

Nationalism and production of precarious life: an anarchist critique of *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*

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Abstract

Following Anarchist theorist Rudolf Rocker, the current paper strives to see the role of state racism in perpetrating violence as depicted in *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* by Nayomi Munaveera. The paper argues that state racism by majoritarian Sinhala elite defines a reductive notion of nationalism which inculcates genocidal violence against the minority community. This nationalism, providing normative definition of human dictates which lives are considered worthy and must be protected by bringing all apparatuses of state in action and which lives must be subjected to extinction by using the monopoly of state violence. The paper further intends to seek the nexus between nationalism and the patterns that it devises to subject ethnic minorities' lives to precariousness. It further seeks to explore that the retributory forces replicate instead of eradicating violence. The paper further argues that nationalism not only defines worthy lives, it, also, provides a cultural frame for defining grievable death thus subjecting minorities to the violence of derealisation.

Keywords: anarchism, state racism, genocidal violence, precarious life, nationalism, grievability, construction of hatred, grievable death, derealisation.

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1. Introduction

Island of a Thousand Mirrors (2002), a debut novel by a Sri Lankan novelist Munaveera presents horrible events which compel the reader to think about genocide. Genocide has assumed a special place in international law and morality. All the events happening in the novel surface only to expose that genocide happens in the fictional world created by Munaveera. Mass killings and gang rapes are rampant. The ethnic minorities are sought out for extinction. Slogans shouted by the perpetrators indicate that the intention is to assert right-wing supremacy and destruction of the minority community. The killings are accompanied by destruction of the property as well as living abodes of the target population. Genocide has been defined in Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on Genocide as:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing means intended to prevent births within the groups; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (Nussbaum, 2007, p. 45).

The text signals that a fundamental breakdown of the supremacy of law happened. Although there seems to be spontaneous rioting in the text but, deliberation in rioting has surfaced from the textual evidence. The killings are the result of hate and fear disseminated from many decades' grassroots works of right-wing organizations which have a symbiotic relationship with the power magnates sitting in the Parliament. The rhetoric of supremacy of law and plurality of democracy proves a sham through the texts as the complicity of the state organs is conspicuous. The offenders commit barbarities with impunity and the state offers no redress to the victimized.

2. Literature review

ITM (2002) is a debut but a mature novel by Sri Lankan writer Nayomi Munaveera. The novel uses recouped history as a method of fictionalizing experiences of individuals as well as a collective community undergoing turmoil caused by three decades of civil war fought in Sri Lanka. The novel tells untold stories of many unnamed and dispossessed people whose lives have been exposed to precariousness by the logic of nationalism. It charts the loss, fear, and disruption on both sides of the margin working to divide the people on an ethno-religious basis. It tells that individual lives are imbricated in the collective history of communities going through turmoil where the turbulences in the personal space coalesce with the panoptic upheavals disrupting personal spaces of home and family.

ITM (2002) critiques "state racism" (Chatterji, 2011, p. 99) where the primacy of "majoritarian will in state decisions" (99) turns minorities' lives into extinction. Here the power wielders use a narrow conception of nationalism based on "geography, race, religion, culture and language" (Nussbaum, 2007, p. 160) to marginalize Tamil community thus jeopardizing the notions of venerable plurality and heterogeneity within the borders of a country. Their politics is done over the bodies of people excluded from this five-fold definition of nationalism. These

nationalists construct framework that does not include minorities' lives thus exposing them to violence of death/ derealisation. The founders of this conception of nationalism not only admire but encourage fascist versions of these ideas to be implemented in their realm thus subjecting millions of people to violence of marginalization.

Implicit in the text is the message that the violence is not spontaneous rather it is cultivated through grassroots organization to affect the people frustrated through centuries of deprivation. *ITM* (2002) depicts ordinary people preferring harmony and peace, accommodating peoples different from themselves, sharing space and relations with each other since centuries. The novel suggests that this animosity, religious/ethnic/racial, is whipped up by power wielders. Equipped with a sense of responsibility, many characters in *ITM* (2002) reject this restrictive notion of nationalism. Accepting plurality and admitting all humans in the expansive frame of humanity, these characters show respect for all regional, ethnic, religious and racial segments coexisting with them, thus, extending their support to maintain their lives and moving towards a heterogeneous conception of the nation.

ITM (2002) seems to be haunted by the specter of the colonial past when power transfer was unevenly done to placate the majoritarian population of the country. Instead of rehearsing and trivializing the present and giving a monolithic portrait of the recent civil war, Munoveera (2002) contextualizes the present turmoil in its conflicted past. Although *ITM* (2002) hints at social issues of class, gender and caste ingrained in the Sri Lankan society, but it covers most potently Sri Lankan coeval violence by underlining how the war has been fomented by a constrictive model of nationalism that refuses to embrace minorities and accord them right to exist. Despite showing minute conflicts between different factions, the main focus of the fiction is on violent conflict between ethnic groups competing for dominance and a centre space. Both the contending groups construct their own definition of human, thus excluding people from that frame of reference all those who refuse to believe in and extend their cooperation in violent politics.

The novel opens in 1948's "Island of Ceylon"¹ (9) when the white man departs with a heavy heart taking along him not only the material wealth of the newly decolonized country but also "the jewel-encrusted thrones of Kandyan kings; the weapons of Chola warriors; priceless texts in Pali and Sanskrit, Sinhala and Tamil" (2002, p. 9). The insemination of violence in *ITM* (2002) dates back to this formative time in the unequal power shift and the ensuing contentions over the constitution that failed to respond to the needs of the multi-ethnic populace of Sri Lanka. The resultant struggle over political representation is charted through an ever-widening chasm between majoritarian Sinhala population and a minority Tamil through their respective flags and their symbolic significance. Conflict over political representation is depicted vividly through newly decolonized country's flag which has "a poised stylized lion, all curving flank and ornate muscle, a long cruel sword gripped in its front paw" (2002, p. 10). This lion with long sword is an old Sinhalese icon symbolizing Sinhalese as the offspring of an expatriated Indian prince and a ferocious feral cat. The flag contains a minute green strip which represents a small but "much-tossed Muslim population", whereas a bigger orange strip signifies the larger, yet minority, the Tamil population that predominantly inhabits the northern province.

The transfer of power is followed by an era of conflict between Sinhala majoritarian state and Tamil minority. The marginalized Tamils, with the passage of time, are enraged and consider "the orange strip inadequate". So, the national flag that fails to accommodate minorities

adequately is replaced with another flag signifying militancy proportionate to the combativeness represented by an enraged lion. On the new Tamil's flag is, "a snarling tiger, all bared fang and bristling whisker. If the idea of militancy is not conveyed strongly enough, dagger-clawed paws burst forth while crossed rifles appear over the cat's head". Munaveera's (2002) *island* depicts mobilization of war instruments "between equally related beasts".

