Chapter Two

Tear Drop in the Indian Ocean

Introduction

The history of the Sri Lankan conflict is not a univocal history but a plural discourse, owing to the many sides of the conflict. Literary works have narrativised the conflict in exile, and from Sri Lanka using varied perspectives and different genres. Shobasakthi and Ondaatje, the former an exiled Tamil child soldier and the latter a Sri Lankan Burgher and a voluntary exile, portray the conflict from the exilic position in *Gorilla*, *Traitor* and *Anil’s Ghost* respectively. The chapter will explore the novels’ use of displaced exiles to relate this contested history. The discussion of the representation of the conflict would include the recovery of the subaltern’s story, and the emergence of alternative histories from personal, collective and collected memories of the trauma of the conflict. The chapter would explore how by challenging hegemonic discourses through its pluralising discourse, the novels also subvert binaries made possible more complexly by the dialectics of exile.

I

The Many Faces of the Sri Lankan War

John Richardson in *Paradise Poisoned* says of Sri Lanka, “Called the pearl of the Indian Ocean, meaning resplendent in Sinhala, once described by travellers as a paradise and named by Arab seafarers as Serendib, Sri Lanka was what an Eighteenth Century writer had in mind when he coined the word ‘serendipity’” (22). However the nation’s gruesome and protracted civil wars have reduced these myriad nomenclatures to the poignant and literal–tear drop in the Indian Ocean.

At the outset it is important to understand and analyse the genre of armed conflict – civil war that had ravaged Sri Lanka for decades. James Fearon and David Laitin, Professors of Political Science at Stanford University, define Civil wars as “fighting between agents of (or claimants to) a state and organized, non-state groups who seek either to take control of a government, to take power in a region or to use violence to change policies” (76). Huntington locates this type of war within the sphere of “civilizational fault line conflicts”. Commenting on these long drawn out conflicts, he states that these are difficult to resolve as they involve fundamental issues like group identity and power and the fires of communal hatred are rarely
totally put out except through genocide. So they are “off-again-on-again” wars sometimes conflagrating into massive violence and then tapering off into low-intensity hostility to flare up again (252-254). Huntington and Fearon and Laitin locate the roots of civil war in ethnic nationalisms and in the rebellions of ethnic minorities, rebellions born out of their grievances arising from discrimination by ethnic majors, cultural incompatibilities and nationalist aspirations(Huntington270;Fearon and Laitin77-79)

Postmodern and contemporary historiographers like Keith Jenkins, and Hayden White contest a realist account of historical knowledge (Jenkins 5-7; White 3). Jenkins for instance, conceives of history as “nothingness”, on to which historians can project any history. The accounts of the Sri Lankan Civil Wars also called Eelam Wars (which began initially as differences between the Buddhist, Sinhala state and the Hindu Tamils, later escalating into civil wars between the state and the LTTE, with an intermittent period that involved the Indian armed forces as well) are thus as Jenkins remarks “myriadly historicized” and “historians have made the past ‘historical’ in any way they like, in their own image” (9). The Wars have been seen as insurgencies by a guerrilla group on the state or the liberation struggle of a minority group fighting for secession from a parochial autocratic state, or as an ideological warfare by a terrorist organization or an idealistic struggle that abated into mindless killing of many innocents. In such conflicts the lines that divide ethno-nationalisms and insurgencies are constantly shifting and shadowy.

In the Sri Lankan context multiple historicisations, various narratives of the same history occur since the nation is marked by a diversity of ethnic, religious and linguistic identities. Most scholars use the all island census of 1981, two years before the civil war to record the ethnic breakdown at 74% Sinhalese, 12.7% Sri Lankan Tamils, 5.5% Indian Tamils and 7% Muslim moors. Majority of the Sinhalese are Theravada Buddhist and majority of the Tamils are Shaivite Hindus. Blurring this ethno–religious distinctiveness are Sinhala and Tamil Christians. Apart from these, they also note there are also other smaller minority groups like the Burghers- people of predominantly Eurasian descent- the majority of them Christians. Though they are supposed to have flourished during the British rule, the decolonization process in the postcolonial state did not favour their growth so many left for Australia and Canada. Other minor groups include Parsis, Sindhis, Malays and Malayalis.

Stokke and Richardson point out the distinct and varied Tamil identities that emerged. Stokke et al draw our attention to the regions occupied by the different Tamils. Sri Lankan
Tamils constituted a majority in the Northern, Eastern regions and the capital Colombo, the Indian Tamils resided in the plantation areas of the Central Highlands and the Moors have a strong presence in the Eastern regions and urban areas. The construction of Tamil identity in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries produced diverse experiences of inclusions and exclusions that uncovered and reinforced difference between categories of Tamils Stokke (288-289; Richardson30-32).

Historians, political science scholars A.R.M Imtiyaz and Ben Stavis, Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, Richardson, Stokke and others have located different reasons for the civil strife in Sri Lanka to understand why and how simmering ethnic differences escalated into a full scale insurgency movement. The primordialists see the ethnic difference between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils as primordial-inherent, inborn and immutable. The constructivists argue that ethnic identities and differences are constructed, as a result of political environment and circumstance, and not genetically transferred. Other scholars emphasize the pre-colonial roots of the conflict, but colonial history theorists contend that the contemporary ethnic tensions were shaped by colonial politics of inclusion and exclusion, divide and rule policies, promotion of one ethnic group over the other like the resentment of the Sri Lankans of the perceived Tamil advantage (over-represented in higher education and public sector employment). The above mentioned commentators singularly blame elite political leaders who in the postcolonial period mobilized along ethnic cleavages to win support and strengthen their position like the Ceylon Citizenship Act in1948, the 1956 Official Language Act (also known as the Sinhala Only Act). The exploitation of ethnic tensions in electoral politics and ethnic outbidding of opponents by elite politicians like Sirimavo Bandaranaike’s blatant anti-Tamil policies and the constitutional declaration of 1972 which declared the state as a Sinhala- Buddhist state, paved the way for civil war.¹ Eminent Sri Lankan historian, K.M. de Silva, offers an important argument to support the Sinhalese nationalist viewpoint. The Sinhalese, he observes, have lived in Sri Lanka for more than 2500 years while the Tamils have lived in the country for only about 1500 years. Despite their Indian origins, they have developed their distinct culture and speak a language not spoken elsewhere. The affinity of the Sri Lankan Tamils with the millions of Tamils in

¹ For multiple readings of the Sri Lankan history see A.R.M Imtiyaz and Stavis 135-152;Sriskandarajah 341-356; Richardson 40-55; Stokke 285-300.
South India has made the Sinhalese according to de Silva, “a majority with a minority complex” (513)

Both the Sinhalese and the Tamils resort to myth-history to legitimise the “sons of soil” status. K.M. de Silva ‘s seminal book begins by locating the origins of the Sinhalese to derive this certainty, in *The Mahavamsa* (Great Chronicle) (1-10). Written around the Fifth Century then updated in the 13th, 14th and 18th Centuries it has been used by many historians to explain Buddhism’s ascendance and preeminence in Sri Lanka. On the other hand C.Rasanayagam a seminal Tamil historian comments on how the monk annalists of *The Mahavamsa* kept Tamil history and culture outside its gambit. He and other historians locate an eighteenth century chronicle *Yalpana Vaipava Malai* compiled in Tamil prose by Mailvagana Pulavar as the earliest and the most faithful account of Jaffna history. The text was used to uncover a particular Tamil history in Ceylon and thereby prove the Tamil historical right to exist as a community in the island (xx-xxiv)

Stokke and Jeyaratnam Wilson an important Tamil historian observe that in the post independence period we cannot speak about Tamil nationalism in the singular. Elaborating on this they observe that the first one was the parliamentarian nationalism, an elite led nationalism, initiated by Colombo based Tamils, that dominated Tamil politics from the 1950s to the 1970s. The Federal Party under Chelvanayagam the dominant party in the Tamil districts after 1956, had no secessionist intentions initially and demanded equal status for Tamil and Sinhala as official languages and autonomy in Tamil areas. But the repeated discriminatory policies of the different governments, the disappointing withdrawal of pacts, the failure to fulfil election campaign promises the anti-Tamil riots of Gal Oya (1956), subsequent riots of 1958 (which later resulted in the 1977 riots leading to the anti-Tamil pogrom of July 1983), led the Federal Party to demand a separate autonomous state in 1973. They also remark that in a move to strengthen their unity and demand, the Federal Party joined other Tamil political parties to form TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front). Stokke notes that this was the time the second type of nationalism emerged –militant separatist nationalism. They also note the rise of militant groups both within the Sinhalese and Tamil youths (Stokke 301-304; Wilson 66-113).

Huntington observes how unemployment led to many youths to join militant groups (259). This was especially the case in Sri Lanka what with the pro- Sinhala and elitist policies of the state regarding employment and education. Tamil militant nationalism was spearheaded by middle–class youth in opposition to the majoritarian state and the Tamil elite,
whom they saw as ineffectual. With a number of state sponsored riots directed against the Tamils and the militants, the Tamil political elite was politically marginalized while the militant separatist movement of the Tamil youth gained political legitimacy among the Sri Lankan Tamils. Stokke observes that in the 1970s there were at least 30 Tamil militant groups. The socio-spatial basis of Tamil nationalism broadened from the initial core of the Jaffna youths to now include Eastern Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan moors (304).

The civil war that broke out after the July pogroms of 1983 was fought in many phases and caused tremendous loss to people, property, economy, the environment. During these 30 years the LTTE with its attack on civilians through suicide bombings transformed from a militant nationalist organisation to a world terrorist organization. As the University Teachers for Human Rights group emphasizes in “The Growth of Tamil Militancy” in The Broken Palmyra the popular base of the militants gradually wore away (paras 5.1-5.5). The LTTE that killed all its dissidents like the people activist doctor Rajani Thiranagama, was no longer seen by all Tamils as their sole representative and turned from heroes to oppressors. The Indian intervention in the Sri Lankan affair that reached its high point with the deployment of the Indian Army- the IPKF (1987-1990) to ensure a peace process resulted subsequently in the assassination of the former Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi. As for the Sri Lankan government and its armed forces in the name of national defence, it violated human rights, unleashed pogroms, state sponsored terrorism that many times reached genocidal proportions. In May 2009, the Sri Lankan government announced that the war had ended with the defeat of the LTTE, arguably one of the most successful, multifaceted and rich guerrilla organization in the world.

Some of the significant literary writings began with the July 1983 carnage. Many poems of Richard de Soyza, Devika Brandon and Yasmine Gooneratne speak about the tragedy of Black July. These poets use tropes ranging from the Apocalypse to the metaphor of a cricket match to represent the carnage (qtd in Goonetilleke, Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People. 79-89). A seminal Sri Lankan writer in English Jean Arasanayagam writes from her experience of the times and her refuge in a refugee camp in her anthology titled Apocalypse ’83 (qtd in Jayasuriya, Terror and Reconciliation 81-91). Goonetilleke locates a number of Sinhalese writers like Suvimalee Karunaratna Kamal Wijeratne, Punyakante Wijenaike, Tamil writers like Ayathurai Santhan (who was bilingual), Rose Aserappa (a Chetty) have recorded other aspects of the war- like the paradoxical peace
process, the plight of people of mixed parentage living in border villages, poems from the point of view of a child soldier, an erstwhile inter-ethnic amity and sisterhood (qtd in *Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People*, 90-119). Primarily reflecting the majoritarian viewpoint- the fear of the loss of the Sinhalese identity and the jeopardy of Sri Lanka’s sovereignty, together with motifs like post-traumatic stress and incidents like the Central Bank explosion, are narrated. Though the humanitarian angle of the narrative is very evident, the singular perspective is also apparent Writers like Neil Fernandopulle and Nihal de Silva, cast doubt on the rhetoric of war and the logic of both the militant and the state in the former’s short story collection *Shrapnel* and the latter’s *The Road from Elephant Pass* (qtd in Jayasuriya’s *Terror and Reconciliation*, 134-153; 169-181). The Sri Lankan conflict has resulted in a number of other outpourings from different cultural and linguistic spaces within and without Sri Lanka. Some of these writings will be employed as secondary texts during the exploration of the primary texts.

In her recent Afterword to the November 2014 publication of the English translation of Shobasakthi’s short story collection *The MGR Murder Trial*, Anushiya Ramaswamythe translator suggests that Gorilla’s asylum applicant Anthony Dasan’s life has strong similarities with Shobasakthi’s life in Sri Lanka as well as in his host country France (281). Confirming these findings in an interview with the researcher, she concurred that Shobasakthi was born in the 1960’s and hails from Mandaitivu a small island off the coast of Jaffna peninsula. “When he was fifteen, Shobasakthi,” says Anushiya Ramaswamy, in her Foreword to Shobasakthi’s Autofiction, *Gorilla*, “born Anthony Dasan, joined the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Movement (LTTE) like countless others” (v). Stating his reasons for becoming a militant, Shobasakthi, in his interview with Bhakthi Shringarpure from *Warscape*, says,

In the years 1956, 1958, 1977 and 1983, Tamils in Sri Lanka were attacked violently. The 1983 ethnic violence was the worst of the lot. Sri Lankan cabinet ministers planned and executed this pogrom. The then Sri Lankan President, J.R. Jayewardene, addressing the Tamils of his country, crowed, “If there is war, then there is war; if there is peace, then there is peace.” More than 2000 Tamils were killed; Tamil property worth millions and millions was destroyed. The Tamils living in the south and west as well as in the central mountainous region of Sri Lanka were made refugees and chased to the north and east [the Tamil areas]. Angered by this violence, young Tamils willing to bear arms against the Sri Lankan government joined the liberation movement in hordes. I was one of them.
An autodidact and a voracious reader, in the interview he states that Marxism is the driving force behind his writing. He also states that from his childhood he has been intensely involved in theatre and the springboard for his writings is the courage to speak about issues that others hesitate to write about. A fearless writer his works are powerful political denunciations of varied power structures of Sri Lanka, France and India. In an email interview from Paris with the DNA magazine, Shobasakthi says, that he was a writer and a dramatist even as a militant, writing propaganda poems and pamphlets about the liberation of Tamil Eelam. And during the militancy days had staged theatrical performances that were played in the villages. He adds, “I had more than my share of the imagination needed for a writer. I should admit that the height of my imagination was my hope that we would gain a socialist Tamil Eelam through militancy.” Three of his works Gorilla, Traitor and The MGR Murder Trial have been translated into English.

Speaking about the Eelam struggle and the in-fighting between the various Tamil groups he observes that “none of the Tamil movements had any kind of politico-philosophical outlook. Even if they mouthed off about socialism and Marxism, these were empty words for all of them lusted after armed struggle and based their actions on excitable feelings rather than reflection” (interview with Bhakthi Shringarpure Warscape). He is also powerfully critical of the political manipulations of the Indian government and its role in the different phases of the Eelam wars.

Shobasakthi left Sri Lanka in his late teens and made his way to Thailand as an international refugee. Anushya Ramaswamy notes in her introduction to Gorilla, “After an extended stay in many of the places that fall within the itinerary of the undocumented traveller, he arrived in Paris in the early 1990s”(x). In France he has chosen to find employment at the minimum wage level which gives him freedom to write. For Shobasakthi, Ramaswamy explains his political commitments are inseparable from his everyday life. He and his writer/activist friends maintain a network of writers and thinkers within the Tamil speaking refugee world(x). She adds that he “…defines himself primarily as a refugee writer, and his writings to me reflect a profound homesickness and homelessness”(x).

