As denotative and connotative meanings can be read into words, images in films can work as an encoded visual language which carries social meaning. The semiotics of film is different from that of language. In films, signifiers can take the form of technological ingredients like camera movements, background music, etc. For instance, portraying death in slow motion has become a cliché.

While studying the relationship between film and culture, two modes of reading can be identified. A textual reading, like literary new criticism, would concentrate on the body of films as a text while a contextual analysis would look at films as cultural representations and deals with the cultural factors present outside the text. This thesis will take a mix of both these approaches while analysing films representing the Sri Lankan Civil War.

Let us begin with the growth of the Sri Lankan film industry and its role in the creation of a visual culture in the country. Since the advent of the twentieth century, Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, witnessed screenings of

British films which only the colonisers or anglicised natives could follow. Makeshift tents gave way to theatres which later began to screen Indian films. *Rajakeeya Wickremaya* (1925) was the first film to be made in the country but the reels got burned before its screening in Sri Lanka. English movies were replaced by Indian movies in time. S. M. Nayagam's *Kadawunu Poronduwa* (1947) heralded the birth of Sinhalese cinema in the island. In its early stages, Sri Lankan cinema was heavily indebted to Indian cinema. The films were derived from South Indian films and followed the same formula with overstated melodrama, fights, dance and lowbrow humor. There was a shift in style when independent film makers began to work on native themes and brought out indigenous pieces. *Rekava* (1956) by Lester James Peries is considered to be the first Sinhalese movie free of Indian influence. More movies followed; while some looked into the history of the country for inspiration, others opted to represent the contemporary society. The nineties witnessed the rise of independent film makers who valued artistic perfection over commercial success. Dr. Dharmasena Pathiraja, Asoka Handagama, Chandran Rutnam, Prasanna Vithanage, Vimukthi Jayasundara, Sanjeewa Pushpakumara, Sumitra Peries, etc. are some of the important names associated with Sri Lankan film making.

What is the significance of having a national cinema in a globalised world? Graeme Turner, in *Film as Social Practice*, argues that

representations of the nation create as well as shape alternate points of view (158). It can give voice to the silenced segments in the nation. What mainstream global media fails to see can be articulated through art where loaded metaphors circumvent censorship. Films thus become representations as well as representatives of the nation. Does Sri Lanka have a national cinema? If yes, how does it portray the island nation? The Sri Lankan film industry produces Sinhalese and Tamil cinema, the latter very less in number. For a country like Sri Lanka, every film produced there since the eighties can be categorised as a 'war film'. Three decades of war has affected the daily lives of people so much that nothing is left untouched by it.

By the middle of the twentieth century, the concept of 'genre' entered the field of cinema which organised films according to certain preconceived conventions. There are films which stick to the conventions of a particular genre while there are some which blend multiple genres. There are theorists like Robert Stam (2000) who question the necessity of the existence of genres. He poses some very important questions on genres, which are:

A number of perennial doubts plague genre theory. Are genres really 'out there' in the world, or are they merely the constructions of analysts? Is there a finite taxonomy of genres or are they in principle infinite? Are genres timeless Platonic essences or ephemeral, time-

bound entities? Are genres culturebound or transcultural? . . . Should genre analysis be descriptive or proscriptive? (*Film Theory* 14)

The definition of genres can be region-specific. Thus, western notions of genre can fail to address cinema from other countries. For example, the most popular genre in Indian cinema is the ‘masala film’ which is in fact a blend of genres. It also features music, dance, fight sequences, spectacle and sub plots, which appeals to the masses and saw the rise of actors as ‘superstars’. A typical study of genres via the academic discourses of the west would be inefficient for something like the ‘masala film’.

Tudor puts forth four ways in which the genre of a movie can be defined. The "idealist method" judges films by preset values. The "empirical method" identifies the genre of a film by evaluating it against films already considered to be of a particular genre. The “a priori method” uses universal generic essentials which are recognised in advance. The "social conventions" method is based on the customary cultural consensus in the society (Grant 205). For instance, let us consider the genre of war film. Films that feature combat scenes would ideally be war films, like *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930). It features the experiences of a company of German soldiers during World War I. A realistic take on the morbidity of war, it can be considered to be an anti-war movie. There are many movies which follow the same formula. *The Trench* (1999) features the emotional experiences of young British soldiers who were confined in

trenches before the Somme Offensive in 1916. Comedy, a genre would not be normally associated with war movies, also found a place since *Shoulder Arms* (1918). There are films which follow newer techniques, like *84C MoPic* (1989). It is a mockumentary which employs the found footage technique. The genre was later made use of in horror movies. There are genres which are specific to a region or culture. For instance, *samurai* cinema of Japan mostly features a way of life that was prevalent in the country during certain periods. The lives of *samurai* warriors were different during the different periods in history, like the *Sengoku*, *Tokugawa* and *Meiji*. The genre was later adapted by the west and movies with a changed context began to be made. As mentioned earlier, the conventions and theories of film studies are western and it would be inappropriate to use those as yardsticks to analyse regional cinema that do not follow these conventions. The idealist as well as the empirical methods are thus not very suitable to be used in studying Sri Lankan cinema. In order to address the cinema of a specific region, it is of utmost importance that the cultural history of the space is to be taken into consideration. Sri Lanka is a multiracial as well as multiethnic nation where communities have grown parallel through the course of history.

Garret Stewart, in *The Philosophy of War Films*, writes: “War pictures: a clause as well as a phrase. Regardless of national politics, war’s true regime is scopic. . . A battle can sometimes be watched; a war must be

perceived according to a bigger picture. That's one of its lures for cinematic treatment, as well as one of its built-in limits" (108). A war, unlike a battle, is not something of the moment. It encompasses a lot of factors that need to be addressed. When the battle deals with two armies in conflict, the war has to address why they are so. It is beyond the spectacular military exercise. A war often deals with multilayered concerns and questions. It deals with the common man on the road as much as it does the soldiers. Wars affect civilians in more ways and magnitudes than the battle does. When wars are made into films, it serves the purpose of providing information as well as entertainment to those who were left behind. The civilians get a feel of the war. Performing something also helps create meanings out of it. "Performance is foundational to the study of human communication. . . . Performance theory views humans as Homo narrans, or creatures who communicate through stories as a way of crafting their social world and making meaning of it" (*Encyclopedia of Communication Theory* 265).

According to Anastasia Bakogianni, in the introduction to *War as Spectacle: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Display of Armed Conflict*, representing wars can also challenge social norms as it calls for an active, not passive, spectatorship. The Sri Lankan war, which spanned to around three decades, affected lives in many forms. Ordinary lives became battlefields. Unlike the battles usually portrayed on screen, where

two forces come face to face and fight, Sri Lanka witnessed guerilla shelling and shooting. Areas inhabited by civilians were targeted. They were used as human shields. The recording of this war, thus, is not just an accounting of operations conducted by the warring sides. Civilians suffered the most in this war, that too not as the so-called 'collateral damage'. They were targeted and killed; their lives were jeopardised.

Jean Baudrillard, French philosopher and cultural analyst, elaborated on how media usurps reality out of the postmodern world and substitutes what can be called as 'hyperreality' where reality is simulated. We are so much engrossed in the concept of 'models and maps' that we no longer care about the real. In his 1981 philosophical treatise *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard discusses the relationship between reality, symbols, and society. Simulacra are the copies of things which did not have an original and simulation is the process of imitating the real-world system. Baudrillard says that we have lost all ability to make sense of the distinction between nature and artifice. He identifies three "orders of simulacra", which is as follows. In the first order of simulacra, which he associates with the pre-modern period, the image is a clear counterfeit of the real; the image is recognised as just an illusion, a place marker for the real; in the second order of simulacra, which Baudrillard associates with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, the distinctions between the image and the representation begin to break down because of mass



production and the proliferation of copies. Such production misrepresents and masks an underlying reality by imitating it so well, thus threatening to replace it; in the third order of simulacra, which is associated with the postmodern age, we are confronted with 'a precession of simulacra'; that is, the representation precedes and determines the real (Felluga).

Baudrillard's collection of three essays, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1991), describes the Gulf War as 'an atrocity which masqueraded as a war' (Merrin 144). According to Baudrillard, no real fighting took place between the armies. The West orchestrated propaganda imagery which the world believed to be that of war. It was misrepresented through simulacra. It was rehearsed and presented as a spectacle before the world. The final stages of the Sri Lankan Civil War, if considered along the same lines, cannot be called a 'war' but a planned genocide. Authorities made sure that there would be no witnesses present in the northern areas of the country. UN officials and media persons were removed from the area before the killings began. All we now have are footages and images which are representations of what happened there.

Fredric Jameson, in *The Philosophy of War Films*, discusses eight important narrative variants of the genre of war cinema. He lists the portrayal of the existential experience of war, the collective experience of war, depiction of leaders, officers, and the institution of the army, illustration of technology, description of the enemy landscape, atrocities

perpetrated, attack on the homeland, and foreign occupation, without adding themes of espionage, guerilla warfare etc. to the list. The first two, along with that on atrocities, would fall mostly within the boundaries of civilian experiences of war. In Sri Lanka, even the civilians cannot be categorised as a uniform entity. There are the Sri Lankan Tamils who suffered traumatic experiences from both the army as well as the Tigers. The Sri Lankan Tamil Muslims are a group which was displaced by the Tigers; the Sinhalese civilians too had their share of sufferings in the war-affected land; there were Indian Tamils who worked in the plantations who suffered the yoke of poverty and discrimination along with the trauma of war. A movie that features the life of civilians should therefore be inclusive of all these elements that were prevailing in the society. The trauma faced by all of these groups cannot be generalised, reduced to a common denominator, or included under the umbrella of universality (82). When the Sri Lankan Civil War becomes the theme of representation, even the most objective perspective would be tinted with political correctness. As filmmaking is a commercial activity involving a huge amount of money at stake, the quest for truth and its portrayal can become secondary. The threat of movies being banned would also contribute to film-makers treading only the safe thresholds of the middle ground.