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework chosen for the investigation of the Sri Lankan novel is Anarchist Rocker's (2016) philosophical approach in *Nationalism and Culture*. It is a prominent work in which Rudolf Rocker asserts "nationalism is not an organically evolved entity, but something artificially created by the power-hungry elites" (Rocker, 2016, p. 204). Nation for him is "a purely political concept" concocted by power hungry elites. The modern nationalism means the "complete absorption of individuals in the higher ends of power". Nationalism as is often associated with one's "love towards one's country or one's place" is rooted in the aspirational projects of a minority craving for despotism and intent upon imposing upon masses certain contours of state against their will. Using the trope of nationalism, these politicians artificially train racial fanaticism, and use this frantic ferociousness against the minorities. Rocker defines nation as:

Nation is an organized selfishness of privileged minorities which hide behind the skirts of nation. For the power-hungry elite nation is a convenient cover to hide their personal greed and their schemes for political power from the eyes of the world... Land, blood and culture become the motive for all brutality done to human beings in the name of nationalism. The political fascism of today tries to preach to man the new gospel that he can claim a right to live only in so far as he serves as raw material for nationalism (Rocker, 2016, p. 205).

Being antagonistic to liberation, nationalism adopts militaristic attitude in turning the people into callous automatons. Rocker believes that this artificially created imaginary concept hides every injustice, inhumanity and every gross criminal act behind its flag. The nation becomes the most tangible reality by the people who are consumed by it and they overlook every injustice if it is done in the name of nation.

4. Data analysis and discussion

ITM (2002) presents two narrators who have experienced loss, fear, terror and trauma in all its entirety. Yasodhara, the narrator of the first part of the novel, narrates the events happening in Colombo, a city inhabited by various ethnicities. Wellawatte house (18-19), designed and constructed by an Oxford-returned judge becomes the witness of genocidal violence. Although, racism and caste hierarchies were devoutly practiced in this house, yet they were not lethal; thus, the possibility of coexistence is not foreclosed for its inmates. After the death of the patriarch, Sylvia Sunethra the matriarch of the family has to keep accounts and provide for the dowry of four daughters, hence she decides to rent out the upper portion to an influential Tamil family. Although there are cultural and religious differences, yet friendships and love relations flourish in upper and lower domains. Interaction between people is a daily matter and religious and caste differences do not cast inhuman impression on the relationship of diverse ethnic communities sharing space and experiences.

Colombo was first hit by violence as depicted in the novel. The state is left in the hands of irresponsible politicians who, in order to have electoral support from the majority Sinhala population, make discriminatory laws² that fuel the anger of the minorities. Hence, just after ten years of independence, in 1958 riots are seen on the horizon of Colombo. The rumours of “the air turned into the smoky scent of Sulphur” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 28) blowing down from Colombo are heard in neighbouring villages. The insistence on “fivefold definition of nation” (Nussbaum, 2007, p. 160) increases with every passing day. The only solution presented in this scenario of majority/minority contestation is assimilation. The ideas floated are that the minorities are aliens to this land, and they should learn to respect and hold in reverence the Sinhalese tradition and Buddhist religion. The dominant narrative is that the minorities can stay in the country only after erasing all religious, cultural, and linguistic differences, or else, they cannot demand citizenship rights. The Tamils are given no other course of action to follow.

Nishan, the father-to-be of the narrator Yasodhara, witnesses such an exclusionary version of nationalism enacted in one of his school journeys. The seaside village near Colombo where Nishan with his parents lives becomes the site of this violence. The aisle of the train taking children to school is full of bare-chested people armed with machetes intimidating unguarded, unarmed and trembling uniformed children. Terror of the long bare knives is compounded by inflammatory language. The enraged voices of the sarong people shout vociferously, “Tamil devils. Get up! Stand up! Stand up!” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 29). A small girl Radhini’s dark complexion singles her out for vengeance. Dragged to the centre of aisle, she is inquired about pottu not worn by her. The mob surmises that she tries to seduce Sinhala boys by not wearing the traditional Hindu mark. One of these men says, “May be we should make a pottu for you, no? In the middle of the forehead. Nice big one. Red I think” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 29). The emphasis on purity of blood is conspicuous here. The men fear that Tamil girls would seduce the Sinhalese boys and that this impurity will bring imbalance in demographical dimensions³. The courage and sympathetic imagination of the teacher Miss Abeyrathna saves the girl. Emerging from the back of the carriage, she ignores the blood-hungry men and wraps the little girl in her caring embrace announcing blatantly, “The girl has done nothing. Let her be”. The men insistent upon spilling Tamil blood give an explanation for their callous behaviour thus, “She is Tamil. That’s enough. They take our land, our jobs. If we let them, they will take the whole country” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 29). The fear of the usurpation of land, and resources explains the cause of this bellicose behaviour. Miss Abeyrathna’s confident assertion that the girl is a Sinhala, “only a little dark”. only meets the demand of proof of her affiliation with the dominant religion. Knowing the importance of assimilation, Miss Abeyrathna commands the girl to recite something like the “Ithipso Gatha”. The girl obeys and recites the Buddhist verses and is thus saved.

Burning of Jaffna Library sets the stage for retributory violence. The politicians, instead of offering reconciliation, inflame the already charged environment by playing hate-card against Tamil minority, thus paving the way for scores in political field. One of such politicians comes on forefront to highlight ethnic differences. In a TV interview a Sinhala politician insists upon Tamil’s foreignness, thus disowning the whole community in the process:

If there is discrimination in this land which is not their Tamil homeland, then why try to stay here? Why not go back to India where there would be no discrimination? There are your kovils and gods. There you have your culture, education, universities. There you are masters of your fate.

This irresponsible politician instead of offering redress to the victims of riots, insinuates that Tamils are not endemic to this land. The candidness of the expression and provocative contents of the speech hails another spell of violence in the country of which Black July⁴ is a significant marker.

4.1. Complicity of the state

A state bent on gaining electoral benefit would not shirk using state machinery to marginalize the minorities. *ITM* (2002) provides succinct example in the event of Jaffna Library burning in which a mob ‘headed by police and paramilitary storm the public library’. This “cultural genocide” (Somasundaram, 2007, p. 12) would not have been possible in the absence of benign gaze of a state. Books are ripped from their shelves and thrown into mounting fire. This inferno bourgeons high into the sky making a cremating fire visible compelling Tamils to mourn the loss of centuries of culture and knowledge. The narrator thus says:

For weeks afterward, torn blackened pages fly over the lagoons and salt marshes, the onion and chilli fields. They lodge in the branches of Palmyra trees, float into houses and buildings, entangle in the barbed wire fences and the limbs of gods soaring over the kovils ... The ground is littered with fragments of angular Tamil language (Munaveera, 2002, p. 76)

July 1983, also called “ethnic holocaust”⁵ (Somasundaram, 2007, p. 12), brings with it not only its usual stifling and breathless heat for the city but also dread and terror. Retrieving Yasodhra’s memory, Munaveera writes that Colombo presents the picture of a burning city heralding disaster not only for the target population but also for those owned by the state. Yashodra and Shiva find out that a mob is gathered in the street descending from trucks containing makeshift beds. These rioters sing bawdy songs and share drinks which indicate as if some debauched university students are on a holiday trip. Apart from that, they are fully equipped with war apparatuses accumulated for the occasion. They had “Knives, metal poles, machetes, dusty hoes, large white cans full of incendiary gasoline” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 81).