Michael Ondaatje is a well-known postcolonial, postmodern writer and is widely celebrated as a Sri Lankan born Canadian writer. “Ondaatje” says Avinash Jodha, “inherits multiple racial, ethnic and socio-cultural hybridities” (5). Belonging to the hybrid Sri Lankan Burgher community his hybridity can be located in the mixed Portuguese, Dutch, English, and Sinhalese and Tamil lineages. Born in Sri Lanka in 1943, he left for England when he
was 11 and then moved to Canada in 1962. His personal history – his community, his childhood memories of Ceylon, his exposure to Canadian culture and literary tradition – has found multiple manifestations in his works.

Ondaatje’s literary journey began with many collections of poetry like *Dainty Monsters, The Man with Seven Toes, The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Rat Jelly* to name a few. *In the Skin of a Lion* was the first novel of Ondaatje, after which he went on to write several award winning novels like the Booker Prize winning *The English Patient* (1992), *Divisadero* (2007) and the latest *The Cat’s Table* (2011). Ondaatje has evoked multiple critical responses spread over literary and academy journals and books, dissertations and research projects. Different theoretical and critical frameworks of post-colonialism, postmodernism, structuralism and so on, have been used to study his works. His intriguing style with its literary pastiche that presents heterogeneous material—photographs, poems, newspaper clippings, disjointed narratives and his depiction of human experience as inherently fractured, have particularly drawn scholastic attention.

For Ondaatje Sri Lanka has been the location for writings in different genres. His Sri Lankan texts like, *Running in the Family* (a memoir), *Handwriting* and *The Cinnamon Peeler* (collections of poems), deal with private recollections, ancient myths and history of Sri Lanka. It is however only in *Anil’s Ghost* that Ondaatje addresses the conflict in Sri Lanka. *The English Patient* is the other novel that uses war, though here it is the Second World War, as its immediate setting. Very similar in its technique to *Anil’s Ghost*, *The English Patient* also moves on the central plotline of discovering the identity of the burnt out “English Patient”. Speaking about *Anil’s Ghost*, in his interview with Peter Coughlan, Ondaatje says “… the version in *Anil’s Ghost* is” not about being “… a more faithful or more nonfictive version. It’s a fiction. It is a novel, and it is also a point of view”. The novel went on to win the prestigious Canadian Governor General Award and other awards like the Giller prize, the Kiriyama prize and the Prix Medicis award in France.

Shobasakthi’s *Gorilla* and *Traitor* and Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* are set against the wide canvas of the civil wars and can be placed within and against literatures that have retold the conflict. Located in specific conflict contexts like the ethnic violence of 1983 or the internecine warfare amongst the Tamil militia or the problematic period of the Janatha Vimukthi Perumana’s uprisings that worsened the condition of the already war ravaged zones of the nation, the works narrativise the war from different positions of the exile.
II

The Dispossessed –Exile: Anthony Dasan, Rocky Raj and Nesakumaran.

Shobasakthi’s *Gorilla* divided into three parts is primarily the account of one/two LTTE child soldier(S) - the two seemingly different and disparate “exiled” protagonists- Anthony Dasan and Rocky Raj. However towards the end of the novel, this distinction gets blurred in their multiple contexts of exile. More complexly interwoven, with its ambivalent and oscillating narrative, *Traitor* traces the story of a single protagonist- Nesakumaran, whose exilic condition fluctuates, ebbing and flowing between the expelled contexts of Dasan and Rocky Raj in *Gorilla*.

*Gorilla* and *Traitor* begin within the frame works of exiles, the former through the narrative of an individual Anthony Dasan, the asylum seeker, the latter first through the collective unconscious of the Sri Lankan Tamils, then through the account of Nesakumaran. What is generalized as the condition of the Tamil speaking Diaspora of Sri Lanka, those who “wander forever as exiles and unwanted migrants” in the beginning of *Traitor* becomes particularized in Anthony Dasan and Nesakumaran’s situations (*Traitor* 200). Anthony Dasan’s narrative in the present and Nesakumaran’s retrospective narrative, project and envisage themselves as victims of what Peter Isaac Rose in his essay “Forced Out”, calls the “cruellest type of displacement, that was caused by categorical victimization” (4). Thus the two novels begin from the point of view of the dispossessed, those evicted, cast out and rendered homeless, owing to their belonging to a particular (in this case) ethnic group. In *Gorilla*, Anthony Dasan (initially), and in *Traitor*, Nesakumaran, represent this collective Tamil speaking Diaspora of Sri Lanka, particularly the Northern Tamils who have, according to the translator of *Gorilla*, borne “the brunt of the ethnic conflict and its consequent displacements” (xiv).

Through the braided narrative of *Traitor* and the epistolatory narrative of Anthony Dasan’s story in *Gorilla*, it becomes evident that Nesakumaran and Dasan’s, what critics like Rose call “forced displacements within the state through roundups, incarcerations in prisons, army camps and mass exterminations”, lead to these dispossessed Tamils mandatory relocation to another country and “flight” from Sri Lanka (4). Nesakumaran and Anthony Dasan are thus involuntarily exiled. Isaac Rose states that involuntary displacement caused due to expulsion-“expiation” through banishment is not very different from a voluntary movement like flight (3). Flight is egged on by those who threaten harsher treatment should
those besieged remain. Anthony Dasan and Nesakumaran are forced to take flight and expel themselves in order to escape a hostile homeland, becoming hence the hyphenated expellee-escapees. These contexts result in their becoming what Said determines as the characteristic exile of this age, the “age of the refugee, the displaced person and mass migration, caused by modern warfare ... quasi theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers” (“Reflections on Exile”174).

_Gorilla_ begins with the fervent appeal of Dasan, the asylum seeker.Narrated in an epistolatory manner Anthony Dasan’s plea for sanctuary begins with an unambiguous and apparently transparent declaration of identity- in terms of name, ethnicity, religion and region. Through this Dasan’s multipart exilic/dislocated identity becomes evident. Being a Tamil in search of what Rushdie suggests “imaginary”- separatist – “homelands” within a majoritarian state that denies such secession, Dasan like other Tamils is the dislocated, which cannot assimilate within their nation states. Dasan who can be identified as what Rose calls “inner exile” is thus exiled even before his convoluted flight from his homeland begins (5). Other marginalities emerge, as the text suggests in him being Roman Catholic amongst the predominantly Hindu Tamils of Jaffna (Gorilla 1).This inner exilic position becomes especially harrowing once the civil war escalates. In a series of rapid declarations, Dasan casts himself as the hapless innocent periodically victimized by the Sri Lankan army, the Indian Peace Keeping Force and the Tamil Liberation Forces (Gorilla 5-11).

In stark contrast to the beginning of _Gorilla_, the first person narrative of _Traitor_ narrated in the present in the context of exile commences in ambiguity and indistinctness. The unnamed “I‟s only classification of himself, at this point seems to be the official expression “Refugee”. The “I” whom we later associate, through the third person narrative as Nesakumaran, however gives no particulars about his causes for exile, neither his place of origin nor can we ascertain his host land. The host land is merely a “small and silent town in the middle of the cherry tree forest, 126 kilometers north-east of the capital somewhere in Europe” (Traitor3). The only detail he offers is the year he reached Europe, 1987 and the names of his wife and daughter- Premini and Nirami. Though a refugee, by the time the “I” launches on the story of his “beloved child, Nirami” he has been cast out as the text suggests of even that status, locked up in the prisons of some foreign, “frozen country” (Traitor 6). Thus though Dasan’s exilic condition is in a flux, his identity has a solidity, Nesakumaran’s exilic condition while it coagulates in the word refugee, his fuzzy narration dissipates all coagulations gradually.
Pramod Nayar in his book *Postcolonial Literature* states that Diasporic narratives capture two invariables of their experience—exile and homeland—“analeptical” and “proleptical” (188). This is true of Dasan and Nesakumaran’s accounts as well. This they achieve through two moves—temporal and spatial. Their temporal move is a looking back at the past, an “analepsis” that involves negotiating with a tormenting history and reclaiming this story in their nation’s conflict history. Significantly, in Dasan’s case this “analeptical” account is done in order to survive hostility and gain acceptance in the present in the host land, in this case Paris. Hence the “analeptical” move is simultaneously a “proleptical” one as it looks forward to the future. However Nesakumaran’s “analeptical” account has no such seeming lucidity of motive. For all the turgid statement of intention, that he proposes to narrate the story of his child, moving perhaps towards the naming of her rapist, he does no such thing. More than anticipating a “proleptical” future, the reader understands through the “analeptical” account, Nesakumaran’s present that as the translator Sivaraman points out is “pathologically damaged by a violent history”, leading to his paedophilic incestuous rape of his daughter, Nirami (“Afterword”, *Traitor* 211).

The spatial move like other Diasporic writing involves the two processes—which Nayar calls - of “de-territorialisation” - loss of territory and “re-territorialisation” - gaining of territory (189). However this rather simple polarity, one gradually realises, cannot work either for Dasan or for Nesakumaran. This is suggested in *Gorilla* in the surreptitious and complicated journey(s) Dasan undertakes to exile himself from Sri Lanka, reaching France via Ukraine Turkey and Italy by flight ship and car. While his loss of territory seems absolute there is no concurrent gaining of territory. In Nesakumaran’s story the journey is implied in the word refugee and the year of his arrival. Through an intertextual reading of *Gorilla* and *Traitor*, one infers that perhaps Nesakumaran also undertook a similar covert departure from Sri Lanka, considering his contentious past. While his “de-territorialisation” is implied, the concomitant “re-territorialisation” is complete in Nesakumaran’s case. Though he finds refuge and sets up a home and so on, these structures would later be dismantled by Nesakumaran himself. Before he narrates the harrying treatment meted out to him in his homeland and hence his departure, Dasan narrates the maltreatment he faced as a refugee in France. Elie Wiesel, an Auschwitz survivor, writer and Nobel laureate comments on the word refuge, and its warm connotations offering protection and hospitality, but with the addition of the phoneme “e” it became refugee, meaning something negative. A negativity related not only to the angst suffered but the attitudes of countries of asylum that reflect more
xenophobia than its opposite what the Greeks call philoxenia (hospitality to strangers) (qtd in Rose 8). France similarly is wary of strangers at her gates, even if they have suffered persecution and expatriation. The French authorities far from providing sanctuary arrest him and once again the old sequence of interrogation and incarceration, to escape which he had fled, is now repeated within the prison chambers of France. In a contemporary world where passports, visas, embarkation and disembarkation forms are important documents at ports of entries, with the loss of his passport in Turkey to an agent, all marks of identity are lost and Dasan has no official documents to prove his nationality to the French officials. Dasan perforce, becomes a sort of subverted “transnationalist”. Sophia McClennen defines “Transnationalism” as a concept that deconstructs boundaries of nation states, renders borders insignificant and may cause at its extreme a loss of any attachment to nation. She also comments that at the other end of the spectrum is heightened ethnic nationalism (23). In Dasan’s case such concepts of globalisation and cosmopolitanism are undermined and weakened. Borders, for him, are etched in blood, boundaries translate into documents and permits that admit or reject crossings and crossovers, yet simultaneously he is in a space that is borderless, as he cannot cross any borders, a citizen of a boundless world who has been denied citizenship by nations for whom borders and boundaries are sacrosanct.

With the French authorities rejecting his application for political asylum thrice, Dasan’s exilic situation gets further irrevocably convoluted. The impossibility of obtaining refuge in the host land gets entrenched with a certain finality through the number –three. The question Dasan asks “where do I go?” makes him a kind of an “Almasian” exile. Count Almasy, the Hungarian spy, the “English Patient” in Ondaatje’s novel of the same name, states how nations only “deform us” so he rejects nations and nationalist identities and calls himself the “international bastard” (The English Patient 108). Dasan in a way is also an “international bastard” but in his case nations reject him owing to his ambiguous nationalist/anti-nationalist identities.

Though not literally exiled like Dasan, Nesakumaran by the end of the novel becomes a metaphorical transnationalist, however in his case it is not due to the xenophobic exclusionist politics of host nations. In fact the host land’s penal system brings Nesakumaran’s offence into the public space of court rooms, lawyers and trials, leading to his incarceration. Moreover, before Nesakumaran confesses, Premini wishes she could have been in Sri Lanka where Nirami’s pregnancy could have been aborted through medicine women and other such clandestine remedies, thus privately silenced. She also narrates another
episode that echoes her context. It is the foreign soil that prevents the stifling of Nirami’s rape. State authorized bodies like the white social worker enter the private space of home, a threatening space for Nirami, to protect her from a rapist father and a mother incensed by the sullied family honour. Nesakumaran is thus rendered homeless as the family, the metaphor used to describe nations in nationalist discourses, rejects him as he has deformed it.

Anthony Dasan is a linguistic exile, not only in Sri Lanka but in Paris as well, and is unable to tell his story except in his mother tongue. It is only when a white lady who speaks fluent Tamil arrives to interview him, that he is able to narrate his “problems” and his multipart victimization by various forces in Sri Lanka (Gorilla 3). Not so Nesakumaran who during his incarceration quotes lines from the Bible in French. This suggests his assimilation into the host culture and the resultant refuge that he is offered (Traitor 101).

Most Diasporas live in perpetual hope of returning to their homeland in some faraway future, signified in the trope “next year in Jerusalem”. But for Anthony Dasan extradition is a sentence worse than death, deportation would mean arrest, torture and extermination. That there might be deliberate gaps and erasures in his story becomes evident when he declares that he had falsified his identity when he had first arrived. His identifying himself as Radha Sethupathy was done, he claims as an attempt to stave off a highly possible deportation. While Nesakumaran neither desires nor fears repatriation into Sri Lanka, he hopes for other kinds of homecoming once his prison tenure is temporarily terminated in France. Without trepidation he prospects that his wife Premini will receive the patriarch home. However Premini rescinds the patriarch’s re-“patriation” and he is exiled forever.

Alienated and exiled in his homeland and host land, unable to assimilate in homeland and refused assimilation in host land, space for Dasan becomes Dystopias of torment. Dasan’s narrative is hence caught between de and re territorialisation and attempts to negotiate this interstitial space through reclamation of his story in the armed conflict of his country. It is from this composite position as an exile that Dasan narrates his story.