Let us now move on to film theory. Film Theory developed in two stages through history, as the classic period dominated by individual

theorists like Munsterberg, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Arnheim, Kracauer, Bazin, *et al.* , and the contemporary movement which appeared in the 1960s and featured many currents like the Barthesian textual analysis, Althussearean Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Metzian semiotics, poststructuralistsynthesis, etc. The nineties witnessed more inclusions like the feminist, ideological, psychoanalytic, narrative and auteur theories and cultural studies. When considering the philosophy of film as a discipline, the important concepts to be dealt with are idealism/nominalism and realism.

Ideological theory deals with how culture moulds the thinking and behaviour of people. In *Film and Phenomenology: Toward a Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation*, Allan Casebier quotes what Nichols says about idealism as:

Our perception of the physical world is. . . based on codes involving iconic signs. The world does not enter our mind nor does it deposit a picture of itself there spontaneously. Perception depends on coding the world into iconic signs that can represent it within our mind. The force of the apparent identity is enormous, however. We think that it is the world itself we see in our "mind's eye," rather than a coded picture of it — Hence both cinema and perception itself share a common coding process involving iconic signs. (10)

Realism views films as reproductions of reality. Films, or ‘actualities’, focus on stories which are usually real-life incidents. It focuses on characters and emotions. Realist movies are slow paced. André Bazin is one of the prominent critics who belong to this school of thought. Italian Neo-realist cinema falls under this category. The formalist school of theory focuses on how film is a representation and emphasises the technical elements of a film. It considers content to be secondary. The montage school of Soviet cinema falls under this categorisation. For the formalists, films do not portray the real world as it is but transforms and expresses it. Hugo Münsterberg, Rudolf Arnheim, Sergei Eisenstein, Béla Balázs, and Siegfried Kracauer are some of the important theorists associated with this school of thought. Formalism focuses on style created with the aid of external devices and how it communicates ideas. Often focusing on illusion, fantasy and myth, formalists use shorter shots along with camera techniques like multiple exposure, superimposition and time-lapse. Other prominent theories include auteur theory, psychoanalytic and cognitive theories, deconstruction, postmodernist, structuralist, feminist, post colonialist, semiotic, and reception, theories, etc.

Auteur theory discusses how a director is considered to be an author who creates meanings with visual elements. Movies, when analysed from this perspective, seem to bear a personal stamp of the director. A deconstructive analysis makes a threadbare study on how a film is

interpreted. Nuances like the choice of a particular word, casting, choice of camera angles, background music, etc. are considered in such an analysis. Semiotic theory studies how a film uses signs and symbols to communicate meaning. Reception theory studies the response of the spectator while feminist theory, as the name suggests, deals with questions of how women are (mis)represented in films that come out of patriarchal cultures. The most important for this thesis is the psychoanalytic theory which will be discussed in detail.

While considering the Sri Lankan cinema through the auteur perspective, movie-makers like Lester James Peries, Asoka Handagama and Prasanna Vithanage cannot be ignored. Peries, called the father of Sri Lankan Cinema, created movies which featured authentic Sinhala familial relationships. His wife, Sumitra Peries, is the first female filmmaker in the country. Handagama, a graduate in mathematics, merged his creative genius and scientific temper to create technically intricate movies. He used cinematography to weave a new cinematic language. His debut movie, *Chanda Kinnarie*, explored new vistas of hyper-realism. He faced the wrath of his colleagues for bringing in a foreign cinematographer for his movie *Moon Hunt* to bring out a special lighting effect. Handagama is not a full formalist either. His vision also includes the social sphere where daily life of ordinary men happens. His 2012 movie *Ini Avan (Him, Here After)* is a Tamil postwar film which is realistic in nature. It features the lives of

ordinary people in the post-war Tamil society and offers hope in the reconciliation between the communities. Vithanage, whose three movies on the war are sensitive narratives of civilian suffering, discussed how ethnicity is an obstacle in Sri Lankan film-making (*Frontline*). A Sinhalese moviemaker is expected by the society to make movies on and with only Sinhalese themes and actors. He says how he was criticised for including Muslims in the cast of *Ira Madiyama*. The government's censorship is yet another hurdle filmmakers have to face in the country.

Moving on to psychoanalytic film theory, the blend of psychoanalysis into cinema occurred in two waves. The first, in the 60s and 70s, involved Lacanian ideology. Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Baudry, and Laura Mulvey were the important theorists. The second wave, in the 80s and 90s, considered the importance of representing trauma. Psychoanalysis later merged with other theories and ideologies like language theory, feminism, gender and sexuality, queer theory, theories of the body and new media.

Christian Metz's semiotic approach considered cinema to be an 'imaginary signifier' which can aid in wish-fulfillment while Jean-Louis Baudry coined the phrase 'the cinematic apparatus'. Laura Mulvey rejected psychoanalysis as a theory and opted for a more feministic perspective. Jean Goudal argued that the cinema offers the viewer with a simulacrum of reality that is capable of creating an illusion of presence. Other important

theorists who considered psychoanalysis in film theory, either to accept or reject it, are Jacqueline Rose, Annette Kuhn, Mary Ann Doane, Joan Copjec, Tania Modleski, E. Ann Kaplan, Constance Penley, Kaja Silverman and Teresa de Lauretis.

Richard Allen, in his chapter “Psychoanalytic Film Theory”, discusses different ways in which psychoanalytic theory is applied to the cinema. In “Film and psychoanalysis” (*The Oxford Guide* 1998), Barbara Creed also discusses the same. Jean-Louis Baudry, in his essay “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” (1970), argued that “the screen-spectator relationship activates a return to the Lacanian Imaginary”. . . the mirror stage of the Lacanian Imaginary refers to that moment when the infant first experiences (misrecognises) itself as complete. The self is thus split between recognition and misrecognition. The spectator, similarly, identifies with the characters on the screen (*The Oxford Guide* 4). Baudry speaks of how “the arrangement of the different elements - projector, darkened hall, screen - in addition to reproducing in a striking way the *mise-en-scène* of Plato's cave. . . reconstructs the situation necessary to the release of the "mirror stage" discovered by Lacan”(McGowan 2).

Metz used the Lacanian theory of mirror-misrecognition to discuss how cinema constructs an illusory identity in the spectator. In *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier* (1975), Metz argues

how cinema positions the spectator in a pre-Oedipal moment of imaginary unity (*The Oxford Guide* 6) as:

Metz also pointed out that, whereas the cinema is essentially a symbolic system, a signifying practice that mediates between the spectator and the outside world, the theory of the mirror stage refers to the pre-symbolic, the period when the infant is without language. Nevertheless, Metz advocated the crucial importance of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory for the cinema and stressed the need to theorize the screen-spectator relationship-not just in the context of the Imaginary, but also in relation to the Symbolic. (7)

Cinema also offers a fantastic realm of wish-fulfillment. Metz's concept of the imaginary signifier argues that the cinema makes present what is otherwise absent. Apparatus theories are concerned with how cinema supplements or alters vision. Some discuss cinema and dreamwork while some others like Žižek blend in surrealism too. According to Žižek:

Cinema, as the art of appearances, tells us something about reality itself. It tells us something about how reality constitutes itself. . . . It is through. . . an ontology of unfinished reality that cinema became a truly modern art. (*The Symbolic* 104)

There are those who discuss how cinema produces perverse pleasures by intensifying vision. There are theorists like Adorno who considered cinema



to be dangerous as it can be used by capitalists to create a compliant populace ( *A Companion to Film Theory* 133-134).

It was in the later part of the twentieth century that trauma studies received academic attention. Psychoanalytic theories began to concentrate on the aspect of trauma. Cinema, a medium based on fantasy, provides the necessary alienation while dealing with the representation of traumatic events. According to film theorist Siegfried Kracauer, in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, the silver screen is like the polished shield of Perseus in which he saw the reflection of Medusa. The mythical hero used the mediated image of Medusa because it was not as scary as facing her in real and thus killed her. Cinema presents a mediated version of a traumatic event which makes it more accessible (306). Like how the Lady of Shalott viewed the outside world in her mirror, spectators can watch the horrors of traumatic representation through movies. As Eco writes in *The Limits of Interpretation*, “Texts are the human way to reduce the world to a manageable format, open to an intersubjective interpretive discourse” (21).

An event is initially inaccessible to those who have not witnessed it. It also holds true for those who are shattered by the trauma resulting from an event. As mentioned in the previous chapter, trauma is ‘unspeakable’. When the event is represented as text, be it in script, audio, graph or visuals, the event becomes accessible. It opens the scope for multiple

interpretations and perspectives. When an event becomes unmanageable, its representation helps. What is said above holds true only in societies where art is free from the manacles of political correctness. Unless embedded deep within symbols and metaphors, certain truths are hard to represent amidst the looming threat of censorship. *The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema: Violence – Void – Visualization* discusses how trauma can work in cinema. One needs to ponder on the question of how representation of trauma onscreen supplements the transmission of wounds or helps in the inclusion of testimonies in official historical narratives. It encodes a traumatic experience in film language which makes it more readable cultural symbols (10). Trauma is considered to be non-representable as it is experienced in a belated manner.

There are certain risks associated with the cinematic representation of trauma. Aesthetic representation can amount to banalisation of a traumatic event. It can put forth a compromised version of events or make a political comment. It can lose focus and be a philosophical discourse on how reality is essentially traumatic. Cinema can also present illusions of reality which can be used therapeutically to make the spectators forget about the real event. Joshua Hirsch, in *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust*, says how cinema can transmit historical trauma. While analysing a movie psychoanalytically, the general theme of the work is to be considered first. It might portray any mental illness or trauma, or reflect

the psychological issues of the maker. Characters can be studied as manifestations of these illnesses. Hirsch has rightly put forth that “discourse on trauma. . . film. . . gives one a language with which to begin to represent the failure of representation that one has experienced” (18).

Anoma Pieris discusses the genre of Sri Lankan Black Cinema, a product of the 2000s, in which the militarisation of ordinary lives in the island country is portrayed (*Asian Cinema* 211). Filmmakers like Jayasundara, Asoka Handagama, Prasanna Vithanage, Sathyajit Maitipe and Sudath Mahaadivulkwewa invited controversy by criticising authority. There were scenes that featured sex and violence which raised many an eyebrow in the traditionally patriarchal nation. There was rawness in the portrayal of characters that was psychologically intense. Social realities like corruption, suicide, poverty and violence were portrayed on screen which irked the local populace but grabbed international attention. For the Sri Lankan audience who were familiar with representations of rural natural beauty and traditional village life, Black Cinema became a blow that shattered the basic ontology. Artistic techniques were employed instead of popular sentimentality.