Shocking is the fact that this belligerent concourse is conducted unhesitant to the houses inhabited by Tamils. They “dragged out fathers and mothers, girls and grandmothers, ripped clothing, shattered bone, and cut through flesh” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 81). Set upon annihilating an ethnic group, they not only burn houses and businesses but human bodies too. They ignite fire in the foreparts of houses, burn down lawns, and throw in infants ignoring the lamenting mothers. Thus, a furtive effort is made at elimination of the minority community. The most chilling aspect of this communal violence is the complicity of the state organs charged with law enforcement. The state’s collusion could be inferred by the presence of state documents, thus pointing out that these atrocities are done on the direction of higher ups. The narrator comments:

They committed the usual atrocities in the usual ways, but here was something unexpected and incongruous. In their earth-encrusted, calloused fingers, they clutched clean white pages, neatly corner-staple census accounts, voting registrations, pages detailing who lived where and most important, who was Tamil, Burgher, Muslim, or Sinhala (Munaveera, p.81).

The fear is so rampant that the inmates of the Wellawatte house huddle in the back room. The matriarch of the family, Sylvia Sunethra answers the doorbell and sees the leader of the mob holding a curving fish knife proceeding towards her. He demands that the Tamil family living upstairs should be handed over to the mob. The mob, shamed by the old lady, leaves to return for three consecutive days. Sunethra although cognizant of the ethnic differences between them and their tenants, realizes her responsibility and plays a crucial role in making escapade of the Tamil family possible. When she careens her way upstairs from back side, she finds that the upper storey is already deserted and enwrapped in “thick cloud of fear” (Munaveera, p. 83).

The most outrageous aspect of these riots is that most of the victims are incinerated, thus annihilating any possibility of survival. Unarmed people particularly children and women are inflamed and no intervention on the part of the state is seen. The carnage of Tamils is aided and abetted by police and politicians. This indicates that this massacre would not have been possible if the law had not looked the other way. Despite all these killings, the Police do not come on the forefront to help save the lives of the poor people. One such episode of mob killing is witnessed by Mala Nanda. Mala Nanda who conceived baby after ten years of marriage and still has two months to wait for the baby, trembles at horrible scenes and scents outside. Her premature travail propels her husband Anuradha to take her to hospital nearby. At the turn onto Galle Road, they observe rolling smoke around them. From far off, they glimpse abandoned cars, looted shops, and destroyed property. The couple could see frustrated people gathered in the shape of mob. These were the people who were impoverished through decades’ neglect of the state. Instead of distributing goods for life, the state has distributed weapons such as machetes, old dusty hoes, axes, knives and gasoline oil. On taking stock of the situation, the couple wants to leave the sight of violence, but is caught by a teenage boy who tries to escape the gathering mob. The couple realizes that the unarmed Tamil teen “has been chosen as sacrifice for years of deprivation, broken governmental promises, failed examinations, and decade of relentless physical labour” (Munaveera, p. 84).

Pushing through the congealed crowd, Anuradha covers the boy’s body with his own thus risking his own life. Anuradha’s negotiation to spare the boy’s life further infuriates the mob. The mob shouts, “These mother fuckers ruining our country. Think they can take over. Time to teach them lesson they will not forget. Crack some heads before they murder us in our beds. Move aside” (Munaveera, p. 85). For enraged mob, respect for any human life is inconceivable. In order to protect the trapped boy, Anuradha becomes a shield and wraps his arms around the cowering boy. Mala sees the blade raised and brought down to kill Anuradha whose blood invokes “the ear-shattering screams of an animal in terror” (Munaveera, p. 85). The murder of a privileged Sinhalese sends a candid message that dissenters to violent politics have no right to exist and whosoever intervenes in this bloodthirsty venture will meet the just treatment. Killing of Anuradha does not quench blood thirst; the real target is the boy. The crowd join hands to pull the boy in their midst. Neither his screams nor Mala’s sobs affect the mob. Huddled on car’s floor, she is saved by coconut plucker Alwis, another acquaintance of the family from lower caste.

Genocidal violence cannot happen without recruiting some people in the ranks of rioters. The state organs recruit these rioters to hide themselves behind them. These common humans are turned into mobs under certain conditions. Rucker (2007, p. 185) provides the reason for mob and its constitution. Rucker believes that the desire for power atomises society and awakens antisocial feelings in people. The shocking inequality resulting from socio-politico/economic

conditions build hatred in the deprived people. This hate with its malignant outgrowth demolishes the delicate “cellular tissue” of social body. Hence, he writes:

The more easily the state disposes of the personal needs of the citizens, the deeper and more ruthlessly it dips into their individual lives and disregards their private rights, the more successfully it stifles in them the feeling of social union, the easier it is to dissolve society into separate parts and incorporate them as lifeless accessories into the gears of political machine (Rocker, 2007, p. 185).

It is in these times of social disintegration when social bonds of centuries are torn apart, and the communal interests are periled for the narrow interests of people holding power apparatuses. This division sabotages the fine structure of communal feelings. The distorted communal feelings result in disturbing the people’s equilibrium, and they become mob. Rocker states, “The mob is nothing, but the uprooted people driven hither and thither on the stream of events. It must be collected again into a new community that new forces may arise in it and its social activities be again directed toward a common goal” (Rocker, 2007, p. 74).

It is under these conditions that the people who have been deprived for centuries, have been collected and made into mob and maneuvered to move ahead in a single direction i.e., annihilation of a target minority. The fanaticism sprouting in *ITM* (2002) is born of this deprivation and acclivity of anti-social feelings in them. Rocker asserts that this blind religious fervour of the people for state-oriented goals could apologize if it were impeccable. But this harmlessness melts in the hands of power wielders. This uncritical religious excitation of the child-like people turns into barbaric delirium and contrives into an instrument of unresisting nefarious power. Rocker (2007) believes:

It is not the frightful needs of our day which is alone responsible for this mass delusion, robbing men weakened by long years of misery of their reasoning power and making them trust anyone who feeds their hungry longing with alluring promise (Rocker, 2007, p. 188).

The mob is let loose on the streets of Colombo avenging poor Tamils of centuries of their own dispossessed and miserable state. Away from the sight of her loss, more loss, and vulnerability awaits Mala at the head of Galle Road. She sees a destroyed bus surrounded by a jovial mob. These frenzied men focus all their strength on pulling a woman from small side window of the bus. The woman’s forehead is bisected, and she falls into the circle of men. A bellowing pleasure submerses the ill-fated woman’s shrieks. The city is wrapped by “the thick fragrance of charred flesh like that which wafts from the Muslim quarter during Eid, the festive roasting of animal flesh” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 87). Festivity and “holiday making” (89) of the mob continues for days after which they head to their different villages, towns from where they have been called to participate in frenzy leaving behind “burned cars, shattered glass; looted factories constructed after centuries of hard work, towers of garbage including blackened bodies of Tamils, orphaned children and dishonoured women” (Munaveera, p. 89).

