

“APOCALYPTICAL WRITINGS FROM A WAR TORN SRI LANKA”

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INTRODUCTION

The Sri Lankan Civil War was fought in Sri Lanka from 1983 to 2009. It began on 23 July 1983, there with an intermittent insurgency against the government by the Velupillai Prabhakaran-led Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, also known as the Tamil Tigers). The LTTE fought to create an independent Tamil state called Tamil Eelam in the northern and eastern parts of the island due to the continuous discrimination and violent persecution against Sri Lankan Tamils by the Sinhalese dominated Sri Lankan Government

The war, insurgency and the dominant political unrest in the nation created a history which was both burnt and wounded in the memories of each of the civilians.

The paper intends to study the select poems explicitly speaks about the harsh realities of the Sri Lankan Civil War unknown to the outside world. The poems can never be labelled as war poems, rather they can be labelled as discourses on the apocalypse in the nation. The objective of the study is To recognize how poems are capable of locating memories of both the individual and the nation thereby creating a parallel history of Sri Lanka during the Civil War.

The study concentrates on Recent developments in the political scenario of Sri Lanka and the interest in probing the politically chaotic atmosphere of a neighbouring nation. The aresearch methodology adopted is Narrative textual analysis and comparing the representation of facts in the select narratives with the relevant information in other media. The paper intends to probe on the poems on Genocide and memory written by a group of Sri

Lankan born poets compiled in the anthology *Waking is Another Dream- Poems on the Genocide in Eelam* edited by Ravikumar.

Sri Lanka, though a nation filled with political unrest has not received the needed attention Afghanistan or any other nation has received for years. This neglect from the international media or perhaps the all country media blackout by the nation itself has made it not so unpopular in the international columns. The three-decade old long Sri Lankan Civil war that started from 1983 riots took a sudden collapse in the year 2009 with the death of Velupillai Prabhakaran and his LTTE.

The war crimes and heinous murders committed by the nation came up the surface soon after the abrupt end of the civil war in Sri Lanka. Though the most basic motive behind the war was the creation of an individual Tamil state within Sri Lanka lost its importance and was brushed from the memory of any person who survive it. The only hope that lead to the survival of the people after the war was the end of the current chaos, of witnessing the turmoil for years at an end and the need for an alternative peace.

The Sri Lankan Civil war can be divided into three phases- the first one of resistance- which was the militant operation against the Sinhalese army, the second phase- the phase of hope where the turmoil was between LTTE and the IPKF. The third phase was the phase wherein refugees were scattered and there was a plight for survival.

The Sri Lankan Tamil literature aimed at the reformation and was predominated by the thoughts of rejuvenating the Tamil Literature which was once affected by the burning of the Jaffna library of 1981. Some ancient poets were Mudingarayar, Musiri Asiriyar, Neelakandanar, Nannaganar, Pūtan Ila Naganar and Marudan Ila Naganar.

The questions to be probed in the paper are What happened between 8 and 18 May 2009 in Eelam? Did no one write diaries? Did no one have cameras? Were there no poets there? Not a single artist? Whatever happened on that last day? What is the poetry that can emerge from a 'wounded landmass' where 'no bird is able to fly', where people 'ate death'?

The Sri Lankan Civil War brought more evidently the disparity between the Sinhalese and the Tamils based on their geography, language and economic disparity. *Waking is Another Dream* is a modest effort to combat such indifference and ignorance about the

different race and religion in the island . The book features the work of five leading Tamil poets—Cheran, Jayapalan, Yesurasa, Latha, Ravikumar—on the Eelam issue translated by Meena Kandasamy from Tamil. Instead of exploring the possibilities in a poetic response to genocide, Ravikumar, through his book hopes to stun us with the report and with the graphic violence of personal testimony, apart from offensive proclamations of the loss of intensity in poetic voices from Eelam.

The poems in the anthology has different themes ranging from longing, despair, loss, memory, anguish, love for freedom, resistance for oppression and hope for a better future. These poems are a way of the Sri Lankan Tamils coming into self-realization that the world around them was not peaceful and there is no coming back to a heavenly abode as they had always dreamt about.

The book begins with the poem of Cheran titled “Apocalypse”. The poem in itself reveals the thread that runs through the different poets who describe the same theme throughout the book.

“The apocalypse happened
in our own time.
Earth shaking in smokescreens
Body splitting in satanic rain
Fire raging within and without
Night’s howling flood
Dragging children, people
Burning them in an inferno
In those days, we ate death
Throwing a lifeless sidelong glance
At the helplessness of spectators
Fuming, fuming, like a cloud