Nesakumaran’s exilic position in his homeland in the early part of his story causes him to negotiate issues similar to the ones traversed by the central protagonist of Gorilla, Rocky Raj. Rocky Raj is not a refugee or an asylum seeker, like Anthony Dasan, when the reader first encounters him in the second part of the novel. But Rocky Raj’s story deals with his ascent from a voluntary inner exile that causes him to join the Movement to an enforced flight to Paris as a consequence of the conflict. In Traitor, the fraction of Nesakumaran’s
early life in Sri Lanka before he is forced to migrate to France is spent in a similar yet somewhat different voluntary exilic condition. In these early parts of the novels, Rocky Raj and Nesakumaran’s ethnic positions as Tamils in Sri Lanka becomes evident. Other exilic marginalities of Rocky and Nesakumaran also emerge, in the former’s open and the latter’s covert campaigning for the separatist state of Tamil Eelam, the imaginary homeland the Tamil minorities craved for in the majoritarian Sinhalese state of Sri Lanka. In addressing the people of Kunjan Fields as “people of Tamil Eelam” and in mourning the lack of a separate nation for this “honeyed tongue”, Rocky Raj is the very opposite of the transnationalist. As McClennen remarks, he becomes the “ethnic nationalist” who is in linguistic exile within his country, Sri Lanka (23). When Nesakumaran’s ethnic nationalism is threatened by the oppressive state structures, he extradites himself out of his home into the conflict by supporting an organization through his friend Dattu. As ethnic nationalist exiles, they are both critical of the homogeneous politics of the state and disparage cultural/linguistic unification that suppresses to the point of erasure other cultures and languages. While Anthony Dasan is more a refugee suffering losses who attempts to find succour through his appeal for asylum,(hence writes from a condition associated with anguish and loss), Rocky Raj’s exile is initially a more ideological exile, exiled from mainstream Sri Lanka owing to his Eelam ideologies. Nesakumaran’s exilic position as stated earlier, moves between these two states of expulsions, although concurrently being different from Dasan and Rocky. Though, early on we do not see Rocky opposing the hegemonic state and its authorities, as an ideological exile, we see other oppositions emerge making Rocky Raj’s exilic position doubly layered. Nesakumaran on the other hand in countering and combating authoritarian figures, his self-exiled stand-point becomes increasingly multipart and uncontrollable in his homeland.

If Dasan is cast out of his homeland owing to identity effacing oppressive structures, Rocky Raj casts himself out of his home, owing to the distressingly overpowering figure of his father, Gorilla. His is not a metaphorical or an abstract form of exile but as concrete as Dasan’s, dispossessing himself of home and roots, since his father represents the archetypal “Chandy”. A figure, Pradeep Jeganathan locates in Sri Lankan anthropology as representing the thug figure (38). Home is not a place that offers him a sense of self, legitimacy and strength. Populated by his servile mother Genoa, a rather loving but hapless sister Princie and a thug-in-the-making brother Michael Raj, Rocky Raj renders himself homeless and joins the “Movement”. Unarmed in many ways by his “Chandy” father who hurls himself into armed
confrontations with authority figures, Rocky Raj’s self-exile is driven by the need to arm himself with the power of the Movement (whose power Gorilla seems to fear) to regain his lost identity and thwarted masculinity, both displaced by his father. In that sense Rocky Raj is an ex-patriate who deliberately rejects the patria thrusting it to an “ex” status and seeks inclusion and assimilation in the host land (in this case the movement) completely.

If one can measure varied scales of expatriation, Nesakumaran’s rejection of his home is relatively more voluntary, in comparison with Rocky. Unlike Rocky’s domicile, Nesakumaran’s home’s forte lies in its identity as a structure that gives those affiliated with it, authenticity and supremacy. Belonging to the upper caste majoritarian group of the Vellalars of Palmyra islands, Nesakumaran’s family connotes respectability, uprightness and propriety, represented by his father, Earnest. Earnest “master”, the principal of the Government School of Palmyra Island, the patriarch of Nesakumaran’s home is the polar opposite of Gorilla. Absolutely “unthug” like, Earnest Shobasakthi asserts, was the “pure catholic son of the church of St. Thomas”, with not even a “hint of drunkenness, womanizing, lying or cheating in his history” (Traitor25). Such is his repute, that people called him “master” or “principal”. Within this space Earnest wishes to voluntarily exile his son from worldly ties by making him a catholic priest to ensure his later departure to Rome. It is from this other worldly demands of his home, that Nesakumaran intentionally exiles himself to the world of politics and political ideology.

Both Rocky Raj and Nesakumaran’s expatriation begins with their “de-territorialising” their home willingly, in order to “re-territorialise” themselves within the movement/ organisation. Like Dasan and the implied later expatriation of Nesakumaran to France, Rocky Raj’s too commences in a concealed, stealthy and secretive ways. That his and Nesakumaran’s ideological exiles are flawed is evident from the very way it begins- with thievery. In preparation for conditions that would require assimilation, Rocky steals his thug brother’s running shorts to prepare for training and manipulates Jeyaseeli to part with her money, whilst Nesakumaran along with an associate steals certain chemicals and acid from the Pilimathalawa Middle School’s Science laboratory.

Nesakumaran’s spatial shift, like Dasan’s, is never complete. Once out of home, Nesakumaran wanders between Jaffna town and Urathurai, sleeping in homes of secret friends, abandoned buildings and church porches. Nesakumaran’s homeless wanderings are accentuated further when his series of incarcerations begin in police stations, army bases
culminating in state prisons like Welikada and Batticaloa. The moment he is caught in the vicious loop of the armed conflict, the choice of being an exile is no longer Nesakumaran’s. Unlike Rocky’s context in Gorilla where home and host binaries continue to operate in varying scales till Rocky’s final deportment to Paris, Shobasakthi in Traitor, ensconces Nesakumaran so deeply in the combat of the 1980s that such concerns soon get entangled and implicated with issues of the armed struggle.

Even as spatial shifts are absolute in Rocky Raj’s case, binaries are also initially well defined and conclusive. Peter Isaac Rose speaks about the opposing movements of the displaced. He sees the condition of the dispossessed as centrifugal away from the homeland where individuals are categorically persecuted; the prime characteristic of the immigrants is centripetal, pulled in by the promise of a better life (10). If Anthony Dasan is caught between the “centripetal” and the “centrifugal”, Rocky Raj is more definitive in being “centripetal” as he is pulled in by the promises of the movement: power, militant masculinity and the what Rushdie has termed the “imaginary homeland” (9).

In many Diasporic narratives, dislocation leads to un-naming and renaming. This is one of the immediate things that happen to Rocky, when he is named after the late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s son Sanjay Gandhi. Pramod Nayar states in Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction how a process of transformation of identity accompanies a change of place (189). For Rocky this transformation begins with his naming and adapting to this new home. Even as he strived to dislocate himself from his earlier home, he similarly strives to re-locate himself in the “new home”. Similar to nationalist discourses that see the nation as one family and classify nationalist leaders as “father” and people as fraternity, Rocky constructs himself within the movement in a similar vein. The imaginary homeland of Eelam, which Rocky believes he is helping his people achieve, is framed within such a discourse. The new developments and turns the conflict takes and the knowledge of the wilderness, so essential to guerrilla warfare causes Rocky to be extradited to Kunjan Fields. Like Dasan, Rocky too deplores return and the encounter with his father. However what remains an imminent threat to Dasan, gets executed in Rocky Raj’s case. He returns with a renewed self-image, proud of his achievements in the host land, like the expatriate who returns armed with dollars and foreign degrees. But the memory of his father and the imminent possibility of his acquired authority being undermined remains an unconscious fear. A fear that comes true in more ways than one once the home space and the host space intersect, problematising the earlier neatly compartmentalised binaries.
Rocky is not without longing for his home, though he does not want to see his father. As Avtar Brah comments, “Home is a mythic place in the Diasporic imagination” (qtd in Nayar Postcolonial Literature 192). In Rocky’s imagination he sees a home free of the tyranny of his father and hopes to see a changed father. However this remains a thing of his imagination as Gorilla is more brutish than ever, verbally abusing his son and physically abusing Jeyaseeli. When he hears of the menarchal ceremony and the humiliating treatment Gorilla meted out his guests, Rocky once again sets out to his home in a way of asserting his masculinity by righting his father’s wrongs. Like the expellee who returns with hopes of inclusion, Rocky aims to displace his father with his gifts and the authority the Movement seems to have invested him with. Though Genoa and Princie warm up to him and his gifts, Gorilla returns to set ablaze his hut. Thus completely casting out Rocky in a method similar to the scorch and burn policies of armed combatants.

As Rocky gets involved deeper and deeper with the movement and its power politics, the space within the movement becomes constricting and disillusioning. Equally alienating as his erstwhile home, he is forced into realisation what a chimera the Movement and its campaign for Eelam is. The ex-patriate Rocky Raj, who had voluntarily cast himself out of his home, soon becomes like the asylum seeker Dasan once he is forcefully cast out of the movement.

His expulsion occurs in two stages. Initially suspended from the movement he wanders the coasts of Kunjan Fields, rejected by the host and rejecting the home, Rocky like Dasan has nowhere to go. Though not suffering the anguish and loss of Dasan, Rocky still feels the pangs of ostracism and the unfulfilled aspirations of Eelam. It is in this condition, he writes a letter appealing to the Officer in Charge of the Jaffna Main Camp. Like Dasan’s petition this is yet another document, pleading inclusion and seeking justice. However the letter leads to the second stage, furthering his exilic situation when he is expelled because the movement believes he has stolen one of the hidden cylinders. The space which the Movement provided seen by Rocky Raj as liberating and empowering soon becomes like Dasan’s France, a place where he is incarcerated, tortured and finally banished.

By the time we see Rocky Raj in the third part of the novel with Anthony Dasan in France and hear his narrative, he has become an expellee-escapee like Dasan, who has however found refuge, it seems in France. It is in this space that the distinction that had been
suggested in the text between Dasan and Rocky gets blurred leading to a complete collapse of identity.

The Voluntarily-displaced Exile: Anil Tissera

Like Shobasakthi’s novels Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* also begins with a return to the homeland by an exile. However, the return in *Anil’s Ghost* is a physical one of the self-exiled protagonist and not a return through the protagonist’s memory. The title character, Anil Tissera, is a forensic anthropologist educated in the United Kingdom, based in the United States, and living a peripatetic life as a result of her work. She returns to Sri Lanka, the land of her birth, under the auspices of the United Nations to investigate human rights violations allegedly carried out by the Sri Lankan government against its people. As a Diasporic writer writing about his homeland, therefore, Ondaatje has positioned the protagonist, Anil, as a Diasporic herself. Like Ambalavanar Sivanandan in *When Memory Dies*, Ondaatje has created space within the text for his own perspective as a Diasporic writer, who has chosen to narrativise his conflict torn homeland “with a long distant gaze” to emerge(*Anil’s Ghost*, 11).

Anil is a transnational immigrant who has wilfully settled in another country, having emigrated from Sri Lanka fifteen years ago for educational and economic advancement. Anil, who is from an upper-middle-class Sinhalese family, left Sri Lanka at the age of eighteen after winning a scholarship to pursue her tertiary education in England and subsequently in the United States. During her fifteen years she has not made contact with anyone in Sri Lanka after the death of her parents in an accident. Far from returning to her homeland with nostalgia, Anil seems to have rejected Sri Lanka, like the omniscient narrator tells us that “the island no longer held her by the past” (11). Anil is not the dislocated- dispossessed trying to affix her roots in the land of her birth but rejects any connections with that land. Sandeep Sanghera in his essay “Touching the Language of Citizenship in Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*”, notes how initially on her arrival, the others “give her a citizenship” and attempt to write her back into the island. They situate Sri Lanka as the country of her birth and characterize her return as the return of the “prodigal”. Later Sarath remembers her as the “swimmer”. Sanghera also adds in a place where names are erased or tragically go missing, like Palipana’s from the latest edition of the Sinhala Encyclopaedia, Anil’s is remembered in the context of her Sri Lankan past( 147-149). But all these types of “belongings” are rejected by Anil. Instead the reader sees what Parama Roy calls the “gastro poetics” of the immigrant, in Anil’s choice to drink as the narrator tells us “toddy first thing after fifteen years”. (*Anil’s Ghost*, 10)
Anil’s outsiderly status is particularly marked by her loss of her mother tongue Sinhala. This “disarticulation” is evident during many instances in the novel - when she visits her old maid Lalitha, from whom she is further disconnected for Lalitha speaks Tamil, or later when she tries to communicate with Ananda and Gunasena. This deliberate linguistic “de-territorialising” from her homeland in her homeland can be contrasted with her earlier attitude to the same language abroad, where she tries to cling to its fragments and flavours, through the call she makes to her Ayah to speak of “Curd, rulang and jaggery” (*Anil’s Ghost* 138). It is these longings for the familiar home-Sri Lanka’s of the mind in the alien host culture that leads to her marriage with her Sinhala husband who enters her life in “stilts and bangles” symbolizing Sri Lanka (*Anil’s Ghost* 138). With him she reconstructs her homeland through slivers like street names, Sinhalese words and so on. But this imagined solidarity fabricated against an imaginary homeland soon wilts. With the annulment of her marriage, Anil also disassociates from her homeland.

This deracination from Sri Lanka ensues in her re-territorialising herself in the fields, classrooms and labs of the forensic anthropologist where bodies are exhumed and examined. Settling into her studies she also settles into other languages, of her books. Educated in the West she has incorporated not only its language but also its creeds and perception. Whether it’s her relationship with the married American, Cullis, her ease on the Bakerloo line or the highways around Santa Fe, “She felt completed abroad” (*Anil’s Ghost* 54). Maryse Jayasuriya comments that in this “courtéd foreignness” Anil sees herself as not merely being a confident cosmopolitan traveller, but as someone who has found a sense of fulfilment away from her native land or in the instabilities of “foreignness” (259). So encircled by her “foreignness” and a stranger in her own land, it is to her American friend Leaves’ postcard that she clings to in Sri Lanka in her moment of loneliness and alienation. Further the alienation and hostility Anil feels all around her is also because of her capacity as an international investigator of war crimes by the state, and this adds to the menacing atmosphere of the novel.

The presentiment of imminent danger lurking in every corner and the ensuing apprehension is amplified by the prodigal’s unfamiliarity with the language. In the island, the narrator tells us “she moved with only one arm of language amongst uncertain laws and fears everywhere” (*Anil’s Ghost* 54). Unsure of everything and everyone including the Government assigned archaeologist, Sarath, it is however to him she has to turn at different points for translations- when Gunasena has to be reassured of her medical aid or the interpretation of the harmless scientific feel of Ananda’s calf muscles to uncover “Sailor’s” profession. So
despite the fact that she is “at ease” everywhere else in the world, Anil seems distinctly uncomfortable once she returns to Sri Lanka (Anil’s Ghost 259).

Even non-verbal communication like the “Asian nod, which included in its almost circular movement the possibility of a no” are beyond Anil’s monoglossic western interpretations (Anil’s Ghost 16). This indirectness in communication Anil encounters at several points, Gunasena’s Asian nod like Sarath’s, the rest-house owner’s “J-stroke nod” or Palipana’s tilted head that catches whatever passes around him. Sanghera situates this complex gesture within the circular subtleties of the Sinhala language. He adds that Anil emphasizes her disconnect when she rejects the curling “e” the astrologer wants her to append to her name making it a Sinhalese “Anile”. In disallowing the Sinhalese “e” and making her name the indeterminate “Anil”, she further entrenches herself as the outsider in Sri Lanka (157).