Where metropolitan cities like Colombo are consumed by mob violence, Northern provinces present a different sight. The second section of *ITM* brings forth a female narrator Saraswathi from a village Lagoon of Northern province which has been turned into a war zone. Saraswathi’s account brings to light suffering and violence done to the ethnic ‘other’ by the whole state

apparatuses designed particularly for complete annihilation. Regular bombing of the civilian areas, destroying residences of the villagers and forcing them into refugee camps are part of the program of annihilation. The state with its monopoly of violence extends its security forces and equipment to “neutralize regrouping of Tamil militants, such as increased expenditure on defence, strong monitoring systems and increased military check posts to crush the danger symbolized by Tamil militants” (Fazil, 2019). Lagoon seems a “foreign occupation”⁶ (Somasundaram, 2007, p. 13) with clamorous security emplacements with ubiquitous armed sentries, various types of weapons, check posts, veritable patrolling, surveillance mechanisms amplified by unwarranted search operations, detentions, abductions and disappearances followed by deaths. This area is deliberately chopped off from the national and international sight. There were attendant problems faced by this blocking. Food, fuel, medicine and other inevitable stuff could not reach the village, thus reducing further the chances of survival of the already impoverished people. Prohibition of fishing for the community based on fishing for its sustenance is another attempt at genocide. Saraswathi recalls pervasive fear, impending death and starvation as a normal pattern of people’s lives in Lagoon. She remembers:

I have not tasted fish for so long that when I remember Amma’s seer fish curry, the chunks of fish swimming in the creamy, fiery coconut milk, my mouth waters and my stomach complain ... The fishermen no longer go to sea because the soldiers arrest anyone found in the water... so there is no fish in the market for years (Munaveera, 2002, p. 131).

Colombo’s horrendous flesh-burning smells are replaced by thundering tanks and flying jet planes in Lagoon. The state with its precise and latest weaponry attacks defenceless villagers who are stranded between bombardments on the one hand or “IDP camps”⁷ (Withanage, 2014, p. 18) on the other hand. The novel gives a sharp commentary on the “Mass Exodus”⁸ (Somasundaram, 2007, p. 11) accompanied by civil war. IDP camps could not provide protection to the displaced and dispossessed people; instead, they served the state well. They were run by the military which in the name of security screened everyone, to identify LTTE cadres and detained many people in “Surrender camps” (Withanagae, 2014, p. 18). So, these refugee camps served as conduits between war-torn areas and detainment centres. Apart from that these camps could not provide enough security measures to young girls and women whose vulnerability to sexual abuse was aggravated because of lack of privacy. This lamentable situation has been vividly expressed by Amma when Appa opens up the topic for opting to IDP camps. He begs Amma to take daughters and leave the village for the camp. Getting away from their home into IDPs “... with no food and shit-filled toilets” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 123) is unimaginable to the women of the house. Saraswathi is glad that even at the height of vulnerability, Amma refuses to leave their small, ravished house for these camps.

Genocidal violence against people is accompanied with murder of law as a system of dispensing justice to its citizens. *ITM* exposes the brutality of the government which mutates its legal structures and subjects its judicial system to assault. During the three decades of war, “Judiciary emerges as an organ compliant of the sitting government” (Perera, 2020, p. 190). The state concocted “Prevention of Terrorism Act”⁹ (Perera, 2020, p. 194) to crush tigers. With declaration of emergency in Sri Lanka, anti-terrorism laws void the ordinary laws for three decades which sprouts more problems for the populace under extinction. Agamben’s insight is illuminating to understand “the state of exception” (Perera, 2020, p. 195) which emerges as “prerogative of sovereignty”. By declaring emergency, a state of exception is announced

blatantly which give birth to a precarious state in which “the sovereign, by being outside the law, declares that there is nothing outside the law”. This state of exception fuzzes the boundary between “violence and law”, thus enabling a passageway in which “violence passes over into law, and law passes over into violence” (Perera, 2020, p. 195).

Reflecting on Agamben’s position the Lagoon presents the example where state of exception is declared to put ethnic minority to erasure. The tigers, suspected of treason, are tortured in derelict houses established and maintained by the military or police outside the gaze of law. In order to manoeuvre and suppress any opposition to the indiscriminate use of violence by the state, the state permits the military to occupy such safe havens as torture centres. By virtue of their existence outside the course of law, these centres hide the “disappearances” (Perera, 2020; 191) from the vision of law. These disappearances are meant to “execute swift military operations” (Perera, 2020, p. 195) against dissenters from the landscape of contestation. Tamil villagers at disposal of these military sovereigns are burnt and their ashes flushed into sea. Saraswathi recalls the days when “there are so many bodies rotting and bleeding into the water that whoever eats lagoon fish gets sick and vomits for days” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 131).

ITM dramatizes disappearance and death without trial of Kumar and Maaryama’s son. They as “Tiger Suspects”¹⁰ (Perera, 2020, p. 192) are detained, prosecuted and sentenced to death without trials or with trial without jury. They have been arrested arbitrarily. The forces produce no warrant for their arrest as the oppressive state does not feel obliged to even wear shams of justice. The military soldiers, involved in investigation, are accorded the decisive power. These investigating persons, wearing army uniforms, decide lives and extinction of their subjects. Swift white vans have become the symbol of terror for the villagers. These vans rambling from time to time abduct villagers for interrogation. Hence Saraswathi’s memory reconstructs the image of the youngest son of the family who is “disappeared” (Perera, 2020, p. 191). The news of Kumar’s abduction is broken by Kanahama, the old market woman. Saraswathi tells that the bereaved mother never cries for Kumar though she often cries for her other two sons Balaraam and Krishna. Saraswathi reminds Amma of the preponderance of soldiers and the extinct life of victims trapped by them. Saraswathi muses, “One day she will know that her youngest son, too, is gone and for him she will not even have an empty grave to cry over” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 127). Kumar’s disappearance like many other youth’s disappearance is wrapped in “Conspiracy of Silence”¹¹ (Somasundaram, 2007). The mother unsure of his fate waits for him, whereas for Saraswathi, he is already a memory.

Maaryama’s youngest son has also been bundled up into the back of a speeding white van. Saraswathi, accompanied by her mother, visits the bereaved family. Maaryama lies unmoving on her bed and cannot be left alone because she “makes furtive attempt to the well.” Maaryamma’s dark room, the picture of her son in her quivering hands and the smell of mourning disturbs Saraswathi. Saraswathi’s narrative makes it clear that her son has been detained indefinitely by the security forces. Entering her home was like entering a place under mourning, even many days following his disappearance. There are tears, crying and indefinite grieving. In his case, like Kumar’s, there is no announcement of his death neither, nor any certainty of life.