For the purpose of clarity, the films based on the Sri Lankan Civil War are divided into six categories in this thesis (listed as appendix). As already mentioned in the introduction, the first category includes movies which represent the events that occurred during the war. About nineteen

films are listed under this section out of which five, namely *Ira Madiyama* (*August Sun*), *Igillena Maluwo* (*Flying Fish*), *Alimankada* (*Road from the Elephant Pass*), *Saroja* and *In the Name of Buddha*, are studied in detail. Postwar films also feature under the genre of war films. Six movies are identified in this category out of which *Dheepan* is studied. Indian perspectives on the war are considered too. Out of around eleven movies listed, *Kannathil Muthamittal* is considered for analysis in this thesis. The subgenres of war films, like propaganda films, biographical movies, documentaries and short films are studied as different categories.

While *Ira Madiyama*, *Alimankada* and *Igillena Maluwo* were made in Sri Lanka by Sri Lankan directors, *Dheepan*, *In the Name of Buddha* and *Kannathil Muthamittaal* were shot in France, London and India, and India and Sri Lanka, respectively. The geography of South India, especially Kerala is very similar to the northern parts of Sri Lanka that moviemakers like Touchriver and Santhosh Sivan (*The Terrorist*) have made use of the space of the state to portray a Sri Lankan setting. When the northern parts of the island nation remained inaccessible, Kerala landscape offered an alternative. These movies address a lot of human emotions through the characters. The cast did a splendid job in giving life to the emotions. Except in *Igillena Maluwo*, there is hope remaining for the characters in all the other movies. While *Ira Madiyama* and *Alimankada* have portrayed a balanced view of both the communities, *In the Name of Buddha* and

*Kannathil Mutthamittal* were sympathetic towards the Tamils, if not the rebels. *Saroja* features how human beings are basically the same, irrespective of the ethnic or racial differences.

Women are portrayed as both strong and docile in these movies. In *Ira Madiyama*, we see a damsel in distress in Chamari who has lost her husband and seeks the help of a journalist to accompany her. Kamani, Duminda's sister, ends up in a brothel after losing her job (see fig 4.1.). Duminda's conversation with another girl there shows how poverty has forced many girls in Sri Lanka to take up prostitution without their families knowing it.



Fig. 4.1. Still from *Ira Madiyama* (32. 54)  
 Vithanage, Prasanna, director. *Ira Madiyama* (*August Sun*).  
 YouTube, uploaded by Loku Movies, 2 Apr. 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnTw33XjjVY>

Kamala Velaithan of *The Road from Elephant Pass* is a strong woman, both physically and mentally. She is a member of the LTTE and is very vocal about her hatred of the Sinhalese army. In *Igillena Maluwo*, we

see the desperate Sinhalese girl who gets impregnated by her lover, a soldier. She later loses her father too. The Sinhalese widow who tries to rear her children shows yet another face of womanhood. She is having an affair with someone for which she later loses her life. The scared Tamil girl who gets her first period while on a bus is a tragic figure who manages to escape the eyes of the LTTE but loses her family.

In *Saroja*, we see Varuni's mother initially advising her husband against the idea of giving refuge to Sarojini and her father. The Sinhalese woman initially considers Tamils to be their enemies and is scared about what would happen to her family if Tamils are captured from their home. She even mentions Sarojini as a 'serpent' when the child is brought home. Later, we see a drastic change in her attitude. She begins to treat Sarojini like her own daughter. When her husband is in two minds, it is she who gives him courage and perspective.



Fig. 4.2. Yalini in Trauma: Scene from *Dheepan*  
Romney, Jonathan. "Film of the Week: *Dheepan*". *Film Comment*, 5 May 2016, <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/film-week-Dheepan/>

Yalini in *Dheepan* is a traumatised woman who strives to flee the country. She gets hold of a girl to pose as her daughter. Once in France, she finds a job and tries to begin her life fresh. She is further traumatised by the happenings that occur there (see fig.4.2.) but finally manages to attain peace with the man she has begun to love.



Fig. 4.3. Still from *Kannathil Muthamittal*: *Kannathil Muthamittal* (8. 49) Ratnam, Mani,director. *Kannathil Muthamittal Tamil Movie Scenes / Keerthana meets her real mother Nandita Das*. YouTube, uploaded by AP International,12 June 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43LOp9nzL6c>

Shyama of *Kannathil Muthamittal* is a strong woman who initially wanted a normal life but was later thrown into the violence of the war. She became a rebel after leaving her new born child back in India. She breaks down when she meets Amudha and the softer side of the mother is revealed in her (see fig.4.3.). Indra, Amudha's adoptive mother, on the other hand, manages to remain composed and helps the mother and daughter to connect.

Some of these movies portray the perspective of children. How a child sees the war would be different from the adult viewpoint. The movie *Saroja* (2000) by Somaratne Dissanayake portrays the camaraderie between two girls, one Tamil and the other Sinhalese. The world of children knows no differences of language and ethnicity. Amudha's (*Kannathil Muthamittal*) perspective is not different. All she knows is that the country is unsafe. She wants her mother to go along with her to India where it is safe and happy. Illayaal of *Dheepan* is a child orphaned in the war. She is found by Yalini from a refugee camp to pose as her daughter. Yalini and Illayal were *Dheepan*'s wife and kid. The woman and child assume the false identities to flee the country. Illayal tries to find a family in the strangers she is with. Arfath, the Tamil Muslim boy in *Ira Madiyama*, is sad about leaving his dog behind.



Fig. 4.4. Arfath and his father: Scene from *Ira Madiyama* “August Sun (2003) Photo Gallery”. *IMDb*, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0381280/mediaviewer/rm599533568>



The child actor who played the part had faced similar circumstances in real life. The huge shock of the situation registers in Arafath's mind as the sorrow of losing his dog. He does not know about the politics behind the Tigers chasing Tamil Muslims away from their village (see fig.4.4.). Children's perspectives help us focus on the everyday aspects of domestic life. It would be tinted with an innocent kindness. When the life of civilians during a war is mapped, it would include even the slightest ways in which their domestic lives are affected. *Ira Madiyama* and *Igillena Maluwo* portray the lives of different characters that represent different categories of civilians who are affected by the war.

*Ira Madiyama* tells the stories of a Sinhalese woman who lost her soldier husband, a Sinhalese army man who finds his sister in a brothel, and a Tamil Muslim boy who has to leave his dog behind while fleeing from home. In *Flying Fish*, the plight of a Sinhalese woman impregnated by a soldier, a Sinhalese widow who gets stabbed by her son and a Tamil girl whom the LTTE tries to take away are featured. It is to be noted that the films feature both Sinhalese and Tamil characters. Women characters are mostly docile and projections or victims of male insecurities. It changes in *The Road from Elephant Pass* where an equally strong female character is presented (see fig.4.5.). Elephant Pass in Sri Lanka was border where the two factions collide. The movie too becomes a middle ground where discourses happen. Two sides are presented and peace comes as love.



Fig. 4.5. Kamala holding a gun: Scene from *The Road from Elephant Pass* “Confronting the outmoded ideals”. *Clearing The Road from Elephant Pass*, *Sunday Observer*, 25 May 2008, <http://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2008/05/25/spe05.asp>

It is interesting to note how characters in these movies find hope amidst the tough situations. Movies, as war narratives, win when it unveils peaceful alternatives. In *Ira Madiyama*, cricket commentary runs in the background of most of the scenes. Vithanage has brilliantly suggested how, despite all the differences that caused a bloody long war, the country has things which can unify its people. We see how love becomes a unifying force in *Alimankada*. Despite the differences in language, ethnicity and beliefs, Wasantha and Kamala falls in love and leaves everything else behind.

*In the Name of Buddha* tries to portray the Sri Lankan scene in the early years of the war with some verisimilitude. Rooted in compassion, the movie questions the atrocities committed in the island by those who believe in Buddha, the pioneer of ahimsa. The movie treats the LTTE with sympathy. It includes events which are similar to those narrated by

witnesses in testimonials. The movie is melodramatic (see fig.4.6.) and has shocking violence too (see fig.4.7.).



Fig. 4.6. Siva appeals for help: Scene from *In the Name of Buddha* Liyanage, Priyath. ” Siva appeals for help from the Tamil Tigers' leader”. ” Protests over Sri Lanka war film”. *BBC News*, 16 May 2003, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/3035105.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3035105.stm)

The movie features the real life story of a doctor who escaped from Sri Lanka by destroying his passport. In a personal telephonic interview, the director Rajesh Touchriver commented on how the movie works as the first among a series of war movies. He stated that he plans for a sequel to the movie which would portray the complete picture (Appendix II).



Fig. 4.7. Still from *In the Name of Buddha* (1. 24) Touchriver, Rajesh. director. *In the Name of Buddha*. YouTube, uploaded by Rajesh Touchriver, 5 Sep. 2005, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj0ndcm7cIs>

He spoke about how he did not include the abuse faced by women within the LTTE. He said: “I met many women who were in the LTTE and got abused. Not for recruitment. It was there before Kittu’s death. If (the movie was made) now, I would have included it” (Appendix II). *In the Name of Buddha* faced controversies and bans. *Saroja* (2000) by Somaratne Dissanayake portrays how ethnic divide affects civilian lives in a Sri Lankan village. Sarojini, a seven-year-old Tamil girl, witnesses her mother’s murder by the Tigers. Her father, Sundaram, is injured and both of them seek refuge in the jungle. There is a scene where a Sri Lankan soldier, moved by the child’s agony, lets go of the father and daughter. The child also prevents her father, a member of the LTTE, from firing at the retreating soldier. “Army doesn’t kill children” is something that is heard multiple times in the movie. The Sri Lankan Army is portrayed as gentle while the Tigers, or terrorists, are featured as evil that disrupt civilian lives. Sundaram’s fourteen-year-old son was forcefully conscripted to the LTTE and once the child has died, they return for the next male in the family. Sundaram, though he is seen wearing the cyanide vial and holding gun, is against the Tigers. He has been forced to join them. The themes of forceful conscriptions, child recruitment and civilian shootings by the Tigers are featured in this movie.