Jayasuriya points out that Anil has wholeheartedly accepted and believes “the grand narratives of Western civilization, in the empirical Truth and Reason” (260). This is evident in the way Anil compares what she sees and hears of Sri Lanka unfavourably with what she has experienced in Europe and North America. Whereas in the West, she could depend on “clearly marked roads to the source of most mysteries,” in Sri Lanka truth seems more elusive: “Information was made public with diversions and subtexts—as if the truth would not be of interest when given directly, without waltzing backwards” (Anil’s Ghost 54-55). As Maryse Jayasuriya points out in differentiating Sri Lanka negatively from the West in an essentialist manner, there is a disturbing sense that Anil is engaged in what Edward Said has famously delineated as orientalism. According to Anil, in the West, information is always accessible and it is actually possible to make “truth” known, while the opposite is the case in Sri Lanka (261). To Jayasuriya’s observation we can add that Anil seems to have accepted this assumption that there are no half-truths or intrigues to cover up information in the West, and that its discourse is transparent and unmitigated. It is this muddled Western rhetoric that frames her investigation in Sri Lanka. Julie Mc Gonegal states that Anil is fully committed to a Western narrative of justice (90). Further Anil believes in absolutisms like “Truth” which is empirical and transformative. She fervently believes in the dictum “Truth shall set you free.” (Anil’s Ghost 102).

Jayasuriya states that some critics suggest Anil is a Janus-like figure. Quoting Victoria Cook Jayasuriya observes how Cook sees Anil in a positive light, as a transnational with a “doubleness”, which creates new perspectives by crossing divisions and blurring boundaries (261). While Jayasurya observes that this may not always be the case that
“doubleness”—that discomfiting sense of similarity and difference—is a necessary and inevitable condition of being a migrant, we can add that it is precisely this perception deficiency that Ondaatje is trying to highlight. Anil does not show much proof of having Diasporic double consciousness, perhaps because she valorises her “foreignness” in relation to her homeland and has attempted heartily to disregard her past and sever her associations in her country of origin. Apart from the external indicators such as her British passport, Anil identifies herself with the West. As a result, she feels only a sense of private and intellectual displacement, separation, and loss when she returns to Sri Lanka, and we see her caught in the hold of a rather limited Orientalist perception.

Anil had read news reports and documents about the tragedy while she was abroad and it is with this multiply distanced perspective that she hopes to investigate the complicated world of Sri Lanka. Distanced as the voluntary exile from Sri Lanka, she is also distanced from the Sri Lankan conflicts for she has not witnessed or experienced the conflict first hand. Also her knowledge is based on western manuscripts that have controlled and filtered the documents. It is with and through this perspective of an exile that we first glimpse the conflict.

III

From the Frontlines of Conflict: Shobasakthi’s Gorilla and Traitor

Anthony Dasan - Rocky Raj in Gorilla and Nesakumaran in Traitor are exiles who reflect many of the critical concerns associated with the post-modern experience. Their (what McClennen calls), “displacement, decentring and disempowerment” owing to the armed conflict in Sri Lanka makes them the outsider(20). As exiles from “repressive centres” they critique “authoritarian discourses”and “master- narratives”“grounded in particularities of the experience”( McClennen20).From this position, which the research terms the postmodern-exile-intersect,(a position which they share with the author of the novel, Shobasakthi) they recount the experiences of one who was once the initiated insider of the conflict. While the position of the perceiver of the conflict is the exiled outsider, the representation of the armed conflict is founded on victims and combatants’ active involvement in different phases of the Civil War. Hence the novels are an expose’ to a political history that has remained unwritten or has been written over by dominant narratives of official history. Through the accounts of Rocky Dasan and Nesakumaran, Shobasakthi privileges the margin over the centre, writes the
stories of fragmented subjects and narrativizes plurality and differences. From this intersecting position of the postmodernist exile, he reflects on a number of critical concerns associated with the conflict, offering us through *Gorilla* and *Traitor* alternative histories of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka. Embroiled in debates and dialogues with Sri Lanka’s turbulent immediate past, the texts attempt two things—challenge any hegemonic force that presumes centrality and grant value to the margins and “ex-centric” subjects (Said “Reflections on Exile” 188). To attempt this, what Linda Hutcheon calls “double-talk, forked-tongue mode of address “Shobasakthi coalesces the complicitious functions of the subaltern historian and the postmodern artist, intending a simultaneous denial of totalising history with a recuperation of minor stories, through a foregrounding of gaps and fissures in mainstream narratives” (154). Memory, whether individual’s personal or historic memory or a collective’s memory or a fusion of different memories, are locations from which the conflict memory is recovered.

Anthony Dasan’s account of the conflict recounted from his private memory, from the perspective of the expellee-escapee-asylum seeker, is chronologically narrated beginning with the 1983 carnage, moving on to the different phases of the civil war. The arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Force and the subsequent war between the IPKF and the LTTE, beginning on 10-10-1987, leading to their departure in 1990 followed by the second Eelam War that commenced in June 1990 between the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE. While this is the larger context of the war, we hear only Dasan’s fragment of this totality related to the larger history. Though not fragmentary, it is episodic and as Gramsci points out, it “monographically” deals with Dasan’s involvement in the armed conflict (qtd in Pandey 283).

Dasan’s, begins like other significant writings on the Sri Lankan war, with the ethnic violence of July 1983, the day which changed the nature of the conflict. Anthony Dasan’s unacknowledged tale of suffering and survival can be seen as what Pandey calls an “unannaled document”, a “fragment or trace of the irrecoverable statement of mute subjects, mislaid amidst records found in institutions” (285).One of the reasons why his plea has been repeatedly rejected is because unlike the historiography of the elite, his has become like other subaltern’s stories which Pandey observes has been “destroyed by the state ruling classes need for security and control” (285). Anthony Dasan with wry humour points out to the French authorities that “in my country the military does not cut up a Tamil and then give a certificate to the injured saying, “We cut you” (*Gorilla* 2). This reveals not only the genocidal
practices of the state, but the silencing of minority’s voices, as well. Further this violence is politically motivated and is composite; hence in such armed conflicts it is difficult to establish the patriot from the paramilitary, the tyrant from the terrorist and “the individual circumstances motivating the release of that particular bullet” (Gorilla 2)

Rocky Raj’s story, which forms the second and main body of Gorilla, is narrated in the third person by Shobasakthi and is framed by Dasan’s “histories from below”. Dasan’s story, which anticipates Rocky’s story at many points, suggests the gaps that exist in hegemonic discourses. Rocky Raj’s account shows how within these gaps there exists a space through which alternate histories can emerge. The portrayal of the armed conflict from primarily Rocky’s perspective narrativises such alternate histories which are usually excluded by the grand narratives of the nation state or by hegemonic groups. While narrating this previously untold story from the lived experience of a child soldier, a tale based on personal memories and experiences, Shobasakthi nevertheless effaces himself through the use of the third person. In deliberately interlacing fiction with facts based on his personal memories, he offers a kind of “factional” account of a specific history

Traitor commences in a space Rocky’s narrative amalgamates with, in the end- a community’s story. Memory –whether of the group or of the individual is central to Traitor. While no doubt Gorilla emerges from Shobasakthi’s personal memory, this is only through reading the autobiographical surround to the novel. In Traitor two sites that the critic Jeffrey Olick locates -i.e- “collected and collective memories” are significant sites on which the novel mounts its critique of hegemonic narratives that record histories (334). Such memories are silenced by established historians who Pandey comments “like to defend old history because of the liberal assumption of an inexorable, linear progress towards nationhood and modernity” and further denounce “memories for fear of fracturing certainties and singularities that have been produced and accepted for a long time” (290). By uncovering the Tamil “collective’s” memory and the“collected memories of many individuals”that are plural, heterogeneous, sometimes truncated and undisciplined, Traitor reveals that “Nations” (in the novel both the postcolonial Sri Lankan state and the desired separatist state of Eelam) “are constituted”as Pandey observes “in self-contradictory struggles and in struggles that are prolonged and endless” (290).

In his interview in Warscape Shobasakthi states how Traitoris based on firsthand accounts oral testimonies of survivors of the massacre The epigraph to Traitor divulges
Shobasakthi’s self-conscious narration of the conflict influenced by such a social collective; the ethnic minority of Sri Lanka, the Tamils, whose combined identity has been shaped by memories of prisons, death camps, refugee camps, Tamil Eelam, traitors, Maveerars (*Traitort). If this social collective memory can generate the text, it is also to such a collective that the novel is addressed. Brought up on the one hand on rhetoric’s like “pongu Tamil”, this collective memory has also been disillusioned by the politics of the struggle, to them Eelam is at once a prohibited dream and an imprisoning nightmare. To multitudinous suffering, death and madness they only respond with the apathetic “Hmmm...” (The novel’s Tamil title), therefore Shobasakthi says “This book is for my people” (Epigraph, *Traitort*).

The novel begins with a Diasporic collective in the year 2003 with the Eelam Tamils, all over Europe memorializing the twentieth anniversary of the 1983 violence, with song, skits and *bharatnatyam* dances. These acts of commemorative mourning by this Diaspora, born out of trauma is immediate to the novel’s attempts to remember a collective past. More than *Gorilla* which emerges from a personal recollection, *Traitor* transpires a communal collective which actively reclaims its histories, traumas and customs through such cultural acts with which the novel sets out. This communal cultural citizenship has maintained and developed a traumatic memory of the conflict in exile, a memory shaping its ongoing cultural production. By offering this frame for narrating the conflict in *Traitort*, Shobasakthi not only locates his text within such cultural “commemorative-memorialisation”, but this communal collective memory becomes the fount from which the novel springs. The literary text *Traitor*, like the cultural acts encodes such traumatic memories which are as the critic Olick states “collected and collective” (334). The particular stories, Shobasakthi wishes to narrate are chosen from the collected memories of many, that of the Nesakumarans, Srikanthamalars, Pakkiris, Kalaichelvans, and Chinas and as the narrative implies several others, who have to be as Olick states of memories “narrativised in proxy”, “remembered together and alone” (339). Shobaskthi narrates Nesakumaran’s story with several others’ stories, before handing over the narrative to him-the individual who also remembers himself with others, what Olick terms “alone” and “together” (339). It is through these twin remembrances; *Traitor* excavates alternative histories of the conflict.

Anthony Dasan’s involvement with the conflict begins with the state’s violence during civil war. Stathis N. Kalyvas in “The Paradox of Terrorism in Civil War” notes how “terrorism” by the state also turns out to be counterproductive, for this enables insurgents to win recruits (99). For instance, the State’s torture of Anthony Dasan’s father, “counter
produces”, a supporter for the Eelam cause, in Dasan. Approached by the LTTE to draw posters for them, he also makes advertisements for them. Unlike terrorists and insurgents who arm themselves in secret Dasan does it more openly. In an act displaying his support for the Eelam cause, Dasan writes and directs plays and street plays in order to “arm” the ideology of the Eelam struggle. The title of his three plays, The Sacrificial Fire, Until the Thirst Stops and Will Kannan Come, and his street play The Song of the Suffering echo the idealist liberation rhetoric of the Tigers and other militant groups on which they bandied their struggle for a separate homeland Eelam. This unguarded arming leads to Dasan being, what the critic Kalyvas terms “selectively” and “indiscriminately” targeted by insurgents and state structures (98).

The story of the main protagonist, Rocky, begins in October 1984, like Sri Lankan Tamil writings with an assertion of linguistic nationalism. Though the text mentions no clear dates at this point, the date and month is suggested through the announcement bemoaning the assassination of the then Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. It is significant to note why Shobasakthi chooses this beginning for Rocky’s version of the conflict. The assassination of Mrs. Gandhi and the significance of her death to the Eelam struggle occur at a point where many armed conflicts, more specifically separatist conflicts intersect. The assassination recorded in Kunjan Fields only through its impact, proleptically does two things. In using a peripheral impact to record what mainstream history would see as a seminal event, Shobasakthi comments on how separatist identity struggles (like the Khalistan Movement and by implication the LTTE) can become terrorist ideological struggles. Secondly, Mrs. Gandhi’s death and the causes that led to it offer a blue print for a similar political assassination referred to in the last part of the novel the suicide bombing of a later prime minister of India, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE. Further the anti-Sikh riots are a thumb nail for the ethnic violence that will tear Sri Lanka apart. The other separatist struggle that makes her death of consequence to the Sri Lankan struggle is the East Pakistan separatist war against West Pakistan which was aided by Mrs. Gandhi and the Indian army substantially, leading to the formation of Bangladesh. The Eelam cause received considerable support from India in its early phase before the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, with RAW establishing training camps in many parts of India. Indira Gandhi’s death is cast within the discourse of the separatist nation’s struggle as the loss of the “great mother” who fought to wipe out the enslavement of the Tamils to the Sinhalese. By recording the political killing from the point of view of a rather naïve idealist marginal like Rocky, Shobasakthi is critical
of the politics of hegemonic States, which manipulates and manoeuvresthe raw optimism of those harnessed to fight to meet its own larger international political agendas and of militant groups, who were called “podiyal”, suggesting their nascent idealism.

However this death which would be received and recorded in historiographies as a decisive event of great magnitude is of no consequence to anyone in the peripheral Kunjan Fields. Here the assassination creates Shobasakthi states with his inimitable irony, the “kind of curiosity and disturbance one might witness if an ownerless cow had been found dead in the field.” (Gorilla 13).

In Traitor, Palmyra island the socio-cultural space is the collective from where Shobasakthi aims to recover Nesakumaran’s individual story. It is an island, South West of the Jaffna Peninsula, one among the seven small islands floating in the Northern Sea. Though a marginal location, like Kunjan Fields, in relation to the conflict, this has faced changes in more ways than one by the armed conflict, even before the narrative begins on its shore on 24th December 1982. Unlike Kunjan Fields which is initially impassive to the larger issues surrounding it, Palmyra Islands’ every day, is charged with the effects of the conflict. Moving from the Diasporic cultural commemoration to an indigenous local religious congregation, we find the island preparing itself for the “son of God to be born once again “on her shores. However with the Sri Lankan government handing over these parts of Tamil Eelam to the administration of its armed forces, much about the celebrations has been supplanted and substituted for fear of drawing the attention of the Sinhala forces. Other influences of the conflict become evident when the thin middle-aged, fair skinned priest begins his sermon. The text’s self-reflexive parody of the priest, who anticipates Nesakumaran’s transformation in many ways, insinuates the religious with the political, muddling up liberation and salvation and citing from the Eelam ideologue Kasi Anandan’s speeches in his Christmas eve sermon.

Gorilla which begins with the death of Indira Gandhi and Traitor’s commencement with the promise of a new liberated dawn through the birth of an unnamed Messiah are both subtle comments on the nature of such armed conflicts. In a text that depicts the percolating conflict and some seminal figures that played an active role in it, Shobaskathi subtly satirizes the zeitgeist of the early 1980’s when the Tamils saw these militant leaders as more capable of achieving Eelam than their rather ineffectual moderate contemporaries. The priest’s impassioned rhetoric is soon undercut and brought to a premature closure by the news of the burning Buddhist School, Sri Lumbini Vidyalaya. The destruction of the school, placed along
with other such destructions in the novel, destabilises fervent hopes of blind believers like the priest here. In a career of botched up acts of terrorism, this burning down, is the first act of Nesakumaran’s violence, the novel introduces us to in its narrative. However once the story reaches this point later, one can cogitate in hindsight the complex conflation of Nesakumaran’s schemes in choosing this site for destruction.