One of the abominable facets depicted by Munaveera in *ITM*, is the preponderance of rape and sexual excruciation. Although the scale and severity of the crime is symptomatic of a full-fledged war against an ethnicity, yet it is different from other casualties suffered in the war.

The rapes here are more sadistic, monstrous and their pattern calls out for explanation. Sexual assault and its politics have been discussed at great length by a feminist scholar, Susan Brownmiller. Brownmiller argues that rape has always served as a “weapon of terror” (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 31). The recurring pattern of sexual violation in *ITM* indicates that rape is not merely an inauspicious spin-off of the conflict. Women here are not incidental, unavoidable casualties like ravished houses, burnt property and spontaneous killing of animals. Rape in a war is a “familiar act with a familiar excuse” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 32). The continual sexual harassment of Tamil school girls by Sinhala soldiers cannot be viewed as separate episode of spontaneous violence executed by unruly personnel, but it serves as an inherent part of genocidal goal. The usual practice is that Sinhala soldiers swoop down on Lagoon during the dead of the night, keeping track of the girls alone and unprotected at home.

One such victim in *ITM* is the narrator/protagonist Saraswathi. She is alone at home, doing her schoolwork when soldiers break in. Alert to the crashing of boots, she tries to hide, but her ravished home does not provide any protection. She is dragged to the white van waiting at the juncture of the road. The place, chosen for her molestation, is ‘a burned-off carcass” (Munaveera, 144) of a derelict house. She is dragged into a back room with bullet-riddled, broken cement walls, no roof overhead on a perfectly framed square of sunlit sky’ (Munaveera, p. 144). In this makeshift interrogation camp extraction of political data becomes a pretence for the perpetration of an abominable sexual offence. To still her resistance, her dress is torn into pieces exposing her bare body to the undesirable touch and gaze. If that is not enough, she is called by animal names, “Tiger! Bitch” (Munaveera, p. 144). Saraswathi recalls the traumatic event thus:

I am pulled apart, uncovered, exposed. They hold me sown ... they tear me open with their nails, bite me with their fangs, their spittle falls thick across my breasts. They break into me. Break me. Break into me. Burying their stench deep inside my body while they pant like dogs over me. Until I no longer smell like myself. Until this body is no longer mine. Until I am only a limp, bleeding, broken toy (Munaveera, p. 145).

War sanctions participant men to express their disdain for women (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 32). The men in uniform, wearing soldierly boots, occupying dreading van and holding rifles believe that the war is a manly game and women are excluded completely from it. This exclusion of unarmed, unprotected, civilian girl of adolescent age ices their contempt for women which is vented on Saraswathi. She is nothing more than a “Tiger-bitch”. Their excessive use of “rifle butts” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 144) on her back proves that her existence as a venerable human being with feelings and subjectivity is out of the question to them. Saraswathi is the cushion that will make them feel war-boys. The juxtaposition of a fragile unarmed little girl poised cowering against armed men, create an exaggerated masculinity/femininity dynamic that leads towards rape. The rapist/soldiers prove very easily their superiority to the world.

Brownmiller (1975) writes, “Raping is the act of conqueror... a Sexual coup de grace” (35) which symbolizes ultimate humiliation. Apart from this human vexation, rape by the dominant forces is an irrefutable manifestation of the suppressed group’s position of manly “impotence”. Men have, since times immemorial, enjoyed the pride of protecting their women, and dominant warring forces use rape to destroy any remnants of male pride of the defeated side. Hence in

war, a raped woman's body is deemed "a ceremonial battle ground" (Munaveera, 2002, p. 37), for the victor's troops. The act that is played out upon her is a message passed between men—"vivid proof of the victory of one and loss and defeat for the other" (Munaveera, p. 38). In traditional South Asian societies where father not only earns for the family but protects the women of the house from invaders and intruders, rape breaks that protective unit, exposing fatal vulnerability of the hierarchical structure operating in the house. Appa's self-criticism and his isolation fits well into this pattern of national subjugation. He is ashamed of himself for not providing a protective environment to his daughters. His genuine concern about the molested family women is compounded by unbearable shame. Grief over his daughter's personal loss, is exaggerated by his own impotence symbolized by "useless leg" (Munaveera, p. 127) that he drags to reach trenches in the face of a military poised against defenceless people. Appa who is "too old and sick" (Munaveera, p. 129) is ashamed of himself for being an inadequate parent. He leaves the grieving women early every morning and returns very late in the night.

ITM comments upon the callous state of a society that frowns upon rape victims and instead of accommodating and suturing wounds inflicted by the heinous crime; they are regrettably ostracized. Through the characters of Saraswathi and her very close friend Parvathi, the novel exposes the lamentable behaviour of the villagers who ostracize them and further limit their chances of survival. Thus, the families of the victims push them into spiral of victimization and instrumentalization practiced over them by evil forces surrounding them. For such victims of sexual assault, the prospects of future grooms and a blissful life of hearth is turned into a nightmare. Born in a traditional society, Parvathi is expected to lead a cloistered life. After the heinous act, denial of acceptability in her home is another factor spoiling her. Her family and neighbours turn in revulsion from the molested daughter. Her personal loss compounded by humiliating attitude of a hegemonic patriarchal society, makes her suffering unbearable to her. Unable to engulf this excruciating behaviour of the villagers, she suffers trauma. Whenever she is seen by Saraswathi, she had defeated person's aura around her, "silent as a ghost on her mother's arm, her head drooping like a heavy flower over a fragile stem" (Munaveera, p. 136). Tired of this contempt, the girl jumps into well. Saraswathi could not recognize her bloated face and water-logged body. Parvathi's funeral is attended only by her sisters and mother. Males of the family kept away from her funeral pyre. For rape victims in *ITM* denial of viable options lead to dreadful results. When all other options are foreclosed for such victims, suicide seems the only option available.

Saraswathi's rape, however, proves only the first round of humiliation and dehumanization. The second and more dreadful round starts as she makes for her home. The organic bond with home promises healing for Saraswathi. The security promised by the sanctuary and caring touch of her mother hastens her steps. She thinks that the pain of humiliation will be willed away by her loving parents. But the promised bond has already been ruptured. Due to the feeling of inadequacy, she becomes socially withdrawn and unable to cope with trauma, she rather becomes a burden on the family. Initially, her family tries to hide the stigma and helps her overcome her trauma. Amma shoulders extra burden of responsibility by "stripping" (Withanalagae, 2014, p. 20) her material assets to overcome the inadequacy. Amma spends all her saved money to buy fish, greens and spices and prepares a sumptuous meal for her. But caring hand of Amma cannot still Saraswathi's shrieks.