Fig. 4.8. Still from *Saroja* (32. 15)  
 Dissanayake, Somaratne, director. *Saroja - සරෝජා (2000) Sinhala Full Movie*. YouTube, uploaded by Sinhala Movies, 9 Nov. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4BnfAhkDeg>

The movie makes a distinction between Tamil Tigers and Tamilians. The movie clearly states its perspective in the scene where Varuni's father explains the difference to her (see fig.4.8.).

Varuni: Daddy, are there Tigers in this jungle?

Father: With two legs or four legs. . .

Varuni: Are the Tigers with two legs Tamils?

Father: All the Tamils are not Tigers. Some Tamils are fighting the army. They are called Tigers.

Varuni: Are they bad?

Father: (nods)

Varuni: Are their children also Tigers?

Father: No. There are many good Tamil people. (*Saroja*)

Varuni and Sarojini teach Sinhala and Tamil to each other. For the children, languages are just a way to communicate with each other. There is a scene in which Sarojini puts a *pottu* (traditional mark worn by Tamil women) on her forehead and Varuni asks for one too. Varuni's parents are happy to see the children look alike in their similar clothes and *pottu*. It is the same mark that miscreants looked for to identify and target Tamil people during riots. Sundaram, before bringing Sarojini to the Sinhalese village, erases her *pottu* and removes her bangles even though he believes that the people there would not harm his daughter as she is a child. The corpses of children strewn everywhere during the war tells another story.



Fig. 4.9. Still from *Saroja* (1. 54. 52)

Dissanayake, Somaratne, director. *Saroja - සරෝජා* (2000) *Sinhala Full Movie*. YouTube, uploaded by Sinhala Movies, 9 Nov. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4BnfAhkDeg>

The movie ends with hope. Sarojini, though orphaned by the war, gets a new family. She gets a friend and sister in Varuni (see fig.4.9.). The movie extols virtues like kindness and human fraternity. Although not

comparable in magnitude to *Schindler's List* or *Hotel Rwanda*, this movie too portrays the story of someone who helped the 'other' or the 'enemy' during tough times, risking his own safety. Though not a biopic, the movie can remain as a tribute to those Sinhalese civilians who protected their Tamil friends during the crisis.

The title of the movie *Dheepan* can be read as an alteration of 'dweepan', one who lives in a 'dweep' (island). *Dheepan* was an ordinary man whose life was lost in the war inside the island country. He dies there and another man leaves the island in his name. The real *Dheepan*, thus, still remains in the island and the movie is his story too. *Dheepan* is the representative of thousands of war victims who suffered in the country. When the narrative portrays how one man escaped from the country and set his life up in another, it also points to how those who could not do that live.



Fig. 4.10. Family of Strangers: Scene from *Dheepan*  
 Romney, Jonathan. "Family of strangers". *Dheepan* review – dirt, debris, squalor... and utterly gripping, *The Guardian*, 10 Apr. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/apr/10/Dheepan-observer-film-review>

*Dheepan* is an absence, a very important one. Somewhere in the course of the narrative, a hauntological situation arises. Hauntology, the Derridean concept, discusses how the nostalgia of future can affect the present, like a ghost haunting. It is this absence that influences and decides the fate of another person who assumes his persona. The ex-militant Shivadasan leaves the country as *Dheepan* and adapts to a peaceful domestic life abroad (see fig.4.10). He does what the real *Dheepan* would have done, or in better words, he lives the life *Dheepan* would have lived.

The movie *Dheepan* was conceived and executed by personalities in the French film industry. Antonyhasan Jesuthasan, the actor who played Shivadasan, was an LTTE child soldier once and it is said that he contributed positively towards the accuracy of the narrative. The body scars in the scene showing Shivadasan taking a shower are real. The casting of important characters was perfect in this movie. Kalieaswari Srinivasan, the theatre-artist from Chennai, portrayed a Sri Lankan refugee who travels by the name of Yalini.

Identity is one of the major themes discussed in the movie. In order to earn his daily bread, Shivadasan is seen selling glowing Mickey Mouse ears by wearing one himself (see fig.4.11). It gives a surreal tone to the scene. One's sense of identity is shattered once he/she becomes a refugee. His/her life becomes something like a staged performance, scripted by



someone else. In this movie, it is more pronounced as the characters assume fake identities.



Fig. 4.11. Surreal imagery: Scene from *Dheepan*  
Romney, Jonathan. “Film of the Week: *Dheepan*”. *Film Comment*, 5 May 2016, <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/film-week-Dheepan/>

Three central characters live with fake identities and try to fit in to it. Three strangers are forced to act as a family and later, they become one in real. It portrays the category of people who are usually left unrepresented- refugees. According to Audiard, as said in an interview conducted by Jonathan Romney, “We see migrants as people who have no faces and no names, no identity, no unconscious, no dreams. And what happens to all the violence they’ve been through? I wanted to give them a name, a face, a shape - and give them a violence of their own” (*Guardian*).

*Dheepan*, or Shivadasan, often dreams about a forest which, in psychoanalytic terms, can symbolise his unconscious. The forest, a trope

which connotes the unknown, may even be a reflection of his fears in the unknown place. Coming to a new country as a refugee brings out the feeling of being lost- one of the traumatic experiences associated with childhood. The characters flee their nation in quest of peace but what awaits them in the foreign land is an episode of intense violence.

Shivadasan, an ex-rebel, doesn't find it difficult to embrace violence but Yalini cannot accept it. In a scene, Yalini and Shivadasan speak about shootings.

Yalini: "Doesn't it remind you of something?"

Shivadasan: "It's different here"

Yalini: "Because *you* did the shooting there?" (*Dheepan*)

Here, Yalini exhibits the true civilian anxiety about violence. For a civilian, any violence is bad. She, though a Tamilian, cannot accept the violence Shivadasan has committed as a Tamil Tiger.

When it comes to the question of genre, *Dheepan* does not fit into the Procrustean limits of any particular one. It can be termed as a war movie portraying post-war events, at the same time falling under the 'refugee movie' subgenre. As the movie progresses, it becomes an action movie filled with stunts and violence. A blending of genres works well in movies portraying wars as there are different perspectives being featured. *Dheepan* sets a fine example for this.

Indian perspective, as featured in movies, on the Sri Lankan war is mostly confined to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The event is portrayed in many films like *Kuttrapatrikai*, *Madras Café*, *Mission 90 Days*, etc. The life of civilians in Sri Lanka does not seem to be a matter of concern for Indian filmmakers who concentrate only on white-washing the Indian involvement in the war. *Kannathil Muthamittal*, a movie which is synonymous to ‘Sri Lankan war movie’ in India, features the story of a child who seeks her mother in the tumultuous battlefields of the island. Amudha, who grew up in Chennai as the pampered daughter of Thiruchelvan and Indira, is let known on her ninth birthday that she is not their biological child. Amudha was adopted by Thiruchelvan from a refugee camp in Rameswaram where Shyama, a Sri Lankan refugee, gave birth to her before fleeing back to the island. A stubborn Amudha wants to find her mother and the family takes her to Sri Lanka. Bombings and shootings scare the little girl but once she meets her mother, she shoots out questions that shatter the latter. She wants to take her mother back to the safety of India but Shyama refuses. She asks Amudha to return to Sri Lanka once it is peaceful (see fig.4.12.).



Fig. 4.12. Shyama breaks down: Scene from *Kannathil Muthamittal* “*Kannathil Muthamittal* (2002) Photo Gallery”*IMDb*, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0312859/mediaviewer/rm1665075456>

The movie is a melodramatic portrayal of the emotional sufferings of a child orphaned by the war. Unlike the majority of children who remain lost in refugee camps, Amudha gets a loving family. The set of questions she asks Shyama portrays a child’s vision. For a child, the basic need is to be with its mother. There are many children who lost their parents in the war, most of them not lucky enough to get a privileged life like Amudha. The movie treats the LTTE group sympathetically but does not stoop to the levels of propaganda. Does it portray the ‘truth’? It takes out a sliver of truth from the war and adds so much embellishment to it to make it a ‘normal’ commercial movie. It creates a story remaining within the safe zone of domestic sentimentality. Though it is a good movie, with all the necessary ingredients, it does not rise to become a good narrative on the war or its trauma. It has concentrated more on characters, which is not a

wrong practice. In the extreme caution taken to avoid the marshy grounds of political incorrectness, the movie has lost its essence. On the other hand, it was a movie which people saw. It did not end up in controversies and bans. Compromising on effectively narrating the traumatic truth becomes a necessary evil in such circumstances.

Most films end with the protagonists fleeing the island nation. In almost all the movies, the notion of 'peace' is equated with the physical escape from the country. While it stays close to reality, there are people who remained in the island and tried to build new lives. In *Kannathil Muthamittal* too, there is no discussion or judgment, not even commentary, on the happenings on the island. Like *Amudha*, the spectators are returned to the safety of a peaceful country. We are to wait till there is peace on the island. Though there are brief glimpses of the lives of refugees in the movie, it is not much explored. The conditions in the refugee camps and the pain suffered by the refugees are masked behind the story of an orphaned child who gets all the good things in life later. The story of refugees does not begin nor end there. Moving our gazes away till the problem is solved is not the ideal response. The movie in no way opens a fruitful discourse on the war. As a movie, *Kannathil Muthamittal* fares well; but it becoming the main narrative or an important perspective on the war is definitely an issue. It surely is a compromised narrative.

Something that is worth considering in the movie is the transformation in Shyama's life. Married to Dileepan, a supporter of the Tamil rebel organisation, Shyama's dreams of a normal family life are shattered. Shyama is a patriot who loves her soil more than she loves God or even her man. Though they love each other, Dileepan considers the liberation of his land above everything. There is a scene in which Shyama asks Dileepan to pray for kids.

Dileepan: I don't want a child.

Shyama: Why?

Dileepan: Don't want.

Shyama: I am asking why.

Dileepan: The child should not be born till peace dawns.

Till there is peace in this soil, I don't want a child. One day, liberation will come, peace will come. Bear me a child then, not now. (*Kannathil Muthamittaal*)

The climax scene, considered the best in the movie, is made remarkable with the use of background music that evokes pathos. The sudden rain that descends on the characters symbolises their emotional states. Amudha, who had prepared twenty questions to ask her mother, stops with three when she feels that her mother did not care for her much as a baby. Once Shyama's tough demeanor breaks, she holds Amudha and cries. The child, unaware of what happens in the country, wants Shyama to go to Madras

with her. She says that there are no shootings in Madras, and tries to cajole her mother by enlisting the luxuries that they can have there. The innocence of the child is the best perspective to view how a war spoils civilian lives.