Rocky Raj’s campaigning rhetoric on the loud speaker in the jeep on the Northern Road reminds one of the Sri Lankan Tamil literary writings on the conflict in the 1950’s and the 1960’s, especially Tamil poet’s like Murugaiyan, Siaiyur, Sevarajan with their militant expression of linguistic nationalism. Rocky Raj’s oratory about the Tamil language and the need to find a separate nation for this “honeyed tongue” and a “specialized politics” of its own echoes the vocabulary of titles of anthologies published in the ‘50s and the ‘60s like Tamil Enkal Ayutham (“Tamil is our weapon”) Uyir Tamilukku (“Our Life is for Tamil”). The heroic mode and the diction from Sangam poetry that these poems adopted ricochets in Rocky’s emotional and “valorous “salutation of Mrs. Gandhi (Gorilla14). Here, Shobasakthi intertextually parodies what he says in his interview with Warscape about Tamil Movements, especially their “lack of political-philosophical outlook, the empty rhetoric” and the “excitable feelings” with “no common political agenda” (Jan 2012). The plot of the novel hinges on how this delusional, romantic and idealized view of the conflict by Rocky gradually falls apart leading to his disillusionment and ultimate dispersal from home and homeland. But this rhetoric crusade to bolster support for the Eelam cause is soon destabilised with the arrival of Rocky’s father Gorilla.

This initial interchange between Gorilla and Rocky or the lack of it shows other power struggles—the politics of empowerment-disempowerment and contesting masculinities that exist between father and son. The power and potency that Rocky wields is subordinated and belittled by the presence of the hegemonic masculine figure of Gorilla. If Dasan tries to show the disjunction between his personal life and the political struggle, in Rocky’s case the personal and the political traverse in more ways than one, especially in the form of his father.

If Gorilla begins with Rocky’s rhetoric mimicking popular political discourses of Tamil nationalism, Nesakumaran in Traitor is enthused and moved by such rhetoric. While Rocky’s dream of Eelam is based on a romantic idealism, Nesakumaran we see is driven by the histrionics of stagy politicians like Appapillai Amirthalingam. Amirthalingam reconstructed from the historical memory of the Eelam struggle is hardly remembered here as
the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front leader or as he was visualised by popular imagination as the martyr assassinated by the LTTE for his attempts to bring forth peace accords in the 1980’s. *Traitor* compares him to a mango tree in full fruition and the young men who came to him in droves to “swooping bats” (17). Shobasakthi is not only stringently critical of speechifying political figures who exploit and manipulate the raw, misplaced and blind idealism of the Tamil youth but once again of the emptiness of such rhetoric that laid the foundation to the anti-Tamil bloodbaths by pillaging Sinhala mobs. In her “Afterword” to the novel, the translator Anushiya Ramaswamy comments how, the 70s newspapers carried Amritalingam’s oratorical flourishes claiming, “Blood will pour down the streets” as Tamil youths were willing to lay down their life for the cause of the separatist state (211). In a scene that recaptures the high drama of his public meetings this “sacrifice” becomes literalized in the blood-letting of the young men to place the mark of victory on their leader’s forehead. A protégé of one of the revered leaders of Tamil nationalism, Chelvanayagam, the novel depicts the advantageous Amirthalingam as cleverly translating on stage, the inexplicable noises Chelvanayagam makes as he had lost his ability to speak in his last years. Shobasakthi’s mode of characterizing Amirthalingam is to move away from verisimilitude to history in favour of self-reflexive caricature and encoding this further with the pastiche of his political speech. This vitriolic portrayal of this seminal historic personage is to deliberately defy historical documentation which sees Amirthalingam belonging to a moderate political separatist struggle than a militant one. But historical accounts are self-consciously circumvented, with Amirthalingam delighted by the blood smearing, offering the front part of his “bald” head to the eager crowd and Mangayattarasi stopping the “lions” after “enough time has gone by”(*Traitor*24). This portrayal suggests the mutual complicity of rival Movements to found a nation in bloodshed. By the end of the novel this reconstitutes as internecine military conflict.

Rocky Raj’s story takes place in the 1980’s, the period that saw the LTTE rise to its full power after wiping out other separatist organizations. His story explores a complex period in LTTE’s history when it was not yet castigated as a “terrorist” organization and it posited itself as the sole means through which Eelam could be achieved. Rocky’s account of his experience with the movement, his training as a child tiger, his posting and his subsequent expulsion are to a large extent based on Shobasakthi’s personal experience as a Tiger. From the position of the initiated insider the novel offers us “hybrid histories”.

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In the section “Give us your Children” in her book *Sri Lanka Voices from a War Zone*, Nirupama Subramanyam records amongst other stories the “little histories” of children like Sritharan forcibly recruited into Tamil Tiger camps, their travails and suffering (167-185). The Human Rights Watch Report lists a number of reasons why children join the LTTE - influenced by the propaganda of the LTTE, especially in schools, poverty and unemployment or government abuses against their family members. They also note that most of the children were however abducted or forcefully recruited (15-24). In the small histories of cadres in *Gorilla* like Gnanaraj (whose family was hacked to death by the Sri Lankan navy), Rahim and Juli (who were drawn by the weapons) Shobaskthi presents other recruits and their reasons to join the movement. As Rocky departs from Kunjan Fields to join the movement, he prays to the St. Anthony statue for personal freedom - “change my father into a God-fearing… good-hearted soul” and political freedom, “…let us obtain Eelam as quickly as possible” (*Gorilla* 22). Through this conflation of the political and the personal, Shobasakthi internally contrasts Rocky’s motives for joining the movement with the others. Shobasakthi does not romanticize Rocky’s story sentimentalising his disillusionment. Further Rocky is not a flawless character either. This is made explicit as stated earlier by his attitude to Jeyaseeli “the other woman” and his stealing from Michael Raj. The stealing and exploitation anticipates other stealing and underhand dealings of the movement.

While LTTE trained its historical child soldiers in separate camps after forming them into what were called Baby Brigades, Rocky’s training begins in the jungles with other thirteen and fourteen year olds and older men. The wry parody that the narrative moves on in these sections is Rocky’s ideological expectations as an inexperienced revolutionary of the Movement as against the veracity of the Movement. The inception begins with neither rhetoric nor ideology but with threats of punishment and death, in case of desertion or involvement with other Movements. The training that Rocky undergoes is similar to training that child soldiers went through: rigorous physical exercise, arms and weapon training. When he realizes that he would be given a Movement name, he wishes to name himself Arafat, after the Palestinian Liberation leader Yasser Arafat. However in a naming process loaded with bathos, where cadres are named after Tamil cinema heroes and bulls, Rocky is named after the controversial son of Indira Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi.

Rocky is also different from other cadres, more the studious ideologue, he can neither understand the weapon preoccupation of the other cadres nor does he care for their loutish jokes. Further his physique is unsuitable for such rigour and he struggles with swollen feet,
aches and sores, unlike the physical brawn of cadres from a working class background. The final training is one of the novel’s definitive comments on the Movements practices of violence. This is a mock-torture set up where the cadres are beaten black and blue by the teachers (the mock Sinhala army) till the cadres disclose their “Kotaya” (tiger identity). This initiation into violence is Rocky’s final test. The text juxtaposes at this juncture Rocky with his Utopian vision of Eelam and the dystopian carnage of the movement. Rocky dreams of an egalitarian idyllic setting with green fields and identical cottages. But that the vision is blemished is palpable through Rocky’s image of men and women working in the fields with guns slung to their backs. At one level this reflects the nature of fault line conflicts where, the lines, separating civilians and combatants are hazy. At another level this is perhaps the apocalyptic future, Shobasakthi envisages for his strife torn nation when war generates war, encompassing everyone, everyday. Nonetheless Rocky clings to this Eelam of his romantic mind to endure the physical onslaught of torture that charges on him guerrilla style, as part of his training. Meeting Thayavaramurthi, the renegade relegated to the kitchen proves the fatal one for he renames the guerrilla Rocky, “Gorilla”, a name he was called in school after his father, much to his disgust. Thus Rocky’s very purpose gets encumbered, when the identity he had rejected follows him even into the camp. The naming also forestalls the travesty of the movement and the text’s unmasking of its charade.

While Rocky’s transition from being the village Gorilla’s son to a guerrilla is wrought with one kind of tortuous disconnects, Nesakumaran’s is more difficult, though he achieves it with his characteristic apostate ease. Further there is no personal-political collision of motives to join the conflict, as is the case with Rocky, nor do Rocky’s peripheral dynamics function in Nesakumaran’s socio-familial space. Apart from the privileged home space of Nesakumaran, which Shobasakthi makes explicit, as a theological seminarian and the first one from Palmyra, Nesakumaran is regarded with deference even by Earnest’s enemies, an esteem highlighted in people referring to him as “Swami or “Brother”. Seventeen years old and a student at the Columbuthurai Catholic Seminary, Nesakumaran attends Amritalingam’s massive public meeting when he has come home for his Lent holidays with Temper Rasan’s group much against the latter’s reservations. Though Nesakumaran is able to placate Rasan’s trepidations by contending against Rasan’s perception of him as the “spiritual man”, on the speedboat that takes them to the dock near Kannaki Amman Temple, Nesakumaran’s inadequate military masculinity becomes evident. While Nesakumaran becomes seasick-retching and getting giddy, Temper Rasan stands on the boat’s prow “with all the majesty of
the leader”(Traitor21). At Amritalingam’s meeting, the author further forestalls Nesakumaran’s bungling incompetency. In stark contrast to the high intensity macabre gore of the scene, Nesakumaran’s facile grazing of his forefinger destabilizes his inherent self-image as the hegemonic militant male.

All Earnest’s attempts to cosset and insulate his son after this “finger-cutting incident” from the conflict is in vain, for like Edgar Allen Poe’s Red Death conflict enters even the cloistered Pilimathalawa Theological College, in the form of burning libraries and protesting priests. The Jaffna Library with its several thousand ancient Tamil manuscripts including the Yalpana Vaipavamalai and other rare documents, some of them written in dried palm leaves and fragrant sandal wood was a deeply symbolic cultural-linguistic edifice for the Sri Lankan Tamils. On July 1, 1981, Sri Lankan history records how a drunken Sinhala mob torched it down. Shobasakthi counters the hegemony’s discourse by rejecting its prose of madness in an inebriated condition, instead records the State’s collusion in what the critic Rebecca Knuth in her paper “Destroying a Symbol”, calls, a “phenomena of Ethnic Biblioclasm” (12). The narration depicts the Sri Lankan police burning down the library, under the supervision of Police Superintendent Edward Gunawardene. Committed by state structures that are meant to guard and defend, the novel comments on how the nation state is constructed on the basis of, what the political thinker Sankaran Krishnan identifies as “exclusionary narratives” of the past (what the library represents) and “univocal visions” of the future (28). Like M.A.Nuhman’s Tamil poem “Murder” (qtd. The Penguin New Writing, 239-240) which shows the callous politicians and their faceless “civvies” unleash the decisive burning down of the Jaffna library, Traitor too portrays the majoritarian state’s fixation with providing, what Krishnan has earmarked as a “pulverized” and “uniform” sense of national identity along the majoritarian lines, letting loose a “spiral of regional and state violence” (29).While Nuhman adds the Buddha as collateral damage to the violence who after being accidentally murdered by the police is set ablaze along with the ninety thousand rare books and the Dhammapada (the collected teachings of the Buddha), Shobasakthi only laconically observes the protesting Ponnuthurai of Pilimathalawa spiralling other protests- in the form of Nesakumaran and the stolen acids and chemicals. For in Shobasakthi’s narrative essentialisms like non-violent Buddhism, univocal Tamil-ness, are contentious as he goes on to depict.

To highlight this, the narrative shifts to Palmyra with Sinhala policemen shaming Earnest master to know Nesakumaran’s whereabouts. However the violence of the police,
which Kalyvas identifies as “the terrorising and intimidating” to coerce Earnest to reveal the hideout of Nesakumaran is futile like the third person voice makes apparent (98). Siriwapushpan and Earnest know about Nesakumaran’s surreptitious disappearance only after the police tell them, making Earnest in Kalyvas’ term a “defenceless complier” abiding to expose his son’s whereabouts, of which of course he knows nothing (100). Earnest’s loss of respectability and honour before his collective community which the critic Jeganathan identifies as “Lajja-bhaya” drives Earnest to attempt suicide. Though the narrative at this point depicts Earnest’s attempts to find his son in a sympathetic vein, as Shobasakthi progresses in the novel with his unrelenting account, stereotypical binaries like the innocent quarry and the malicious victimizer soon cease to exist.

Linda Hutcheon in her *Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and intertextuality of History* suggests that the postmodern text’s counter discourse undermines centrality through its “interdiscursive” strategy of mingling and transgressing different discourses (9-11). *Traitor’s* “interdiscursive” parody reaches its summit in its portrayal of Nesakumaran’s self-initiation into the conflict. Unlike *Gorilla*, which offers a linear, systematic, no doubt mocking account of Rocky’s tutelage and his life as a child combatant, Nesakumaran never joins any movement, is by no means trained to be an activist and never reaches the battle front to wage armed conflicts. His only connection with the “Organization” as the text calls it is “Dattu”, whose real name is forgotten for his Guevara pseudonym. Shobasakthi makes a travesty of these youth and their fantastic ideologies in the “chunks of hope” (about induction into the Organization) Dattu gives to Nesakumaran “to chew on” and Nesakumaran’s misplaced earnestness and sermonizing skills to spread the word of the Organization (*Traitor*44). Though not a flock, he acquires two worshippers in Kalaichelvan and Srikanthamalar moving the former with his Marxist ideology and the latter with his “spirit of liberation”. This section echoes with fragments of Marxist ideology. Through fragmented “interdiscursive” significations to personas like Che Guevara, Fidel Castro; texts like *The First Principles of Historical Materialism* and other war contexts like Vietnam and Cuba, the text comments on Nesakumaran’s nebulous knowledge and his unformed and indeterminate course. This tenuous structure is made explicit in the case of Kalaichelvan and his father. Nesakumaran’s pottering around with these ideologies reaches its ultimate bathos when Kalaichelvan inspired by his sessions on Historical Materialism divides his susceptible father’s agricultural land amongst his workers. Maram Vallipuram’s rather facile faith in his “educated” son is demystified and Kalaichelvan, Nesakumaran’s reserve of revenue and roof is cast out of his home.
While Rocky’s thirst for ideology is never quenched in the arid armament training in The Movement’s training camp, Nesakumaran having had surfeit of ideological rhetoric resorts to producing armoury. Srikanthamalar, the nurse-Kadayar woman’s role is seminal in this process through which Nesakumaran arms himself, in getting the dynamite and in making it in her nurse’s quarters. However like everything else Nesakumaran bungles this too and the homemade bomb hurled at the Urathurai Police Station fails to explode. In a gesture that smacks of torture and treachery, not to mention masochism, Nesakumaran whips Kalaichelvan, who accompanies him on the enterprise. Nesakumaran’s question, “Comrade I ‘am doing the right thing aren’t I?’ (Traitor 41) reverberates through the text as he betrays one after the other, in torture chambers, culminating in the irrevocable rape of his daughter, Nirami.

The braiding together of the plural stories of Kalaichelvan, Srikanthamalar and Dattu with Nesakumaran’s into the collected heterogeneity of the text is not only to recover micro-stories but to decentralise Nesakumaran’s story by narrativising other accounts of faith and trust in the “Swami”. Though Dattu is captured, he withholds the identity of his other comrades, similarly Srikanthamalar’s hiding the dynamite in her handbag and Kalaichelvan’s compliance to Nesakumaran’s whipping are all little acts of protection and acquiescence, the index against which we will gauge Nesakumaran, the “traitor”.