Saraswathi's victimization is coupled with a casualty of education. Despite being a very promising student, Saraswathi has to say goodbye to her academic pursuits. A favourite student

of a Colombo returned teacher, Saraswathi used to love maths sums and was being trained for Teaching Certification. She recalls:

In practice for my Maths paper, Miss sets me complicated questions. They take a long time to solve but I love the long columns of numbers, the need to proceed logically and patiently as the numbers lead you to the final and inevitable answer (Munaveera, 2002, p. 135).

Her rape disrupts all her dreams. Full of self-loathing and hatred, she does not wish to see her favourite teacher when she comes to meet her. She does not want her teacher to look at the deep black circles around her eyes. She wants to hide the wounded, battered skin of her wrists and neck. Ashamed of herself, she thinks that she has “slipped in some other place ... where men can tear girls, rip them open, and bury a kind of corruption in their flesh’ (Munaveera, p. 150). Once complex mathematical questions that she loved to solve, are turned into “messy heap that will not disentangle in order” (Munaveera, p. 151). She tries to practice them, but the numbers do not succumb to her frail mind and weak hands. Her loss makes her realize that her dream of becoming a teacher has “slipped through [her] fingers” (Munaveera, p. 151). *ITM* is a statement against the lamentable behaviour of family that complicates the travail of the ravished girl still further. Tired of the extra burden of responsibility, Amma pushes her into the vicious cycle of violence by sending her to the training camp to be recruited as LTTE cadre. Saraswathi’s pleadings do not affect Amma who persuades her to leave the sanctuary. Amma says, “Think, my girl ... What man will take what the soldiers have spoiled? Who will give their son for your sister? If you don’t go, you will ruin us all... We will lose face with everyone” (Munaveera, p. 152). Thus, persuaded in the name of family honour, she succumbs and offers herself for sacrifice.

4.2. Death producing death: Violence and retribution

Butler (2004, p. 15) proposes that in order to answer bigger questions we need to see the conditions that give birth to people causing violence. Individual responsibility of the persons perpetrating violence cannot be probed without investigating the conditions that compel them to enact such horrendous crimes against humanity. Individual responsibility cannot and should not be extricated from collective conditions giving rise to retribution but the individuals committing violent are shaped by forces around them and reducing their acts to “self-generated acts” will be a serious mistake. Individual’s deliberations cannot be either associated with, “symptoms of individual pathology or evil” (Butler, 2004, p. 15). Any exploration of the accountability of perennial violence around us, should presume such individuals as “the first link in the causal chain that forms the meaning of accountability” (Munaveera, p. 15).

ITM explicitly enlists the conditions that make radical violence the only viable deliberation for Tamils. Tamil inhabitants of Colombo as a result of racial profiling, were forced to flee for their lives. Some of them exiled abroad and the rest had to claim their villages abandoned many decades ago. These dispossessed and displaced people are made “the most militant and determined separatists” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 89). This social disintegration caused by the state is conducive to violent forces. The plight of these people is an asset to the power lusty leadership of the militant organization LTTE (Munaveera, p. 139). The leaders of the militant organization welcome these abject people into a never-ending cycle of violence. Nationalism, based on land, becomes the pivot around which all their activities are planned. Under the

authoritative patronage of the revered leader, these abject people desire a “long curving slice of land along the northern and eastern coasts” (Munaveera, p. 60) of the country and call it “Eelam” (Munaveera, p. 60). Thus, a new spell of “outright blood-lettings” (Munaveera, p. 140) starts. These revolutionaries coalesce around the figure of a leader who promises them eternal peace and justice.

Rocker (2016) asserts that subjection of people to newer power in the name of nationalism is only a ploy. It is a shield to hide the leader’s power lust. Hence:

A people cannot be liberated by subjecting it to a new and greater power and thus starting again around the vicious circle of stupidity. Every form of dependency leads inevitably to a new system of slavery-dictatorship more than any other form of government, because it forcibly suppresses every adverse judgment upon the activity of its leaders and so inhibits in advance any better understanding (Rocker, 2016, p. 191).

Rocker (2007) severely doubts the efficacy of emancipation based on the narrow concept of nationalism desirous of achieving a “state”. This rising power adjusts the outer trappings of power policy in accordance with the changing times, yet the final goal remains consistently unchanged. LTTE, using the ploy of nationalism, demands blind obedience from Tamils. The leader is apotheosised. The love of home and fellow humans is mashed by the grandeur of the national cause and these individuals coalesced around the figure of the leader serve as fodder for this narrow cause. In the light of Rocker’s proposition, nationalism propounded by Tamil Tigers wholly lacks in love for fellow beings. Although LTTE cadres use rhetoric of love frequently, but it turns out to be nothing more than a hollow slogan. This nationalism, ‘swears only by the state and brands its own fellow folk as traitors to their country if they resist the political aims of the national dictatorship or even merely refuse to endorse its plans’ (Rocker, 2016, p. 183).

This rhetorical use of “love for fellow beings” (Rocker, 2016, p. 183) is exposed by *ITM* in the murder of Tamils by Tamils themselves, a phenomenon called “Auto-genocide”¹² (Somasundaram, 2007, p. 12). The disappearances and murders are not always done by the state organs, hegemonic militant organization LTTE incriminates those who oppose its policies or those who refuse to acquiesce. The family of the victim itself is cast out by the deciding power. These disappearances of dissenters are followed by brutal slaughter and a public display of the maimed body of the suspect to cultivate terror in spectators. This process of self-destruction has weeded out many a politician with leadership qualities. *ITM* is replete with such instances where dissenters, intellectuals and “moderate politicians” are liquidated ruthlessly and labelled as “traitors”. Saraswathi is a witness to such case of false accusations and revenge. Yalini’s father refused to take sides, and thus is punished. Saraswathi is stopped by a small crowd gathered around the maimed body of her friend’s father. They are dismayed by his sagging body, held against a lamppost by arms tied behind and a prickly wire knifing through his neck. A wooden tablet tied to his dead body exhibits a list of the alleged crimes chalked in block letters. Some voices in the crowd let others know of his crimes. “Bloody traitor got what he deserved. Must have been informing the soldiers for a long time” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 133). Saraswathi knows that she will never see the family members again as they “are running, out in the open land, like animals scrabbling for whatever shelter they can find” (Munaveera, p. 133).

4.3. Construction of hatred

To achieve its ends, the organization constructs hate through a number of channels. Munaveera, not only condemns the recruitment of Tamil children by psychological manipulation but also tries to reach at the depth of the problem by probing “pull factor” (Somasundaram, 2007, p. 17). The role of schools has been reduced to insemination of hatred rather than ignition of critical spirit in children. The organization takes advantage of the children’s immature age; their curiosity and love for heroism are more amenable to nationalistic enticements. Recruiters use an open display of “war paraphernalia, funerals, dead and burnt bodies”. The Tigers remind the young learners the lessons of nationalism that excludes “others” in these words:

This is what the Sinhala soldiers do, the men tell us. This is the way they enforce their brutal domination over our Tamil people... It is your duty to fight for your Motherland. Only by taking up arms we can save ourselves. A separate country Eelam is the only answer (Munaveera, 2002, p. 182).