Among biographical movies made on the war, *Pulipaarvai* and *Porkkalathil Oru Poo* deserve mention. Both are Indian movies, based on the lives and deaths of Balachandran Prabhakaran and Isaipriya respectively. Balachandran, the 12-year old son of Velupillai Prabhakaran, was killed during the last phase of the war. The army version of his death being a result of cross fire was challenged by a photograph that showed the child with a snack in his hand, apparently held in custody by the army (see fig.4.13.). He was discovered with bullet wounds in his chest later.



Fig. 4.13. Reel and the Real: Balachandran Prabhakaran's biopic *Pulipaarvai* Bhaskaran, Gautaman. "Balachandran". *Coming soon: Puli Paarvai, a film on LTTE leader Prabhakaran's son*. *Hindustan Times*, 5 Aug 2014, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/regional-movies/coming-soon-puli-paarvai-a-film-on-ltte-leader-prabhakaran-s-son/story-8f8jrq4WA276eKSwwDYHPN.html>

Shobha (Isaipriya) was a Sri Lankan Tamil journalist who was allegedly raped and brutally murdered by the Sri Lankan army during the war. According to the Sri Lankan army, she was a member of the LTTE. The movie attracted controversy for the theme as well as its treatment. The movie was denied release by the Censor Board due to the fear of international relations with Sri Lanka going sour. It also invited controversy as Isaipriya's family had protested against the film. It had scenes which featured brutal violence. The maker of the movie, K Ganeshan, after a couple of years, made another movie titled *18. 05. 2009* which was cleared by the Censor Board. There was a court case which stated that the director has just renamed the old film. *18. 05. 2009* was featured as a work of fiction. There are many short films made on the war out of which *Vanni Mouse* by Tamiliam Subas has won many accolades (see fig.4.14).



Fig. 4.14. Still from *Vanni Mouse* (7. 52)

Subas, Tamiliam, director. *Vanni Mouse Tamil Short Film* YouTube, uploaded by Alfreda Collinsworth, 10 Feb 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3HnG76mFKSo>

Neluka Silva, in "A Peace of Soap: Representations of Peace and Conflict in Popular



Teledramas in Sri Lanka” (*South Asian Media Cultures: Audiences, Representations, Contexts*) speaks of the genre of teledramas. The author discusses, based on the study of two popular teledramas *A9* and *Take this Road*, how teledramas carry out mass social communication and thus is a potent tool in knowing about the identity of the ‘other’. It breaks stereotypes and employs “devices such as evoking reminiscences of inter-communal harmony in a peaceful past or exposing the agendas of conflict dividers and peace process spoilers” (164).

Teledramas which use popular techniques that involve song and dance become a part of the everyday civilian life in the country as it caters to the need for entertainment. It also stresses on reconciliation by portraying basic similarities between the communities (see fig.4.15.).



Fig. 4.15. Teledrama in Sri Lanka: Scene from *Take this Road* “*Me Paren Enna*’ : Teledrama travels the A9”. *Sunday Observer*, 11 Jan 2004, <http://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2004/01/11/fea19.html>

The visual representations of the Sri Lankan Civil War offer multiple perspectives. The question of why some movies are made while some others are shelved would seek answers in the postwar scene of the country.

## CONCLUSION

*Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.*

-Fred Rogers

When I began the work on this thesis, something I heard a lot was the question of 'Why Sri Lanka'. I have tried to answer with facts from history, and even mythology, about how the island was always connected, though not literally, to India; how similar is the northern part of Sri Lanka to south India; how geographically and culturally close are the people to us; how the value of human lives are same everywhere and the sufferings from war are universal. Through the course of this work, the other side of the coin has also evolved. I realised how 'why not Sri Lanka' is also a very valid question. Why is the Sri Lankan war not represented like the other wars in history? What makes Sri Lanka different?

Peace in Sri Lanka is a very fragile entity. Along the course of this work, the island faced riots and terrorist attacks. Mass graves were excavated which posed a lot of questions as well as blame games. It proved again that even after a decade, the wound is still raw in the minds of the natives. For tourists, Sri Lanka is always about shining beaches and turquoise waters. My experience of visiting the country as part of this work

was different as it involved travelling to those areas which were destroyed in the final days of the war. Northern parts of Sri Lanka were not accessible for a long time. Now, the government promotes tourist activity in those areas which is clearly an instance of 'dark tourism'. Moreover, for Indians, the Ramayana circuit pilgrimage would be incomplete without visiting the *Asura* king's land.

The Sinhalese are a very cordial group and they focus their best on tourism. Colombo looks like any other metropolis, with skyscrapers and buzzing human activity. The influence of Buddhism is very evident in the city. There are a lot of Buddha statues and stupas. Tourists are cautioned against doing anything that would imply disrespect to Buddha, like taking photographs with backs faced towards the statue. The war always comes freely into the conversations of the Sinhalese. It seems that their life and locale is marked by the war. Jaffna is very similar to Tamil Nadu. The areas which were under the control of the LTTE too suffered. I visited the famed Jaffna Fort, a relic of the Portuguese rule of the nation. It was destroyed in parts by the LTTE as well as the locals. The war did not confine its devastation to historic buildings. There is a water tower which was bombed by the LTTE. It used to provide water to the whole city. I passed through Vanni, the area which was the arena of genocide during the last days of the war. There were ruins of houses which were bombed that stood like mute witnesses.

There is an element of fear that I could sense in the people in the Tamil areas. None were ready to talk openly about the LTTE or its leader. There is an instance of how a native blatantly argued that no film named *Prabhakaran* was, and would never be, made in Sri Lanka and cautioned me not to ask for a copy of the movie in any of the shops. (*Prabhakaran* (2008) is a bilingual biographical war film by Thushara Peiris which presents a humanitarian angle of the war). The name of the LTTE leader is not uttered aloud even today. Once familiar, the people opened up and some compared Prabhakaran to the legendary Ravana who was a good administrator. Fear was always in the air as there is the possibility of an army man or military patrol materialising, as if out of thin air, anytime, anywhere, in the country. Even in the fearful silence, the relief of the war's end was evident. Every other concern dissolves in the finality of a peaceful life.

My work was to map the course of the war through films, concentrating on the civilian angle. I always thought that there were only two players, two warring sides, in any war. Civilians, the third group, the one which suffers the most, is mostly forgotten. Sri Lankan war narratives are peppered with strategic silences and political correctness. The official narratives of the victors with facts and figures as well as the accusatory version of the others seemed incomplete. It is then that I looked towards testimonies in which those who were silenced spoke. It was genuine and

raw. The need for a polyphonic study is imperative and it should include the voice of civilians. Like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle finally falling into place, the hope for the complete picture evolving out of multiple perspectives and representations was my starting point.

The event, that is the civil war that plagued the country for more than three decades, was studied first, concentrating on the root causes of the conflict. Once a disastrous event occurs, it is originally registered into the psyche of the victims and witnesses as trauma. This thesis studied the concept of trauma through psychoanalytic theory, beginning with Freud. My work explored the different kinds of trauma that survivors must have undergone in Sri Lanka. Instances from movies were included to elaborate. Trauma, which is unspeakable, becomes memory and there are changes made to it by the human mind. The memory works at both individual and collective levels. Once the memory gets represented, it comes to the public sphere. It becomes open to interpretation and discourse. Finally, a version is accepted as the truth; it becomes history. History can also be fabricated.

The first chapter of this thesis studied the cultural milieu of the island nation. To address the ethnic tension between the two groups, it is imperative to study their relationship through history. As mentioned earlier, the Sinhalese trace their ancestry to Prince Vijaya and his followers who were expelled from India (5th century BCE). In the *Mahavamsa* version of the story, Vijaya's ancestry can be traced to Vanga and Kalinga

kingdoms of ancient India. The legend of a lion fathering children with a princess appears in this chronicle. Vijaya's first wife, Kuveni, does not find mention in *Dipavamsa*. Xuanzang, the Chinese traveler, gives a different account where the setting is shifted to south India. *Yakkha* tribe does not figure in this version either. In the Jataka version, as found in the cave paintings of Ajanta, the lion's son is the prince who established the race in the island. The story also features supernatural ingredients like *Yakkhinis* who devour human beings as well as a flying horse.

Mythology and history are two different fields. When supernatural elements blend with historical accounts, mythopoesis occurs. In Sri Lanka, *Mahavamsa* is treated as history, even today. Power helps to present mythology in the garb of history. Keeping aside the mythological ingredients, let us analyse the story of how the Sinhala race originated. An objective perspective would feature invasions by ancient kingdoms. The original inhabitants of the island belong to the Veddoid race, ancestors of the *Veddah* tribe. Why do then two ethnic groups which migrated from India fight for the island as their own? Is it the Aryan-Dravidian divide?

The Sinhalese consider themselves to be of Indo-Aryan origin while the Tamils are proud Dravidians. The essential difference in race, as in India, has caused an 'othering' in Sri Lanka too. Religion adds to it, as the major divisive factor. Majority of the Sinhalese are Buddhists who belong to the *Theravada* sect which is a puritan branch that supposedly keeps the

Buddha's line unbroken. Though Prince Vijaya reached the island much before Buddhism sprouted there, it became associated to the sense of nationalism and antiquity. The question of who the original owners of the island are seems to be farcical when the aborigines still live as a tribe there. It was a conflict between two equally strong political forces, in the name of faith and language.

The Tamils had imagined a separate space for them in the island and named it *Eelam*. It is an imagined community which exists in the minds of Tamils all around the world. Was it the root cause of the bloody war? The call for regional autonomy is not the only reason for the war. The Sinhalese government imposed measures which the Tamils viewed as discriminatory. The British too, with their move for taking census based on race, had ignited the fire of separatism. The LTTE which began as a movement for the Tamil people became authoritarian in the later stages. It did its share in making civilian lives miserable, for Sinhalese and Tamils alike.