Dasan, in Gorilla is in the words of Kalyvas both “selectively and indiscriminately targeted” by different political actors (100). First “selectively” by the IPKF, then the Sri Lankan army and the police because of him being, they believe, a Tiger or a supporter of the Tigers. It is also “indiscriminate” because many times his individual guilt becomes completely irrelevant, and his membership in a larger group becomes important. A membership perceived to be connected with a group as opposed to the state. Under the threat of the entire family being “indiscriminately” arrested, Dasan reports at the Velanai-Vangallavaadi IPKF camp, where the Madras Aid Regiment was stationed.

The IPKF’s involvement with the Sri Lankan conflict is a macrocosmic example of how binaries collapse in such fault line conflicts. From being peacekeepers they become warriors, instead of disarming the guerrillas they wage armed conflict with the same guerrillas and from ones who had championed the Tamil cause, they became devastatingly calamitous to the lives of Tamils in Jaffna. It is this disastrous fiasco that gets microcosmically enacted when Dasan is interrogated by Major Krishnaswamy and subsequently tortured in the IPKF camp. As Sankaran Krishna observes, in many counterinsurgency situations the IPKF stopped trying to distinguish between combatants and
civilians (190-191). While Shobasakthi leaves Dasan’s innocence deliberately vague, the IPKF functions and condemns those it captures on equivocal grounds. It has no proof of Dasan’s guilt except by the betrayal by two Tigers Raghu and Kasi, who had earlier been captured by the IPKF. Identified as one who writes posters and dramas for the movement by the two, Dasan has no other choice but to make a declaration, accepting all the charges. This embroils him further in the conflict. He is now used to identify a distinction that the IPKF had not been able to make - to chaff the insurgent from the innocent. Towards this they put a gunny bag over Dasan’s head and he is made to pick out those who belonged to the LTTE in an identification parade in Mandaitivu. Whether Dasan spots an insurgent or not - if so does he deliberately lie about there being no Tiger in the group? - is unclear. But he becomes a metonymy of the thousands who were captured and tortured by the IPKF during their conflict with the LTTE. Thus, he is tortured for not “arming” the IPKF with information, that would help the IPKF “capture a Tiger” and thus disarming the Tiger, in their debacle in Sri Lanka. This absurd, oppressive role of the IPKF in the conflict is indicated in poems like “Upside Down”, written by a Tamil Sri Lankan writer in English, Santhan (qtd in Goonetilleke, Kaleidoscope124). Like the pointless torture of Dasan, the “jawans” in the poem ransack houses in the name of “checking” turning everything “upside down”. The innocent people are all locked up in a big house, while the soldiers go about freeing the cattle. In the end the cattle roam freely while the people are locked up inside. Though released from the torture, Dasan like the people in the poem is a captive who had to sign at the Velanai camp “every single day the IPKF was in Sri Lanka” (Gorilla10-11).

After the IPKF leave in1990, the LTTE come out of the jungles into the town. Suspicious of deserters especially owing to the inner power struggle within the LTTE (a motif that is elaborated in Rocky Raj’s story) it meted out the ultimate punishment of death to those who it was remotely suspicious of. Despite his silence during the identification parade, Dasan is named a traitor by the LTTE. The gunny bag earlier worn to mask him now becomes the symbolic mask of the traitor. Like the IPKF they imprison him for six days in Kunjan Fields, and then release him; the arrest and the release proleptically anticipating Rocky Raj’s later imprisonment by the Movement. But similar to the freedom granted by his earlier captors, Dasan is not really free; he is aware that he is kept under close surveillance by the LTTE, and in this case surveillance also means the Damocles Sword of death. Once the second Eelam war breaks out between the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE, concentric circles of incarceration and torture deform Dasan’s life altogether, like the titular protagonist.
Jayapala(n) of the Sri Lankan writer Jayanta Rathnayake’s short story, who is victimized repeatedly by the police and the Tigers (qtd in Goonetilleke, *Kaleidoscope*, 61).

Victimised by the Sri Lankan army and the police, owing to repeated betrayals by his own people, Dasan’s story undermines binaries like good vs. evil, order vs. chaos, the just state vs. the ruthless terrorist, the law keeper vs. the law breaker. In a genocidal frenzy the army kills Dasan’s two brothers and injures him mercilessly on his legs and head. Henceforth Dasan is not safe anywhere even in the Paasaiyoor refugee camp which is constantly aerially bombed. This in fact was a singular feature of the Sinhalese attack during the Civil Wars, attacking hospitals and refugee camps, since in civil war contexts the insurgents blend with the civilians. Dasan’s complicated departure from Paasaiyoor to Colombo (travels by boat, bus, cycle, vegetable truck via Kerativu, Sangupiddi, and Vavuniya) reminds one of his later drawn out escape route. However in Colombo he is “indiscriminately” arrested at the Avendal Lodge along with other Tamil men and taken to Maradana Police station.

In a brief digression in Rocky Raj’s story, Shobasakthi records the history of the conflict especially the Sri Lankan army’s takeover of Farm Bridge an important access into the island area. Through this narration, he makes other observations as well: people’s support for the different separatist movements, the exploitation of the moment by Sinhala political parties of Jayawardene and Sirimavo Bandaranayke for their electoral campaign; and the military dilution of the LTTE versus the failure of the other Movements This macro history merges with Rocky’s micro story when the Movement sets up its sentry point in Kunjan Fields. Ironies seem to be the hallmark of Rocky’s conflict history, when he is posted much against his wishes in his home town, Kunjan Fields.

It is from here the anticipated disillusionment of Rocky, who arrives armed with the characteristic LTTE arms— a grenade and a cyanide capsule— begins and Shobasakthi’s disclosure of the LTTE from within reaches its apex. Historians vary on their perception of the LTTE, why it emerged as an insurgent organization and what it wished to achieve. Imtiyaz attributes the systematic growth of the LTTE to the terrorizing policies of the state against many innocents. To those joining a politico-military movement was a way of resisting the violence of the persecutor. He also notes that by the end of 1985, four strong groups emerged among the Tamil militants: the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), and the People’s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). Rivalry developed among these groups, and in mid-1986, the LTTE attacked members of TELO (150-151). After fighting for almost a week, the LTTE emerged as the dominant force.
Shortly afterwards, EPRLF suffered the same fate, and from then onwards, LTTE did not allow any other group to operate in the areas under its control.

De Volta in *Blowback* points out that the LTTE’s repeated acts of terrorism especially against Sri Lankan civilians and the bombing of Buddhist shrine have enabled the state to the further politicization of ethnic difference by appealing to Sinhalese emotions (166-168). The LTTE’s assassinations also caused it to lose international support and consideration. Stokke in his paper, however, problematises the term terrorist and states quoting other scholars, that this was a way of denying “freedom fighters international legitimacy”. Speaking about areas which are under its control, Stokke states how the LTTE ran a defacto administration and ensured internal and external security (300). But Saravananathan“In Pursuit of the Mythical State of Tamil Eelam”, disagrees as an insider and sees the LTTE as a terrorist organization, pointing out to the difference in the ways in which they achieved their ends (1190)

Through Rocky Raj’s story the text challenges from within the Movement- the proclaimed objective of the organization -to create a casteless Tamil society by armed struggle. The narrative of the LTTE, who, through their symbol the tiger, borrowed from South Indian Chola Dynasty, allude to their military character, is challenged by Rocky’s alternative narration that shows the complete lack of idealism amongst the Tigers and instead the Organization is rife with power politics. Through this subversion the small history of Rocky gains a foothold in mainstream historiography and thus opens the cracks and fissures in one of the world’s tightest insurgent networks, the LTTE. In its grand narrative, the LTTE constructed itself as a formidable terror-stirring organization, through its more than 200 suicide bombings, by positing itself as the pioneer of not only the use of suicide bombing as a weapon in the terrorist armoury but the use of women in suicide attacks, and in being the only terrorist group responsible for killing two leaders, the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and, the Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa. The othered voice of Rocky Raj undermines this colossal exterior by exposing the corruption within the Movement, its petty power dynamics and its underworld mafia connections. His narrative also destabilizes the Tigers “Us” vs. “Them” narrative that constructed a pure unified Tamil identity posited against a persecuting genocidal Sri Lankan state. The story reveals how it is the Tigers who persecute their own, cleanse the “Organization” of any dissenters and opponents and by the end of the novel there is no distinction between terrorist guerrillas and tyrannical, Gorillas.

Hoping to fight autocratic states, not to mention authoritarian father, Rocky works as the right hand of “Dirty” Shantha, the sentry in charge of Kunjan. Like child soldiers who were made to set land mines, Rocky and others place three cylinders- home- made bombs as
close as possible to the army camp. Interspersed with the historic are also the personal, especially Gorilla’s clashes with the Movement, where he has scant respect for the Movement, perhaps with the son being a Tiger the earlier trepidations are lost. Gorilla undermines the hegemony of the movement and delegitimizes it. He parodies not only plights of parents who constantly queue up outside LTTE offices in search of their children with his valueless cheque, but Rocky’s guerrilla- grenade-masculinity with his Gorilla- thug weapon – wild jasmine stick. For Rocky this loss of validation soon moves into the political space as well in his later clash with the local sand mafia. But Shobasakthi prepares us for this climactic clash through a gradual disbanding of Rocky’s altruism.

In a scene that reminds us of partition violence and the trains that arrived with dead bodies, victims of the Kumudhini massacre, carried out by the Sri Lankan army, arrive in truck loads. Distraught by the ruthless genocidal carnage that has not spared even babies Rocky’s solidity, that had accepted violence as legitimate if the end is, is now shaken. The gap between Rocky’s aspirations and ideology for Eelam and the Movement which the novel had so far suggested now flares into verbal encounters with Osheila. The PLOTE booklet which resonates with the Bangladeshi secessionist war enhances Rocky’s ideology. His slumbering Marxist ideologies are now rekindled; we are told how he hurls around political conjectures about “Indian imperialism”, “Sri Lankan government’s capitalism” and so on. This dissent of Rocky becomes absolute when he wants to rename himself “Mujibur” after the Bangladeshi leader Mujibur Rehman. Thus Rocky commits the ultimate act of sacrilege, supporting the creed of another movement. Osheila’s reply reminds one of Yogi, an LTTE supporter’s, and reply in Sivanandan’s When Memory Dies- “a level headed chap being wrapped in one man” (qtd inSubramanyam, 195). Commenting on the Movement’s leader Osheila declares “We have a great leader, versed in the arts and science to lead us into battle”. Though unnamed this is probably Prabhakaran, the LTTE commando, who Shobasakthi in an interview calls a “warlord” (Warscape, 2012). With Osheila’s words the argument is suppressed. The Movement’s silencing of rebellious voices and its immoderate campaign of violence veiled behind the ideology of Eelam that sanctions it, need not always be right is highlighted in the death of Bava. In a poignant incident laden with dark irony, Shobasakthi comments on how the LTTE expunged other Movements in its power struggle to emerge as the only organization that can realise the Tamil homeland. In his essay Saravananathan compares the LTTE to other “liberation struggles” like the ANC, Pan African Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party. “The ANC did not wipe out the PAC or the Inkatha and claim to be the authentic or sole representative of the black people on whose
behalf it was fighting” (1194). In the novel Dirty Shantha specifically instructs such “wiping out”, asking the boys to patrol the coast and bring in those belonging to other movements when they return from India after training. This is particularised in the way Bava is “mysteriously burnt with tires around his body” (Gorilla 65). Bava is sought after by the LTTE because he belongs to another Movement in the island. Rocky is disturbed by the agonising grief of Bava’s mother, who remains outside the sentry point for four days without any nourishment or rest, after Bava’s disappearance. Rocky’s movements implication in Bava’s gruesome murder is revealed in the unease it causes Rocky and his subsequent guilt, little aware that soon he too would be victimised by the LTTE’s proscription of other Tamil militant groups and its hunting them down.

Though the Sinhala Government had forbidden sand quarrying, corrupt politicians and police are suborned to allow sand quarrying. We are told how it is only after the coming of the Movement that sand quarrying has stopped. Rocky sincerely believes in this rhetoric within which the Movement had constructed itself as the true guardian of the Tamil land juxtaposing itself against the fraudulent Sinhala state that only cares about its private gains and welfare. Rocky’s defiance stems from this earnestness. As a representative of such a Movement Rocky challenges the tall man who like Gorilla has neither deference nor dread of either the name of the Movement or Raviyan’s grenade. Rocky is temporarily successful in not allowing the sand to be transported and in the immediate retaliation, he is able to injure the fair-skinned thug. Though the thug warns Rocky about Vijay Kumar Annan’s (who has ordered the sand quarrying) role in funding the Movement, Rocky’s delusional mind is unable to process this data. His self-persuasion that this is a private treachery on the part of Kasi is soon disenchanted when Rocky discovers that Shantha is equally driven with rage at his actions against Vijay Kumar. After this things escalate beyond Rocky’s comprehension and control. In this climactic episode in an unknown two storey building where Rocky and Raviyan are taken for questioning, Rocky loses all control over the action and the narrative. Despite his legitimate action, which emerges from his sense of duty, uprightness and idealism he is constructed as the “thug” repeatedly by Kasi. By endorsing Vijay Kumar, the one who funds the Movement for its arms and landmines to acquire Eelam, and by constructing Rocky as the thug “chandy” Rocky’s actions are unsanctioned. Thus, Rocky’s discourse is categorized as unauthorized and silenced by Kasi’s hegemonic discourse. If this constructs him as the subaltern, the ultimate disarming occurs when Kasi unarms him of the cyanide capsule, the definitive LTTE signifier. An example of Ranajit Guha’s, The Prose of Counterinsurgency is Kasi’s “counterinsurgent discourse” wherein Rocky is the “Gorilla-
chandy” incapable of functioning as the “guerrilla”. The irony is in the reversal of causes that forces cadres to join Movements. Paul Collier in “Greed and Grievance in Civil War” notes the multiple reasons why some join insurgent groups and differentiates between “group grievance” “loot seeking” (566-565). In the context of the novel, the “group grievance” narrative that causes the minority Tamil to join militant groups is overwritten by the “loot seeking” narrative of the Movement. With Raviyan’s escapade from the Movement, Rocky is persecuted further. For the Movement, Raviyan is a threat as he escapes with the arms of the Movement and as a punishment Rocky is immobilized. Handcuffed to Six Months, another captive of the Movement, who is reduced to an automaton, Rocky is accused of dissenting against the Movement and writing posters countering and challenging the political beliefs of the Movement. Rocky is surrounded by characters whose stories are versions of Rocky’s stories. Bava, Six Months Osheila’s stories, proffer in varied ways versions of Rocky’s story. “Six Months” so named as he had been locked up by the Movement for Six Months, anticipates Rocky’s loss of identity owing to trauma and torture.