Saraswathi enlightens the readers on the inevitability of child militants for an organization. She tells the reason for this conscription of children of dead and disappeared persons. Hence, she says, “we take child from every family... this is war and to fight we need bodies” (Munaveera, pp. 180-181). Saraswathi tells that a few days’ training equips the children with requisite skills to dodge the opponent soldiers. Because of their swiftness and agility, they can easily slip over the land unnoticed and can attack the enemy unaware. Children are also taken because they can generate feelings of love and empathy even in the hearts of battle-hardened soldiers. These soldiers hesitate before the young children and “those moments of hesitation often grant us victory” (Munaveera, p. 181).

The hatred, fed to Saraswathi’s brothers, is so real and severe that on their last visit to the family, they show no interest in the family and its problems. Completely dehumanized, they show a conspicuous lack of interest in anything other than their imaginary piece of land promised by the organization. All their attention focused on their guns, they seem distant from inmates of the house and its woes. Their language stinks of their pride in bloodshed. Saraswathi tells that when the party fails to collect as many human instruments as it requires, it turns to more coercive means for conscription known as “push factor” (Somasundaram, 2007, p. 17) which includes threatening parents of the children and abducting children. This press-ganging produces oppressive conditions for children and their parents who do not want to become fodder for war. Lagoon under assault dread not only the bombardment done by armed forces, but it has also the fear of Tigers claiming their sons and daughters. Saraswathi’s mother laments at the sacrifice of her children for the cause. When the tiger women enter their house in the dead of the night, they look very different from other village women. Equipped with “AK-47s” they display soldier like hardened body. Their fascist gaze measures the girls and demands that the girls be sent to the camp for training. Saraswathi recalls the gaze of Tiger woman which “turns suddenly cold” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 141). The demeanour of Appa itself is sufficient for children to lose all hope. Appa who has been treated in contemptuous way still responds in submissive manner in the interest of the child being claimed. Appa’s powerlessness in the face of a militant group bent on making mischief is evident through his persistent gaze at the floor. Appa’s bent body, his conciliatory gestures, his low and almost pleading tone, with smile while being accosted by the recruiters; speak volumes of his diminished role in the traditional family set up.

Saraswathi abused by soldiers and pushed by oppressive surroundings, has no choice but to join the militia. Once recruited in the camp and fed with party rhetoric, she sees her role as “a predator” (Munaveera, p. 176), and “a jungle cat” (Munaveera, p. 174) who could not be objectified. But, in reality she is instrumentalized and works for the party as a “cog in the wheel” (Alison, 2003, p. 37). She is fully militarized and prepared to replicate violence by searching more recruits. Assuming the same role of her victimizers, she wears the persona of tigress and roams about villages, seeking young pubescent girls for enforced conscription. So soaked with hatred is she, that she does not spare her younger sister Luxshmi. After a hard training of six months, she visits her parents only to convince them to let Luxshmi work as a militant. To Saraswathi, Luxshmi’s schooling and studying are futile business which cannot serve the need of such ravished people.

4.4. Brutalization of society

Somasundaram (2007, p. 15) illuminates that blatant collective harm caused by war is the brutalization of society. Lagoon is completely militarized with the ubiquitousness of check-posts, armed soldiers, precise weapons used by all warring parties, scrutiny, barbed wires, blast mines devouring children and the preponderance of gun culture. This militarization imprints a permanent impact on thought patterns of war victims. Ubiquitously proliferated mangled and decaying bodies have impregnated the consciousness of the children with malignity as attested by Saraswathi. Grew inside the war, Saraswathi could not imagine that life outside war can exist. Her imagination presents war as the “only living creature, something huge with pointed tongue and wicked claws that devours and gets plumb on the blood of her people” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 124).

Children thus soaked with hatred, turn into ferocious beings who need only a slight brainwashing to take lives of the opponents at eyewink of their leader. Society, as a whole, is immunized against such wicked practices. The oppressive conditions coupled with insemination of hatred have produced Saraswathi as “Shiva Nataraja¹³” (Munaveera, p. 177). Saraswathi, aware of her own brutalization, says quite rightly that the soldiers have left her “a blank page... now, the tigers write upon [her] surfaces” (Munaveera, p. 173). The camp turns her into a “perfect weapon” (Munaveera, p. 180) for the organization which could be used to make use of the vulnerability of Sinhalese population during the dead of the night. Generally, a fully armed squadron of Tamil tigers enters silently as a specter in the villages. Terrified of this ambush in darkness, the villagers beg for mercy. In a graphic style, the writer explicitly tells of the havoc let loose on the people.

When the village is found, we want our message to be writ in red. We want to leave dead babies and bludgeoned women with streams of blood curling down the sites of their faces. To this end, I have learned to swing machete through the flesh of babies ... Now I am not just dancing a part. Now I am the Shiva Nataraja, the dancing face of death (Munaveera, p. 177).

The torn social fabric, economic deprivation, a preponderant environment of violence, soaked fully in hatred; what would have nationalism created instead of delinquents. *ITM* reflects on the loss of a burgeoning generation of robust minority children. The children who, in the normal life, would have become energetic members of society contributing positively, are turned into automatons fed with hatred against other human beings.

4.5. Nationalism constructs a hierarchy of grief

ITM explores the relationship between the violence that claimed the lives of many innocent people and “violence of omission” (Butler, 2004, p. 33). Grievability according to Judith Butler, is also a political construct that is allowed not to all. The differential distribution of grievability is done by nationalism using the frame it devises for defining human in its normative form. The rank and sacrifice, done by the people, qualifies them to be considered as human. *ITM* presents a number of examples to explicate the conditions that determine grievability, its availability, and its distribution in the context of establishing people as humans through this political tool. It also shows under what conditions certain people are excluded from the normative frame of human by denying them grievability. This proscription of grievability is “violence of derealisation” (Butler, 2004, p. 33).

Butler’s position helps us to see the politics involved in the rituals of grieving and mourning in *ITM*. A constrictive nationalism defines the restrictive frame for a human both in life and death of individual. Cemeteries for martyr’s serve as instrument of distributing grievability. Militant nationalism, defined by Tamil Tigers, allows grieving of people who toe the party line. Nationalism defines which life becomes or fails to become, a publicly grievable life. Here the martyrs, committing suicide attacks, become icons for national recognition. “Death squad” by virtue of being instrumentalized, are humanized in life and after death. Rest of the Tamils are subjected to the violence of derealisation. So, here constructing martyr’s cemeteries serve as act of nation building. On the other hand, there are certain lives that are not grievable; they do not qualify as notable or venerable lives by virtue of the notion defined by the contending powers on both side of the line. Such life is “already the unburied, if not unburiable” (Butler, 2004, p. 34). Kumar’s indefinite detention and subsequent death wrapped in a conspiracy of silence is not deemed worthy life as he was taken in by the army van and could not serve the party. He does not have even “an empty grave” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 126) to mourn at by the family.