Sri Lanka is unique in the sense that it is a multiracial, multicultural and multilinguistic nation. Nationalism, as discussed in the first chapter, can be various. Sri Lankan nationalism can be classified under 'ethnonationalism'. When the nationalistic feeling of the majority of citizens is based on their religion and language, how can a nation stand united? In a way, the island nation can be studied as a microcosm of India which, if linguistic chauvinism and ensuing separatism spreads, would be



tougher to handle. India is a land of different languages and cultures. It is very populous and too diverse to be united under the canopy of a nation. What unites India is the different kind of nationalism that is shared by its citizens which transcends all divides. Once a group tries to impose their culture as the norm, things can go bad in any nation.

In this context, it would be apt to discuss how a Tamil uprising in the future in Sri Lanka (or the Tamil diaspora) would affect India. It was the war that ended in 2009, not the ideology. The war did not end with a solution to the problem. There are a group of Tamils, scattered around the globe, with *Eelam* in their dreams. There is a government in exile, the Transnational Government of Tamil *Eelam* (TGTE), which aspires for the *Eelam*. The remnant cadres have, according to the Government of India, clandestinely initiated regrouping of the LTTE. The Government of India, in 2019, has extended the ban on LTTE for another five years on the grounds of the diaspora spreading anti-India sentiments among the Sri Lankan Tamils.

If the LTTE re-emerges, it would be stronger with persons and resources spread worldwide. The anti-India sentiment holding the country responsible for the defeat of the LTTE can pose security threats to Indian personalities, as occurred in 1991 when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated. The chance of Indian Tamils demanding a separate nation on the basis of *Eelam* would be too far-fetched an idea, at least for now, as federal

elements in India make the situation here very different from Sri Lanka.

Keeping in mind that the concept of *Dravida Nadu* has re-emerged in the southern states, Sri Lanka exists in front of us as a cautionary tale.

The second chapter theorised the concept of trauma and placed the Sri Lankan War in its context. Trauma is an interdisciplinary phenomenon. It cannot be confined to medical science. The physical as well as psychological symptoms can be analysed via the sciences and cures be administered, but to address the state which trauma leaves a mind in, we need the aid of humanities. How trauma is beyond language and is unrepresentable is studied in humanities. The war left many minds in trauma which they could not speak out to the world. Trauma does it to human minds; it silences. Once they were ready to speak, there were none to listen. Stories were branded as lies. The trauma which is left latent would manifest in other ways, some of which can be destructive. Many are still scared to speak about the war and some gave interviews to me only on the promise of anonymity. Mrs. T, one of them, explained in detail her experiences of the war. She lives a secure life, with a high-profile job, in a safe country. When she asked me not to mention her name in my work, I realised the intensity of fear that is present in the survivors, even after years.

The Sri Lankan Tamils, as a society, has not healed. The concept of cultural trauma is applied in the thesis to address the issue. Trauma works

in both individual and collective levels, the latter of which can be cultural too. Their cause was not addressed after the war. The long war had tired them, all the civilians wanted was peace. In time, things can change. The concept of intergenerational trauma too adds to the issue.

I studied Sri Lankan war movies as narratives of civilian trauma. Some of the movies have portrayed the instances of trauma I have identified from testimonies and documents. There are limitations for filmmakers in Sri Lanka in portraying the war. There are good films that have presented ethically neutral perspectives, but most of them have received flak. When there is no consensus on how the event is documented, different contradictory versions would always try to negate the other.

The third chapter dealt with how a war is remembered. Touching on concepts from memory studies and the genre of testimonial narratives, the chapter enquired how the Sri Lankan war is remembered by the citizens. Once the 'unspeakability' of trauma passes, memories form in the minds of the survivors. Acknowledging their experiences is the first step towards emotional rehabilitation and reconciliation. What happened in Sri Lanka was the opposite. The memories of a community were branded as lies. They were prohibited from mourning their lost ones. In a war-torn space, the government installed memorials that flaunted their victory. The traumatic experiences of the community were exhibited as dark tourism. Even within such restrictive environs, testimonies surfaced. People spoke

about their losses and sufferings. Books were published where these narratives found place, but in a language that they may not even know how to read. Films that featured their woes were banned from release. In the struggle of starting from square one, they forgot everything else. There were instances where I could not read through or watch certain testimonies at a stretch. It was close to what can be called as vicarious trauma. The pain I have witnessed through words and visuals were potent enough to traumatise me.

Art, the creative platform, which can be used as a cathartic tool, can play a vital role in such communities. Art should be free from the shackles of authority. There should be freedom of expression, which, in Sri Lanka, does not hold true. Individual and cultural memories should be represented. Films can, to an extent, achieve this goal. In the garb of fictionality, the truth can be submerged between layers of imagery which can be revealed to those who seek. Films can also bring the two communities together by portraying positive plots. It can bring international attention to matters that are hidden behind the veil of political correctness. Films create images that can be studied and addressed, when reality is kept locked by those in power. Movies can become commemorations too.

This thesis looked at how trauma is represented in Sri Lankan war narratives and is open to study in areas like narrative therapy. It is a form of psychotherapy in which the problem of a subject is externalized before

looking at it objectively whereby it becomes more open to treatment and cure. Cinema therapy, a form of similar self-help tool used to treat mental and medical issues, can be applied to the treatment of traumatised individuals. Movies which can address trauma can be identified or efforts can be initiated to promote movies which can help heal the society. Film/video-based therapy by Joshua Lee Cohen uses collaborative moviemaking with subjects as an aid in psychotherapy. Films, if they have the power to cure mental illnesses, can help in the healing of emotional wounds too.

The studies in this field should be interdisciplinary in nature, bringing in elements from science and humanities. The goal should be to help a traumatised subject find their voice and stories again. Culture-specific social discourses should be promoted rather than sticking on to western theories. According to Nigel C. Hunt,

In one sense being traumatised, being unable to form a narrative, reduces someone to something less than a person because the traumatised person cannot tell the story of their experiences. This is disorientating and depressing for the person because they cannot make sense of what happened to them. It is important that we, as professionals, find ways of helping people to recover the stories of their lives. (198)

Having thus set the ground by placing the concept of different nationalisms within the cultural history of Sri Lanka, and studying in detail how trauma works as a silencing factor in a war-torn society, the next step was to integrate films into its scope. Films have a wider appeal than books and would represent trauma more effectively. Films are a part of culture, but this thesis required the study of the visual culture of Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan films were greatly indebted to the Indian film industry in its infancy. Why is it that there is no war movie from Sri Lanka that have gained a cult status? Is it because it is a third world nation which cannot boast of the technical paraphernalia of the Hollywood, or even Bollywood? Is there something else that hinders the making of good war movies in the country? These are the questions I sought to answer through the second chapter.

Sri Lanka is a country where the war ended just physically. None of the issues were addressed and no amiable solution was found. The final days of the war had no witnesses; the UN officials and volunteers of the Red Cross were removed from the area. Media had no access into the war arena. The war ended in genocide. The sufferings of the civilians were branded as fabricated. There are no efforts for rehabilitation. In such a nation where there is no consensus on what the truth is, how can someone make a film portraying a version? The authoritarian powers too stifled creativity with censorships and bans. As Mrs. T said in her interview

(Appendix IV), most Tamils do not like to see Sri Lankan war films made by Sinhalese directors as they do not believe that their side of the story would be addressed. There are moviemakers who have opened spaces for discourse, within their limitations. There were films that tried to put forth an objective and balanced view. Some stooped to melodrama while some were merely propagandist. Some films visualised scenes that repeated in testimonies which vouched their verisimilitude.

Films should not just be made as a commercial enterprise. In a world torn by disasters and wars, films can play a vital role as art. There is a realm outside the confines of propaganda or poverty porn that can address an issue in a humanitarian way. Good movies should be made in and about war-torn societies where history and culture should be portrayed as tools for reconciliation. War-ravaged nations should address the psychological rehabilitation of citizens. Memorial stones can wait; it is the human minds that should be addressed first.

**APPENDIX I****A List of Movies Based on the Sri Lankan War****Movies that portrayed the conditions during the war**

*Selvam*

*Ira Madiyama*

*Terrorist*

*Matha*

*Flying Fish*

*Alimankada*

*Ceylon*

*Aeniver*

*Ira Handa Yata*

*Neelam*

*Punchi Suranganavi*

*Saroja*

*Pura Handa Kaluwara*

*A Common Man*

*Sulanga Enu Pinisa*

*This is My Moon (Me Mage Sandai)*

*In the Name of Buddha*

*Samige Kathawa*

*Yazh*

*Prabhakaran*



***Post-war movies****Mutrupulliyaa**Her. Him. The Other**Dheepan**Ini Avan**Lanka**A Gun & A Ring***Movies with an Indian Perspective***Madras Café**Kuttrapatrikai**Mission 90 Days**Kannathil Mutthamittal**Cyanide**Ravana Desam**Madhura Naranga**Kaatrukkenna Veli**Unakkaga Piranthen**Uchithanai Muharnthaal**18. 05. 2009***Biographical movies***Porkkalathil oru Poo (stalled)**Gamani**Pulipaarvai*

**Documentaries**

*Crayons and Paper*

*Demons in Paradise*

*I Witnessed Genocide: Sri Lanka's Killing Fields*

*Lies Agreed Upon*

*My Daughter the Terrorist*

*No Fire Zone*

*No More Tears Sister*

*Sri Lanka: The Search for Justice*

*White Van Stories*

*Matangi/Maya/M. I. A.*

**Propoganda film (not all inclusive)**

*Operation Ellalan*

**Short Film (not all inclusive)**

*Vanni Mouse*

## APPENDIX II

Transcript of my telephonic interview with Mr. Rajesh  
Touchriver, director of *In the Name of Buddha* 26 August 2019

PREETHU: *Let me begin with the most basic questions. Why Sri Lanka?*

*Why the specific time period (later years of 1980s and early 90s)?*

TOUCHRIVER: Sri Lanka is very much connected to our culture. When I say 'ours', I don't mean just Tamilnadu. There is the theory of how Sri Lanka was once connected to India geographically. People from *Ilankai* have come to settle in Kerala. Some of our cuisine is originally Sri Lankan. Malayalam is also very similar to Jaffna Tamil in intonation. About the time period, the movie features events that happened during the late 1980s. It was the time when there was maximum conflict in the area. There were a lot of illegal migrations. When a movie is made, it is natural to concentrate on time periods which offer the best scope for action.