Nevertheless, Rocky continues to hoodwink himself that this is all Kasi’s doing and is unable to understand that this corruption spirals down from one stationed higher and the system is flawed within. In absolute naivety he writes a letter to Jaffna Main Camp pleading his undying loyalty to the movement and its cause-the struggle for Eelam. To the Movement with its attempt to consolidate power in areas under its control, Rocky the idealistic ideologue is a threat, an intimidating menace that needs to be stifled and suppressed. When the middle cylinder disappears, Kasi, Shantha and the rest of the Movement get an opportunity to vent their brutality.

In the last episode in the novel, Rocky is transformed reductively to his nickname within the Movement a “gorilla-Chandy”. By assembling Rocky’s story as one who has stolen from the Movement and has therefore been punished, Kasi is able to re-enact the self–proclaimed legitimacy of the actions of the Movement. Further Kasi reverses the “group grievance” – “loot seeking” binary by positing himself as one who takes action to right his group’s grievance against “loot seeking” gorillas. But in Shobasakthi’s narrative the lines that separate liberation struggles of trained guerrillas and terrorist power struggles of savage gorillas, autocratic states that act like “Chandys” and tyrannical insurgent groups that fight against such actions, have become shadowy. As an alternative discourse it dismantles binaries, blurring differences between the vicious and the victim. The anti-climactic ending of Rocky’s story with his discovery that his Gorilla father has infact out done the guerrilla Movement and his subsequent action erases any narrative the reader might have construed
of Rocky’s tale of suffering and the “villainous” Movement. Far from disclosing the truth to the movement and thereby doubly succeeding, in punishing his father and being reinstated into the Movement, Rocky has no compunction in using the money to leave Kunjan for Colombo and thence, one assumes to France.

Nesakumaran’s tale is a traumatic retelling of a past and a reliving of it in the exilic-present. His memory of the conflict becomes therefore a site from which the history of the conflict is retrieved. What Astrid Erll says of how cultural memories are produced is significant to Nesakumaran’s remembering, “Though we associate remembering with the cognitive process that takes place in an individual’s mind it is also metaphorically transferred to the collective” (4). Even as Shobasakthi remembers individual memories and embodies them in the collective, a collective memory is actualized by Nesakumaran. Nesakumaran also makes it evident his memories depend not only on as Erll states “what is remembered but how far it is remembered” (7). Thus for Nesakumaran the armed conflict is not only a “political history” but a traumatic experience and what Erll identifies as “a generation’s memory” (7).

Before compiling this account of his and other’s stories of torture and terror into collected memories, Nesakumaran puts together his battered and swollen debodied body. Beaten into a cadaver at the Urathurai police cell, it is with physical trauma that Nesakumaran’s retrospective narrative begins. This body, which is foregrounded in Nesakumaran’s narration of the escalating events of 1983, becomes a synecdoche for other traumatised and massacred selves of the novel be it the historical Kuttimani, Dr Rajasundaram, “David Aiya” or the fictional Pakkiri and China. The aberrations on his body reveal ruptures on the collective ethnic Tamil that demand the retelling of these outrageous events. His corporeal suffering is located within larger historical contexts of collective pain, which Shobasakthi highlights at the outset. Thus the singular is universalised.

As Nesakumaran is shifted from the torture chambers of Panagoda Cantonment Camp to the terror cells of Welikada Prison, history of an armed conflict is narrativised by a recollecting “voice from the edge” (Pandey 281). And in this case a fragmentary voice of a fragmented incarcerated subject who is the unarmed unlawful combatant. The oral testimony of Nesakumaran’s recollection traces, as the translator in her “Afterword” to the novel suggests, the significant moments in “the escalating events that led to the all-out civil war in Sri Lanka- the Welikada Prison Massacres, the 1983 carnage, the Batticaloa Prison break” (196) and the internecine murderous rivalry between competing Tamil militant forces is like Dasan’s tale a hybridised tale where facts and fiction intersect. His is an account of events.
that are often what Patchay calls “disremembered” in mainstream Sri Lankan history (Patchay 12). This occluded history of the marginalised is told from the inside literally from within the walls of the prisons rather than the objective third person perspective taken by Shobasakthi, through the rest of the novel. Nesakumaran is held, like the fifty three Tamil prisoners who were massacred at Welikada, under the draconian Sri Lankan Prevention of Terrorism Act, 1978. A perversion of democratic practices, this law says the translator in her “Afterword” was “rationalised”, by the Sri Lankan government as “bulwark against further violence”. The act allowed State authorities to search, arrest and detain suspects “from a protesting worker to a commenting journalist” (Traitor 201). This Act became permanent during the Jayewardene rule of the state.

Fragments of accounts of the conflagration of the events from Colombo, leading to the massacre reaches Nesakumaran inside the prison, through English and Sinhala newspapers (important to notice the absence of Tamil newspapers) with the sound of Sinhalese mobs’ victory cries “Jayaveva” and the hypocritical pity of Sinhala guards who narrate how the Jail commander stalled a mob attack. As Nesakumaran watches the Colombo sky red with fire, he states “Death had started its procession” (Traitor 99). Selvarajah Yogachandran “Kuttimani” leader of the TELO, an important political prisoner who was massacred at Welikada after Sinhala mob gorged out his eyes, alerts Nesakumaran about the killing of the thirteen soldiers at Thinavelli. This carnage by the LTTE that led to the July Pogroms captured in many literary writings of seminal writers like Jean Arasanayagam is curtailed to an oral testimony by an important voice in the struggle. Also within the novel’s postmodernist agenda, though marginalised from the perspective of the state the historical Kuttimani is kept in the fringes while peripheral-fictional characters like China and Pakkiri are seen as battling against all odds. This, moreover, prevents the narrative from becoming like Malaravan’s War Journey: Diary of a Tamil Tiger, a Maveeran’s tale. Similar truncated accounts are received through Sritharan, who narrates the savagery in the streets of Colombo and highlights the complicity of the police to the violence. This distancing of the LTTE’s carnage adds as a background to the extreme close–up of the massacre the novel goes on to narrate.

While portraying the massacres, the narrative depicts what Jeganathan identifies as the “bhaya-nethi” of the historical jailors like Rogers, Samitharatne and other prison officers (42). Cool and calculated, they lead and allow the “mad unrestrained” Sinhala prisoners to commit their exhilarating bloodbath. The state thus validates and sanctions the mob’s discourse of frenzy and chaos. This legitimisation by the state of the massacre, which
the then president called “ritualised cleansing” (qtd. in “Afterword”, \textit{Traitor201}), is encoded in the text through the mob piling up the corpses in front of the Buddhist temple and at this altar, the placating, “Thevaram” singing Mayilvaganam is cut into three pieces by a prison officer and thrown away. This methodical spree of madness is called to a halt by a “shrill whistle”- a police signage.

In many writings of the Civil War the Buddha is a central symbol. The Sinhala writer Tilak Ratnakara’s poem “The Whispers of the Bodhi Leaves” for instance is a mainstream’s account which foregrounds the restraint of the Buddhists as against the savagery of the Tamil other\cite{Goonetilleke,Kaleidoscope,184}. The poem depicts the LTTE’s attack of the Sri Maha Bodhi at Anuradhapura and the killing of the helpless innocents in this case the “dasalil matas” (female ascetics) by the “triumphant” LTTE bullets, who die repeating the Pali phrase that exalts the Buddhist virtue of “Metta” or “loving-kindness”, while the Bodhi leaves sing of death and “wishes” them “Nirvana”. However Shobasakthi eschews such poetic poignancy that would expunge the depravity of the conflict that he wishes to portray. The Buddhist temple on the other hand in the text literally becomes the ethnic site on which the majoritarian state would build its postcolonial Theravada Buddhist state by cleansing other racial, minor identities.

Though Nesakumaran somehow manages to survive the 25\textsuperscript{th} and the 27\textsuperscript{th} July carnage, this is in spite of his cowardice and because of his cell mate’s armed conflict. China improvises with “red curry” and his strength, Pakkiri fights using bed sheets, while Nesakumaran whimpers on the floor, claiming he is no Tiger, only a “priest”. However the state’s collision continues through the deliberate delay in medical help leading to China’s death or inadequate help as offered to Nesakumaran. Shifted to Batticaloa prison, a comparatively better penal system as it is in the Tamil Province, the famous escapade is planned. Once again Nesakumaran’s escape has no heroism but he flops in the one task he is assigned – rescuing a prisoner in the prison hospital. Freedom outside is short lived as Nesakumaran can make the best laid plans go awry, and once more he and Pakkiri are in Welikada.

The Civil War is now at its pinnacle with violence answered by counter-violence..., but Welikada is no longer threatening. In a series of episodes, Shobaskthi through Nesakumaran’s narration depicts the Sisyphean absurdity of the Sri Lankan Judicial System. This absurdity is best illustrated when the innocent Fr. Savarimuthu is sentenced to thirty two years while Nesakumaran and Pakkiri are freed. In a contrapuntal frame, Shobasakthi narrates the trial system in Tiger territory, once the Tigers take over the civic, legal and social systems
in Tamil mainland, which the Tigers named “Eelam”. In Palmyra, Earnest their administrator-lackey-tax collector-informant of Tiger traitors-once more manipulates the times. The riotous satire on Earnest and his “General Knowledge” quiz is a point-counterpoint to other stentorian structures and their preposterous functioning, summarised in the outlandish case of Kanagaratnam Shanmuganathan. In the in-set story of the, innocuous Shanmuganathan, we are told how after he was tortured, silenced and secluded in prison for eighteen years, he is asked by his Bogambara Prison torturers, “‘Where is Prabhakaran?’, the Leader of the Liberation Tigers”, the narrative in the same breath says, “Velupillai Prabhakaran was conducting an international press conference in Vavuniya” (Traitor, 125).

By the time Earnest affects Nesakumaran’s release from the Tigers and subsequently in a narrative hiatus Nesakumaran has exiled himself to France, Shobasakthi’s uncompromising portrayal of the conflict has been made explicit. It is his repudiation to let his narrative slide into unproblematic sappiness that leads him to employ a tortured traumatized paedophile as the narrator of an ethnic collective’s torture and violation. In presenting his characters as faulty, convoluted beings he does not want us to confuse their sufferings with their character flaws. When we recoil at the description of the naked and bleeding Maria, sister of Nesakumaran, gang-raped by the marauding Sinhala army, who subsequently goes mad, we also remember her cruelty to the child-servant Rajendran. As the Translator comments, “What happens to Maria on the navy boat has nothing to do with her past inability to treat Rajendran in a humane fashion” (Afterword Traitor 212)

In his interview in the magazine Warscape, Shobasakthi says “When one is a victim, isn’t he at the same time a victimizer”. Quoting the example of the Tamil Eelam struggle he comments how the Tamil Tigers who fought against the Sinhala ethnic violence thrust Tamil ethnicity onto minority Muslims. When the minority Muslim Community resisted they killed them. Debunking polarised binaries like victim-victimiser, he states there is no “Great Wall of China dividing the two states of being” and hence he makes Nesakumaran take on both sides interchangeably. It is with this understanding he states he went on to write Traitor and in Nesakumaran he embodies the hyphenated ambivalence of being both victim-victimizer. His task, he concludes, “is not to judge”.

There are two motifs, which are also Dasan’s motives to narrativise his connection with the armed conflict—one is to portray his innocence and disassociate himself from armed terrorist the other is to show how he is endangered in Sri Lanka, with none to offer him sanctuary—neither those who represent him nor the supposedly protective state. These two motifs dominate his narration and in the bargain, disrupt and dismantle several Manichean
binaries, while simultaneously polarizing the armed and the unarmed— the former the victimizer, the latter the victim. Further the absence of a third person voice and the reminescending facet of the narration to be read by French authoritarian figures to grant asylum, prepares the auditor to be wary of elisions, erasures, careful of remembering and forgetting in the perhaps “selective” retelling, through re-remembering. Even as he has no proof of his innocence, his tormentors have no proof of his guilt. It is to this history of persecution in the armed conflict, that Dasan has no documental evidence. Narrated to show law protectors and preservers as not distinct in any way from those who perpetrate violence and chaos, Dasan’s history from below only exists in the letter which he writes to seek asylum. JamesE.Young comments on how Holocaust Literature is unlike other historically based literature, since it does more than represent or stand for the epoch; it literally renders documentary evidence of specific events (670). While Dasan’s petition is similar to these testimonies of conflict, his appeal is not merely to witness the destruction or produce documentary evidence. But his personal trauma becomes the only evidence to support the official document that is the plea. The letter is the only written testimonial proof of his suffering and hence becomes the space through which he can re-write what has been written on his body through perpetual torture, inflicted by armed forces whether the state’s or self-legitimized organizations like the LTTE. Dasan writes as the persecuted, therefore it becomes necessary to rehabilitate the mimetic impulse, imitating the conflict through realistic representation. The violence perceived as aberration or ruptures on his body demand a retelling, however the “pornography of violence” (Alok Rai) is lost once it enters the narrative. But there is parallel and contradictory impulse on the part of Dasan to deliberately preserve the clinical clarity in recording the events. This becomes important in his case since the more realistic the representation the more adequate it becomes as testimonial evidence of outrageous events. Evidence that substantiates his innocence and the jeopardy his life would be in if he is repatriated. Dasan’s story is thus a fragment of a history that has existence only in this document which is still to become official, since Dasan has not yet been granted refuge. Further, as a gesture of self-preservation, Dasan requests a wilful silencing of this history of the armed conflict; it can as a result never become a part of any Historiography.

Set against Rocky’s story are also plural histories of othermarginals represented excentrically in the story. These are other micro stories, fragments, of the larger history of the war. Many of the characters in the story are based on real life combatants or refugees killed by the Sinhala army, the LTTE or other Movements. By offering them as footnotes at the bottom of the page, the text literally offers us “histories from below”, stories untold by
mainstream historiography or relegated to the peripheries by narratives of the centre. Shobasakthi thus recovers forgotten stories and memorialises these characters dually through the narrative of Auto fiction. The Gorilla and Genoa of the book were real life innocent victims the former of the Sri Lankan navy and the latter of the army. In challenging the univocalism of history, Shobasakthi offers stories from all perspectives, whether they are stories of inspectors like Jesurasan who was killed by two armed youth or Michael Raj who was captured and shot by the EPRLF or the suicide bomber Princie who died in a suicide attack against the IPKF. Other stories include those of the poet Velanai who died during internecine fighting within his organization, Inbam, Selvam who were victims of political murder committed by the Sri Lankan government, Thayavaramurthi’s story of physical trauma because of being severely beaten by the Movement, Shantha who was killed in an air raid, Majeed who was killed by a missile and the rebellious Kasi. The novel also records stories of collective violence and death like the suicide of the baby Group and the Kumudhini massacre. These plural voices frame Rocky’s story, providing what Maryse Jayasurya calls in another context a “mosaic of grief” (91). Through the multiple stories interwoven with Rocky’s story the nameless and the faceless many that are mere numbers or names in newspapers are memorialised. Sometimes in these cases not even that since the state censors their stories. By placing Rocky’s story within a community’s story, Rocky’s story becomes a representative of a community narrative. The personal story of Rocky thus becomes a part of a public’s story - a public who have been forgotten by grand narratives that record majoritarian history. If Gorilla uses auto fiction to narrate other stories, Traitor uses fractures in collective society to narrate other conflicts - that coalesce and complicate the ethnic conflict.