Saraswathi is also initiated into one such ritual when a Sinhala soldier is tracked and brought to the camp for punishment. Saraswathi’s skills and her courage to kill a person, is to be tested. The Sinhala soldier under assault is already a non-human, unrealized. The commandant singles out Saraswathi to prove her status as a human by killing the enemy caught. The unusual act of inhumane killing is done in a very precise manner in order to be accepted as not only a human but a worthy human. The soldier falls outside the frame defined by Tamil Tigers, so his death is not considered a “grievable death” (Butler, 2004). For committing brutal act, Saraswathi is applauded by the commandant and the novices surrounding her. She qualifies the test of human by virtue of distribution of violence. In her effort to be considered a venerable human, she stills her conscience by “washing over and over the thick slipperiness of gore on them” (Munaveera, 2002, p. 175).

The cadres who prove their worth as venerable lives, have been selected for martyrdom. A grand ceremony is conducted in which brave cadres are taught to engulf cyanide. In this ceremony parents of cadres are also invited. Saraswathi and her sister attend the ceremony with “a wet pride shining through their eyes”. In this ceremony, big portraits of martyrs are erected for all to see. The process of humanization of the brave cadres is done throughout the year. Saraswathi remembers her school days when loudspeakers fixed on the roof of trucks, list the virtues of the suicide attackers by proclaiming their exploits. The villagers are used to listening

to such “death-defying exploits of the martyrs”. The faces of these suicide bombers are displayed “on billboards along the bullet-peppered walls” (Munaveera, p. 132). Saraswathi’s stay in the training camp enlightens her about the definition of human. Only those cadres who serve the party by joining suicide squad are “Leader’s most perfect weapon” (Munaveera, p. 132).

5. Conclusion

Recuperating the memory of two narrator voices, *ITM* explicitly sends home the message that the monopoly of violence, used by state organs and the retributory violence used by the militant organization is only a fabrication of constrictive nationalism. Nationalism, erected and extolled by both the contestant groups, is only a political tactic serving the interest of an elite minority lusting for power. The national interest, so furtively defended by the elite class, is only the special interest of privileged minority. Both organizations presented in the novel have their own party programs which are protected by killing all those who pose a threat to those hegemonic goals. But the organizations, depicted in the novel, show through a number of ways that violence is the result of the disruptive nature of the “other” and in order to safeguard the interest of the nation; violent measures have to be adopted. The organizations vilify all other concepts and tendencies as antagonistic and even traitorous to the idea of nationalism. In this endeavour to safeguard the interests of people, doors to the ethno-religious community are hermetically closed in their own country where they are treated as not fully humans.

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Notes:

¹ Sri Lanka was named Island of Ceylon until 1972 (Wang 100)

² Decolonized Sri Lanka emerged as “Majoritarian Unitary state” dominated by Sinhala political leadership which controlled all rule-making processes in the country. In this regard, state policies were constituted and implemented to safeguard and satisfy Sinhalese majority. This whole endeavor was aimed obtaining electoral support. Certain laws were formulated which discriminated against Tamils severely, which include Citizenship Act; The Sinhala only Language Act; Land policies; University admission and employment policies. (For further detail please see Fazil, p. 159)

³ Demographic imbalance by Shruti Das (p. 570) states that their lifestyle and habits were different from and were considered to be threat to the Sinhala people as a whole. The demographic growth of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka threatens the dominant Sinhala motivating them towards ethnic cleansing.

⁴ 1981 saw the riots breaking in an old Tamil library situated in the Northern city Jaffna and burnt almost 95000 manuscripts. These were claimed to be irreparable and irreplaceable manuscripts containing history and culture of Tamils. It is also referred to as “*cultural genocide*”. It was the result of Indian military operation to capture Jaffna in October 1987. For detail, please see Daya Somasundaram (p. 11).

⁵ Black July (23rd July, 1983) also called “Ethnic Holocaust”. It refers to the orchestration of state organs with mobs to destroy lives and property of Tamils. This mass slaughter resulted in forced exile of Tamils from Colombo. It was ignited by the alleged murder of 13 Sinhala soldiers by Tamils. For further detail please see Jayasuriya “Terror, Trauma, Transition (p. 197).

⁶ Daya Somasundaram writes in “Collective Trauma” that these villages seemed like foreign occupations with extreme security arrangements consisting of armed guards, ubiquity of check posts, weapons of all kinds, inhumane search operations, detentions, abductions, skirmishes, guerrilla attacks, and counter-attacks. For further detail please see Somasundaram (p. 13)

⁷ IDP camps are refugee camps established by the state for internally displaced people. These were also called “Welfare Villages”. For further detail please see Withanalgae “Female Agency” (18).

⁸ Somasundaram (11) writes that as the war moves on, violence escalates, the civilians had to leave their abodes. The contested territory under assault could not provide them protection from bombardments and land mines spread in villages. This mass exodus happened during Sri Lankan civil war when the trek of over 400,000 people in the middle of the night had to leave their homes built over centuries economic and emotional investment. They were forced to leave their houses because rain and shells charged everyone in Northern villages. The people left in extreme dread leaving all their possessions behind in their houses in the hope of coming back after the war concluded. The roads were clogged with so many of dispossessed and displaced people. They came slowly, step by step, the less able, the elderly falling by the roadside and finally arriving in makeshift inadequate accommodation with deplorable survival conditions. For further detail please see “Collective Trauma in Northern Sri Lanka” (Somasundaram 11).

⁹ Prevention of Terrorism Act was introduced in Sri Lanka in 1979, when the insurgency was making trouble for the state.

¹⁰ The Tamils were arrested arbitrarily, threatened, and tortured and prosecuted based on confessionary evidence. This confessionary evidence was drawn under torturous condition, hence putting all this sham of justice in suspicion. These men were brought to military tribunals already stigmatized as “Tiger Suspects”. They were not given access to legal assistance. This mass prosecution strategy followed a three-pronged process. a. Arbitrary arrest. b. followed by indefinite detention. c. murder of these suspects on the basis of confessionary evidence. For further detail please see “Confessionary Evidence” by Perera.

¹¹ “Disappearances” in war zone are followed by silence. Further inquiries about these disappearances may lead to more problems for the disappeared persons as well as for the family. For further detail please see Daya Somasutharam (8).

¹² The society facing armed contestation between two fascist groups experience incapacitation and murder of its own highly talented persons. The loss of such viable human resources led to foreclosing chances for reconciliation between warring elements. The Tamil militants did not allow any productive relationship between the state, military, and the civil society. Anyone who dared to go against the verdict of the party was penalized by ruthless slaughter. For further detail please see Daya Somasundaram (12)

¹³ Shiva Nataraja a delineation of a Hindu god Shiva the destroyer, is an allusion to empowerment. For further detail please see Meegaswatta (“Violence as a Site of Women’s Agency in War” p. 33)