PREETHU: *'In the Name of Buddha'- is it a pointer to the irony on the bloodshed in the name of someone who advocated non-violence or a plea in his name to put an end to the war? How is the title of your movie to be interpreted?*

TOUCHRIVER: Of course, it is about the violence done in the name of someone who preached *ahimsa* or non-violence. I believe in the ideology of non-violence. Most issues in the world are easy to resolve if both sides

are patient enough to sit and talk on it. It never happens. Everything boils down to bloodshed, massacres and wars. There would hardly be anyone left behind to enjoy the victory earned by violence. One cannot just topple the system. A system is necessary to govern people. Armed revolutions against systems cannot succeed in the long run.

PREETHU: *How effectively has the Sri Lankan War been marked in the silver screen? What are the factors that decide the 'sellability' of war in movies? Why some wars are 'celebrated' more?*

TOUCHRIVER: The Sri Lankan War was the issue of a small third-world nation. It did not have big players as in some of the other wars. Apart from being a creative phenomenon producing a work of art, moviemaking is also a business. One invests money into it with the hope of gaining profit. The Sri Lankan War is too regional in scope for international moviemakers to invest in it.

PREETHU: *The movie features the initial stages of the war but it was conceived much later. The situations were much different then. Were there things that were purposefully left unsaid in the movie? If you had made the movie now, what would have been omitted or added to the narrative?*

TOUCHRIVER: I cannot say that I have omitted anything on purpose. See, it was a biographical movie that was made on the experiences of someone who left Sri Lanka then. His life and the events associated with his migration were marked in the backdrop of the war. If I had included more

unrelated events into the narrative, it would have turned into a collage. Of course, there are things that I haven't mentioned in the movie due to it being outside the scope of the content. For instance, I haven't mentioned anything about the sexual abuse women had to suffer within the LTTE. It was a reality that could not be incorporated into my narrative.

PREETHU: *'In the Name of Buddha' is the story of Shiva who reaches a safe place in the end. But the Sri Lankan war continued through yet another decade. Are there any plans of a sequel to the movie?*

TOUCHRIVER: I have plans for a sequel to the movie. I have already written down a script which features the last ten days of Velupillai Prabhakaran. Talks are going on; let us see how it works out. I also plan to make a biopic on Kittu.

PREETHU: *Can you share your experiences during the research on the war for the movie? Were there any compromises you had to make as a film maker in the materialisation of such a controversial subject?*

TOUCHRIVER: Almost everything has been included in the movie. There were no compromises made. In fact, my research was limited to the scope of the movie. It was a character-oriented film, as I have mentioned earlier. I had met the person on whose life the movie is made on. He has moved on in his life. He is married to a Sinhalese woman now. His lover, whom I have also portrayed in the movie, is no more.

PREETHU: *There had been different kinds of responses to the film. Can you talk about some unforgettable ones?*

TOUCHRIVER: The Tamil diaspora in many countries invite me for their meetings and talks. As I have no political interest, I stay away from most of it. I don't like to be branded. I do not have any affiliations or affinities; all I care for is the portrayal of truth. Many people have commented that my movie has featured their experiences as it is. There is a huge population of Sri Lankan Tamils in countries like Norway. I remember an instance when a man expressed his happiness after the screening of my movie in his country. He was someone who has taken a vow of silence till Tamils get a place for themselves. There are such fervent people who still dream of *Eelam*.

PREETHU: *How hard is it to visualise trauma in films? What were the challenges you faced?*

TOUCHRIVER: The main challenge I faced is the lack of budget. Most of such movies are made on a shoestring budget. Bomb blasts, shelling, shootings- everything can be portrayed with spectacular effects if we have the necessary budget. I have tried to do my best in featuring the trauma faced by people in Sri Lanka. Some of the scenes are violent, but it was indeed the truth. I shot the movie in Kerala and Tamilnadu. The geography of these places resembles that of the northern areas of Sri Lanka. I haven't employed any special technical effects in the movie. I wanted to use rain as

a backdrop as it would add to the gloomy ambience. The movie was shot during the monsoon season. Whenever there was no rain, we had to use a machine to create it artificially. Then there is the problem of bans too. It is a real challenge for someone who tries to portray the truth.

PREETHU: *How easy or hard is for an artist to create a purely objective piece of art? Or, is absolute ethical neutrality necessary or possible in war narratives?*

TOUCHRIVER: One has to stay neutral. There should be a balance. In my case, I was concerned about portraying the truth. I do not have affinity towards either of the sides. All I care about is how things can be solved easily through non-violence. There are things that are universal, like pain and suffering. It would remain the same for any group. I have no propaganda. My movie is the tale of human beings who suffered because of a war.

PREETHU: *In the 2003 interview to The Guardian, you have mentioned that your film could 'contribute positively to the Sri Lankan peace process'. How, do you think, can films bring about positive changes in divided societies?*

TOUCHRIVER: Films have a wider reach and appeal than books. All people are not gifted with the power of imagination that brings stories alive in mind. Some need visuals. It aids in their thought process. We know the appeal of films from how movie actors are worshipped in India. I will give

examples from the feedback I got for my movie *Naa Bangaaru Talli* (*Ente* in Malayalam) which featured sex-trafficking. A person has confessed to me later about how he used to go to prostitutes and that my movie has given me a fresher perspective on it. He told me emotionally that he would never do it again. Some procurers have also contacted me and said that they would not engage in it any more. See, that is the power of the visual medium. Even if it is about three of four persons, a good change was made. At the same time, the movie *Drishyam* provided cues to criminals in carrying out murders in many parts of India. That is the other side of the coin. What I am trying to say here is that movies can influence people. It should be put to good use.



### APPENDIX III

My e-mail interview with Mr. Samanth Subramanian, author of  
*This Divided Island* 23 December 2018

PREETHU: *Out of the different vantage points from which one can map the Sri Lankan Civil War, you chose to work on the personal history of survivors. What inspired you, a journalist, to transcend the feelings of uncertainty and incompleteness associated with the risks of prejudice, psychological trauma and unreliability of memory in testimonio?*

SUBRAMANIAN: I believe personal experiences matter. That is the guiding principle of the journalist. We are not theoreticians or policy analysts; we try to build the big picture out of assorted smaller stories. In personal experiences, there is room for uncertainty and incompleteness; it reflects life, because life is uncertain and incomplete, even for people who do not live in a war zone. And there is a moral force to telling these stories, a moral value in capturing and recording them.

PREETHU: *Other than those that features in your book, were there instances in which 'being a Tamil' has helped (or became a hurdle for) you during your research in Sri Lanka? If yes, can you share some of those?*

SUBRAMANIAN: Not really, the key instances are all in the book already. I cannot stress how important it was that I knew the language. I don't think I would have been able to write any kind of book about the Sri Lankan war without that ability.

PREETHU: *The experience of visiting Sri Lanka after the culmination of the war would have been like a going back in time, a revisiting of events, through testimonies. How was your experience in the country? What were the challenges you faced?*

SUBRAMANIAN: Again, many of these are in the book. The country was still fragile, and the government ran it with an iron hand. So as a journalist and as a foreigner, I had to be careful not only for myself but also for the people I was interviewing. People were also unsure about talking about their stories, so it required patience and a certain commitment to hear them out, to persuade them that I was worth talking to.

PREETHU: *How did the experience of listening to the retellings of extremely traumatic events affect you? What were your feelings?*

SUBRAMANIAN: There were certainly effects on my own psyche, which I'm reluctant to discuss in detail. Ultimately, my feelings were tertiary to the feelings of those I was speaking with. They had undergone the real trauma, and it would have been foolish to indulge myself in any reflection about my own feelings on hearing recollections of these events.

PREETHU: *How hard was the process of selection of narratives? Was there something that you wanted to include in your work but had to omit?*

SUBRAMANIAN: Only for lack of space. I worked by trying to pin down a selection of themes first -- the kinds of narratives that would together build a satisfactory picture. In each of these themes, I had multiple narratives, and I chose the strongest among them for the book. So naturally a lot of other material was omitted. But this is the process of writing any book or any work of narrative journalism, really.

PREETHU: *How effective, do you think, is the visual medium in translating the trauma suffered by the civilians? Have you watched any visual narratives (movies/documentaries/short films) based on the Sri Lankan Civil War that have effectively represented civilian trauma?*

SUBRAMANIAN: I can't comment on which medium is more or less effective. Film has its own advantages and disadvantages. Its appeal is perhaps more visceral, but on the other hand, you're only immersed in the narrative for a couple of hours, whereas a book takes much longer to read. A book is a slower burn. Certainly the documentaries produced out of the UK that led to the exposures of war crimes against the Tamils were very effective. So was *Dheepan*, the movie starring Shobha Shakti.

PREETHU: *It is almost a decade since the brutal end of the civil war in Sri Lanka. Where do you think Sri Lanka is in the process of reconciliation?*

*Can narrative, art and dialogue facilitate psychological rehabilitation and reconciliation at grassroots level?*

SUBRAMANIAN: Narrative, art and dialogue all have very important roles to play in such efforts. Part of the process of reconciliation is the process of creating an openness whereby people feel free enough to talk about their experiences. Sri Lanka isn't there yet. There was a moment of hope when President Mahinda Rajapaksa was voted out of power a few years ago, and when the new president, Maithripala Sirisena, promised a raft of political reforms and prosecutions. But none of those have transpired in quite the way we'd have hoped, and as the latest episode of political turmoil shows, Rajapaksa isn't beaten yet.

PREETHU: *Your book was lauded as “a fine literary monument against the government’s attempt at imposed forgetfulness”(William Dalrymple, The Guardian, 9 March 2015). Do you believe that art has the potential to alter the cultural memory of a group of people and helps them in building their shattered identities?*

SUBRAMANIAN: Art certainly helps in retaining memory, or in provoking thought. It can, as the review said, be a counter to establishment forces that try to suppress the narratives of certain groups.

PREETHU: *The war ended as a massive military exercise that wiped out terrorism from the Sri Lankan soil but has not yet provided a closure to the civilians whose lives were jeopardised as collateral damage. Many have*

*emigrated to and sought asylum in foreign lands, adding the trauma of displacement to their list of woes. How was your experience with the diaspora? How effectively have they assimilated into the new countries?*

SUBRAMANIAN: Assimilation is always a matter of time, I believe.

However much a new immigrant wishes to retain every ounce of her old identity -- in her social circles, in her habits -- by the time two generations have passed, her grand children will be integrated quite thoroughly into their "new" country. With the Sri Lankan diaspora, you see people at every stage of that process: people who have migrated as recently as the early 2000s, who are still caught up in the frictions and tussles of their home country, and people who migrated decades ago, whose children have a much weaker link with Sri Lanka. They are unlike immigrants from say India in one aspect: many of them migrated because of the war, and may never have left Sri Lanka otherwise. So it is inevitable that they feel a sense of forced exile, and perhaps an associated trauma with the war that caused them to flee. That makes assimilation harder.

PREETHU: *Your experience of the country, as narrated in your work, is almost seven years old. Have you been in touch with any of those who are featured in the work? If yes, how has life changed for them through these years?*

SUBRAMANIAN: I have been in touch with a few of the key characters, and it would take too long to describe the changes in their lives. Several of

them are stronger now, and have found new paths in their lives. Others are somehow stuck in a particular position in life, unable to advance. The book was actually published only four years ago, and four years is relatively speaking not that long a span of time, after all.

#### APPENDIX IV

My e-mail interview with Mrs. T (name omitted on request),  
a survivor of the Sri Lankan Civil War 23 October 2017

PREETHU: *What is the first memory that comes to your mind when you think about Sri Lanka? Can you share your experience of growing up in the country?*

T: My childhood, which was focused mostly on education, was nurtured by people of the whole town. It later changed to an uncertain, traumatic and self-centered adolescence and adulthood due to the war. I grew up in a small town in Jaffna. Like other Tamil parents, the main focus of mine was our education. I studied in a convent in my home town. Both my parents were teachers, and so, my siblings and I were well-known and respected by the people in town. During school holidays we enjoyed experiencing city life in Colombo (where my cousins and many of my dad's friends lived). In Jaffna, the setup of house/surroundings resembles Kerala (I have been to Kerala).

PREETHU: *Some call it rebellion, some call it a battle for identity- what is your stance on the Sri Lankan Civil War? Do you identify yourself more as a Tamilian or a civilian? Can you share your experiences of witnessing/surviving the war?*

T: It is definitely a battle for identity. Before the war, I was a civilian and now I would like to call myself Tamilian. Although there were some disturbances during my year 10 (GCE O/L) and year 12 (GCE A/L) study period, the war escalated just before I gained entry to the university. I got entry to the most prestigious (at that time) university (Peredeniya) which is situated in the central part of Sri Lanka. The majority of the students who come there are Sinhalese. The first week of my university wasn't great– the trauma had started already. Tamil students were treated badly by the fellow Sinhalese students, and so, with the help of the Muslim Tamil students, all of Tamil students returned home. Gaining entry to university in Sri Lanka (that too for a minority) is already hard and the thought of not being able to pursue undergraduate studies was painful for me (I was in tears all the time). I was hopeless and did not have a clue about what is next.

As I come from a middle class family who could afford it, my parents decided to educate me in India and took me to Tamil Nadu. When my dad left me at the hostel in TN, he told me that he would visit me every six months; but I saw my parents only after three years. During this period, people (including my relatives) died in thousands, wounded, lost homes or moved elsewhere. I used to wait for letters from my parents but was scared to open – because the only news that I read were of this cousin or that friend or known people being died or having lost arm/leg etc. By the time I was in third year, I just worried about my family only – too many to



fathom otherwise. I completed my four years of UG in India and returned to Sri Lanka. I stayed with cousins in Colombo as Jaffna was not safe and did not have job opportunities. I started working in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka (where a mix of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese live).

During the first two years of my employment, there were several disturbances (roundups, shelling, bombing etc) which we luckily survived. It wasn't safe anymore in the third year- saw a lot of shell/bomb stricken dead bodies on roads, shootings between rebels and army, had to hide under the kitchen bench top to avoid shell strikes, and had to travel to office in escorted vehicles every day.

The most traumatic incidents I ever faced:

- A bus full of school teachers was stopped at a sentry point and they were slashed with big butcher knives. I, with other staff, was in the bus behind this. I was doing my last prayers to Murugan (my favourite God at that time) thinking my life was ending. But luckily our brave driver raised the accelerator through paddy fields and took us to a safe place.
- During a period of bombing and shelling between rebels and army, I was hiding under kitchen bench for three days and could not walk straight for days.
- Horror of seeing one of my colleagues shot dead (by a supersonic bomber) while he was riding to see his first new born baby.

- My cousin got shot while hiding under a bed as he was scared of the army
- Travelling from the east to home in Jaffna took nearly three days (instead of 4-5 hrs) by several types of vehicles (a train, bus, doubling on a bicycle in no-man land, a boat and then a three wheeler). In every vehicle we held our breath until reaching home (had to face bombers, shelling etc)

At the same time my parents and siblings were going through lot of difficulties-being in camps, moving towns, house got partially damaged, brother was taken by army, dad got intimidated by the army when he went back to see our house – later he told me about how people talk about the “feeling of blood becoming water” and he felt it at that moment.

I came to a conclusion that all of these were enough to go through, and when the opportunity arose I left the country for good. I renounced my citizenship and I don't have any immediate family members in Jaffna.

*PREETHU: How was the assimilation process after the migration? How well do you think the Tamils have adapted to the new environs? What were the challenges? How does the bonding between the diaspora and formation of groups help in the emotional rehabilitation?*

T: I think after many years of struggle and challenges, Tamils have adapted to the new environment well. Emotional issues, linguistic and cultural differences, joblessness and the need to adapt to very different climate

were the main challenges that I can think of. One of the main challenges I personally felt/feel is bringing up children in this new world. The tradition/culture that we don't want to give up and teach them at the same time accommodating the demands of the current generation - our children who are growing up in this new world with their peer pressure.

PREETHU: *The war is still a raw wound in the collective consciousness of the diaspora. How alive is the dream of Eelam in the diasporic consciousness?*

T: Lot of people still talks about *Eelam*. In small friends group gatherings, we/people discuss how heroic, strong and dedicated the Tamil rebels who fought for *Eelam* were, why it failed in various stages, what could have made it successful, how different the life of Tamils would have been if there was *Eelam* or that we would have been recognised as equal citizens.

PREETHU: *How is the situation in Sri Lanka after the war? Not just about politics but also the personal lives of people. Do you have relatives/friends there?*

T: Lot of changes that I could see when I visited Jaffna last year (after 22 years). These are few.

- People are just interested and hopeful of short term-daily life (i. e. not worried about what the future holds for them)

- People are not caring in nature anymore, just about their family and survival compared to the tradition of looking after the neighbourhood or the whole village.
- Education used to be the main God's gift of the Tamils in Jaffna. Education level has gone down badly and continues to go down because of lack of good teachers, kids are exposed to drugs, Teacher-student respect at school is no more there ... etc
- With the help of diaspora, most of the damaged houses have been renovated, hard to see war damages.
- Lots of Sinhalese touring/doing business in Jaffna.
- One good thing that the previous govt. did was building good new roads to convince internationally that they are doing good things post war.

I do not have friends in Jaffna. Only one cousin is still living in Jaffna.

*PREETHU: In what ways do you think trauma affects survivors? From personal experiences or testimonies, how do you feel trauma changes people? Do you know survivors who suffer from fear, mistrust, guilt or stress disorders? If yes, how are they coping with it or trying to recover?*

T: Experience of trauma can change survivors to either feel more hatred towards the other community (in this case Sinhalese) or it can cause depression/fear/stress. My parents and many of my diaspora friends say that they still feel the stress/fear when seeing a plane or army in armed

vehicles (recalling the bombardment or checkpoints). Some of my friends talk about feeling scared when they are in dark rooms (recalling the living in bunkers for days during bombardments). My dad (not living anymore) refused to look at our damaged house (video taken by someone who visited our town) that he built. This traumatic experience cannot be taken away. We try to cope/recover by talking about it and feel that they are fortunate enough to survive and come up this far.

PREETHU: *Do you watch films which are based on the Sri Lankan Civil War? If yes, how do you feel watching it?*

T: No, I do not watch.

PREETHU: *Can testimonial war narratives be used in the psychological rehabilitation of survivors? In other words, do you think that the visual narratives will have an effect on the survivors? Can films bring about such a change?*

T: Although I do not watch films of this kind, particularly about the Sri Lankan war, I read the plot of “Elephant pass” because you are analysing it. In my opinion, the plot is telling probably about 0.01% of the war story. First of all I do not think any of these films produced (by Sinhalese producers) regarding our war has got real testimonials. Films with incorrect plots as these are offensive and damage the history of Tamils. Secondly, Tamil population from Jaffna or eastern part of Sri Lanka has had a very

secluded and “education only” focused life, so I find that they don’t believe that these kinds of things can do any better to rehabilitate their life.

In my opinion, even real war narrative testimonials shown in films are not going to rehabilitate the survivors; it will worry them more or they may not like to watch it because of fear/or reminding them of the traumatic past.

Real war narratives/testimonials may help survivors’ children to know what their parents or grandparents/relatives went through and teach them a bit of the history of the country. These testimonials may also help the children to realise how fortunate they are and to understand how much sacrifices their parents had done – helping them to work hard in whatever they want to achieve in life. Outside spectators (public in countries where these wars effected people have migrated to) might get encouraged/tolerate to accept the war effected migrants.

*PREETHU: As a spectator, do you feel any movies based on the Sri Lankan war as real testimonies?*

T: As in question 8, I don’t think they are real. I am aware there is a documentary taken by someone in the UK (not sure who) which is real.

*PREETHU: In a war, civilians belong to a third and neutral group which has to bear the yoke of trauma. What is your perspective on the sufferings of the Sinhalese civilians?*

T: I am sure there would have been suffering for the Sinhalese civilians; there are good hearted people who respect equal rights etc. But I feel that

when majority of the Sinhalese voted (when the voting is optional) for a government who did not want to give equal rights/recognition/identity to the Tamils, they (Sinhalese civilians) should know that Tamils would retaliate at one point and they have to face the consequences. Equally the Tamil population had to know that there would be huge losses.

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