The University Teachers for Human Rights has noted that even though there is diversity among Tamils in Sri Lanka, both Tamil nationalism and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism tend to lump Tamils into one group. Mainstream Tamils, like the political leader G.G. Ponnambalam who helped to foster Tamil nationalism have tried to forge a monolithic Tamil identity. This uniform Tamil identity was exploited later by the LTTE in its genocidal policies against Tamils themselves (1.1-1.3; 2.1-2.3). In the plural discourses of Traitor, through the embedded tale of Rajendran, and the pornographic song that registers what was done to Srikanthamalar, Shobasakthi not only debunks the monological Tamil identity that posits itself as the disempowered- persecuted against an oppressive Sinhala state, but shows how the concentric circles of exploiter vs. exploited, terrorist vs. torturer, oppressor vs.
oppressed, the legitimate and the illegitimate perpetually circumnavigate and reallocate in his novel.

As the critical insider who has viewed the conflict from its front lines Shobasakthi gives us a microscopic view of the conflict. But this microscopic view itself is made possible from the distanced telescopic perspective of the exile. Through this dialectic position of insider-outsider Shobasakthi makes possible simultaneous but shifting coexistence of contradictory concepts like victim-persecutor, tyrannical state vs. terrorist insurgent. Sometimes these key tensions in exile writings, McClennen observes are not “merely two-fold but can be multiple and binaries are replaced by multiple angles and perspectives” (23). In Shobasakthi’s novels therefore we see a pluralisation of perspectives. This allows for what Neumann comments in “Fictions of Memory”, the “polyvalence and the elusiveness of a problematic past” like the Eelam wars to emerge(343). Through his “dialectical”“contrapuntal”exilic visionShobasakthi makes aware in McClennen’s terms “simultaneous dimensions”, “counter posing” the stentorian state and the guerrilla insurgents, blurring the distinction between the local Tamil militia and the Sinhala army(21). As Said’s “Intellectual Exile” who “remains resistant, outside the mainstream”, Shobasakthi is the “intellectual marginal” who is the “nay-sayer”, “disconcerted and disconcerting others” (Said “Intellectual Exile” 15). Be it his people or the Sinhala state- to such an extent he has been accused of being a traitor of his people. In his interview to Warscape, he says, “My identity as a militant, the minute I left the country became that of the refugee. When I began to write, my identity became that of the traitor”.

IV

To the Burial Sites of Conflict- Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*

In *Anil’s Ghost*, the perspective of the conflict shifts from the extreme close-ups of the expelled exile to a “long distance gaze” of the wilful expatriate. With this shift other changes and alterations also occur to the portrayal of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka. The focus is no longer the armed combatant but the unarmed civilian, framed not against killing fields but burial sites and hospital wards. In its recovery of small voices of history, the novel’s focal point is not on the fragmented stories of to use Hernandez’s term “debodied” guerrilla-terrorist-selves but lies in piecing together disembodied unidentified casualties of war (Hernandez 2).
Ondaatje’s novel is a disturbing account of what it means to live in a society in which terrorist violence, both the state and the insurgents not just breaks but obliterates history. The author’s note at the outset locates the conflict in the mid-1980s to the early 1990s when the crisis involved three essential groups; the government, the antigovernment insurgents in the South (the JVP’s uprising against the state) and the separatist guerrillas in the north. With the insurgents and the guerrillas waging war on the government, the government resorted to sending out legal and illegal squads to hunt down the separatists and the insurgents.

It is into this country fraught with the tangled network of insurgent and counter-insurgent killings that Anil arrives. As Tickell in “Excavating Histories of Terror” comments, her investigation of human rights abuse, “her profession involves the post-mortem interpretation of the skeletal texts left behind in the aftermath of the terror” (180). The novel thus converges on the consequences of barbarity than on barbarity itself. Elke Rosochacki comments on the extensive list of acknowledgements that appends the text as pointing to the fact that Ondaatje’s text has been assembled from diverse fragments of lived experience and accounts collected from various spaces directly related to the conflict (150). To add to Rosochacki’s observation, one can state that, Ondaatje’s book therefore is not from his lived experience of the conflict but based on others’ experience of the conflict- from doctors to anthropologists to Amnesty reports. If Shobasakthi’s novels are based on individual and “collective” memories, Ondaatje’s is constructed upon “collected” memories some recorded, some unrecorded.

More fictional than Shobasakthi’s works, the text however undertakes to speak on behalf of others whose incomplete and inarticulate accounts provide the ground for this, what Tickel calls , “multivoiced text” (l 190). These disembodied voices appear in the novel as the several signifiers with no corresponding signified, nameless dead or mutilated bodies, or significations without signifiers- list of missing people or names without its persona counterparts. Dora Wuyts comments on the intertextual reference to Archilochus’ account of the Greek Wars to highlight the feature of disappearance in the novel (21). Wuyts adds that while the novel locates the conflict in specific geographical landscape and temporal framework, most of the crimes, perpetrators and victims remain hidden from view, thus visual acknowledgement of the Sri Lankan trauma is hindered (20-21). In the “scarring psychosis” of the country, the absence of bodies to mourn for not only takes away the possibility of mourning but closure as well (Wuyts 23). These blank spaces through their silenced discourse and their dread motif narrate the suffering of the actual victim and the
suffering of those who survive. With the latter denied agency and voice to address this blank space, for fear of becoming blank spaces. This colossal blankness as the particular character of the Sri Lankan war, stressing on the absence of bodies and the invisibility of war crimes, is the focal point of the novel’s comment on the war in Sri Lanka.

The novel is a deliberate attempt to reconstruct these stories concealed and mutilated by the State. Towards this, it deliberately shifts its focus from the killing fields to the burial sites and the hospital wards. This is particularly represented in the reconstruction of the skeleton “Sailor” the representative of all those vanished voices. For Anil, “To give him name would name the rest” (Anil’s Ghost 52). Like the tortured body of Nesakumaran represents a tortuous history, “Sailor”, the recent skeleton of a victim of a war crime found in a government protected archaeological burial site, represents all the unnamed war victims and all the other lost voices and stories hidden underneath the surface of Sri Lankan life. What Anil and Sarath attempt i.e. provide a piercing record of the tortured and dead body of “Sailor” is also the project of the novel: impart an acute and intense documentation of things broken and ruined. If Nesakumaran’s traumatised memory becomes a site from which suppressed histories are retrieved, in Anil’s Ghost, Anil and Sarath attempt to restore or re-establish the lost identities of mutilated war victims, who are often in Tickell’s words “burnt beyond recognition through their “subaltern forensic research”(93). Wuylts, commenting on the recurrence of the verbs “to recognise” and “to identify”, states that the novel is an attempts to name, to grant a person the status of subject, rather than object and to re-establish humanity by retrieving lost identities and stories connected to them(33).

In their attempts to arm the victim with an identity, however unlike the armed Nesakumaran and Rocky, Anil and Sarath are deficiently armed with exhumation gears, the former with her futile Western univocalism and the latter with his feeble circumspection, against a formidable lethal state. The discovery of “Sailor’s” skeleton convinces Anil that she can recover the crisis that overwhelms her birth place. Neglectful of Sarath’s caution, Anil believes that reconstructing “Sailor’s” identity will help her build a case against the government. She takes protective custody of “Sailor’s” skeleton, and obsessed and paranoid with her project, she is suspicious of Sarath’s collusion with the government and unyielding about science’s capacity to serve justice. Anil imagines that unravelling the mystery of “Sailor’s” death will solve the mystery of several thousand other murders. Public transparency she believes will aid legal answerability and so subscribes rigidly to the politics of justice. She is confronted by her different local interlocutors to recognise that there are
diverse sides to the state of affairs in Sri Lanka that should not be disregarded. Like contemporary historians Sarath, Gamini and Palipana point out the interpretative nature of the conflict. Sarath for example, reiterates to Anil that the Tamil militants in the north and the east and the Sinhalese insurgents in the south have also committed carnages and murder. Consequently Anil’s examination, with its complete spotlight on the government’s offense, is biased from the start. Sarath reminds her that each element within the Sri Lankan conflict is guilty, repeatedly arguing that “every side”—the government, Sinhalese insurgents, and Tamil separatists—have been guilty of human rights violations. Jayasuriya comments that, most provocatively, Sarath suggests that the murders and disappearances that characterise the conflict also incriminate the West itself (264). The Sri Lankan conflict as Sarath in the novel observes is an “unofficial war, no one wants to alienate the foreign powers”, hence the fact that the war is fought by “secret gangs and squads” (Anil’s Ghost 17-18). Gamini restates this thought, stressing that in Sri Lanka, often those “setting off the bombs are who the Western press call freedom fighters…. And you want to investigate the government?” (Anil’s Ghost133).

The two brothers and Palipana attempt to make Anil realise that truth need not be absolute and that it can be manoeuvred by the powerful to suit their purposes. What is perceived as truth can also be dodgy and destructive. Sarath’s metaphors for the truth in the context of Sri Lanka’s war are portentous: he describes Anil’s estimation of the truth as “a flame against a sleeping lake of petrol” and reminds that in the past truth has been “broken into suitable pieces” in the Western media, resulting only in a “flippant gesture towards Asia” that added to the continuing cycle of violence (Anil’s Ghost156-57). Maryse Jayasuriya comments on the paradoxical nature of Anil’s “truth” as it could contribute to new crimes of the sort she is trying to uncover (265). Sarath, therefore, diverges with Anil’s view that it is necessary to bring “truth” to light, whatever the cost of such an exposure might be. As someone who has lived for years in an explosive situation, Sarath does not see any virtue or necessity in making explosive revelations—set fire to the “sleeping lake of petrol”—that would lead to only negative ramifications. After all, if the government is bared as breaching human rights, Sarath is aware that its secret forces might attempt to make even more people “disappear” in order to penalise those who are accountable for the depiction, and to discourage others from partaking in such investigations in future. The likelihood would be that the fallout of Anil’s investigation about the situation in Sri Lanka might be made fuzzy by a far-off foreign press so that much-needed support would be denied to the country, which might possibly influence all Sri Lankans harmfully, not just a vicious and fraudulent
government. In such a situation, Sarath believes, the truth is of no use to anyone. Owing to his position as an exile writer Ondaatje is able to contrapuntally look at different perspectives of the conflict and through statements like “the reason for war is war”, Ondaatje registers how the war has become an end in itself. The sheer complexity of the Civil War precludes any search for definitive/authoritative explanations. As Julie Mc Gonedal comments “politics of Sri Lanka reflects postmodern notion of the collapse of the grand narrative, the fragility and impermanence of identity and the failure of history to provide a coherent account of cause and effect” (104).

Through the local characters, Ondaatje consistently advocates contextualisation of the Diasporic perspective. History, politics, and culture, these characters stress, need to be considered in order to make comprehension possible about what is going on in a country like Sri Lanka. When Anil accuses Sarath of urging her to engage in self-censorship, he argues that she needs to comprehend the “archaeological surround of a fact,” avoiding the “false empathy and blame” that too often appears in the accounts of Western journalists (Anil’s Ghost44). What Sarath wants Anil to do is not just to study the phenomenon of “Sailor’s” murder and the government’s possible wrongdoing, but to attempt to comprehend all the factors that contributed to such a phenomenon. Sarath repeatedly emphasizes that Sri Lanka is “not like Central America” (Anil’s Ghost17) and again, “this is not Brussels or America” (Anil’s Ghost161). Anil cannot rely on her experiences with conflicts in other countries; she has to have an understanding of the particularities of this one.

Sarath constantly challenges Anil to be more responsible in the way she is conducting her investigation, comparing her to a visiting Western journalist (Anil’s Ghost27), which, in a sense, she is since she is in Sri Lanka only for seven weeks. Sarath and Gamini also maintain that their lived experience and active contribution enables a greater comprehension over observation and analysis, which are part of Anil’s protocol. Perception, they persevere, cannot come simply from appraisal of reports; being an eyewitness and therefore empathy is also necessary. Sarath underlines that Anil’s absence from Sri Lanka during the seminal stages of the conflict means that she cannot realise the “real chaos” and lawlessness that had produced a battle between insurgents, separatists, and paramilitary forces that left people of helpfulness and care like Sarath and Gamini “caught in the middle” (Anil’s Ghost154). Gamini, working twenty-four-hour shifts in emergency rooms during the conflict, has little consideration for those who proffer analysis from a safe distance; for him, they are “armchair rebels” who might have their perspective changed should they “visit me in my surgery”
Anil’s Ghost. Elke Rosochacki similarly state that the novel makes clear that the Western states have material interests in peripheral wars and the human rights discourse is often displayed as the ideological front of Western expansionism. The novel thus challenges and rejects the West’s right to make moral judgments, grounded on its claimed empiricism and universalism.

A further point raised by the novel regarding the outside investigator (and by implication Ondaatje himself), is their ethical compromise in choosing to stay in the west and not being involved or participating in the raw struggles of most Sri Lankans who have chosen to stay. By depicting Sarath and Gaminí’s refusal to leave Sri Lanka and serve their war-ravaged nation by staying back, Ondaatje shows that exile—even for those with the resources for mobility—is not the natural and obvious choice. By means of juxtaposing Anil’s position with these two, the novel self-reflexively comments on the Diasporic perspective that witnesses the disaster and then leaves the victims to their inescapable and harsh fate. By enacting a desertion of sorts the authenticity and value of the outsider’s work on human disasters is undermined through the demarcated limits of fraternity. As Gami and Sarath foresee Anil’s story plays out to the unsurprising end of a by now outmoded script. Towards the end of the novel as the project is ruined by the reality of the Sri Lankan war, she like others before her “gets on the plane and leaves” (Anil’s Ghost 132) Through her departure, it seems as though Ondaatje expounds his guilt of being one among those “who will go home. Write a book, hit the circuit” (Anil’s Ghost 132). As Rosochacki states the Diasporic writers literary success and rewards then comes from “disclosing and aestheticizing the suffering of others whoselife and world he has encountered in passing” (166).

Not to judge Ondaatje with this undue severity, one must add to his espousal that through his fragmented novel, with its many stories, narrated through a plurality of voices, Ondaatje, as Jayasuriya states is not privileging the Diasporic perspective over those living in Sri Lanka (163). Further, to add to Jayasuriya’s observation, through the “dialogic heteroglossia” (Santis 1) of the novel, Ondaatje offers us empathetic participation and witnessing. So, though we start with Anil’s long distance gaze, we go on to hear the views of Sarath, Gaminí, Palipana, and Ananda, and learn about the suffering caused by violence. Towards this the novel offers us a number of vignettes that represent the conflict within different frameworks of torture, assassinations, executions and mysterious disappearances.

The novel records at least two political assassinations by the insurgents- the murder of the government official in the train, and the killing of the President Katugala by the suicide bomber “R--”. While the murder of the government official happens in a narrative
inset, the assassination of the President is deliberately placed after the state authorised murder of Sarath. For all its sympathetic portrayal of the “Silver President”, encouraging us to feel compassion for this “thinning man”, “weary and scared”, his suicide bombing is set against his complicity in Sarath’s murder. Thus the narrative location of Katugala’s assassination expounds the novel’s position about the war in Sri Lanka, “That there was blood on everybody’s hands” (Anil’s Ghost 43)

If Shobasakthi’s novels narrate alternative histories that challenge dominant histories, Ondaatje through the character of Palipana challenges univocal histories and grand narratives of the state. The heightened reference to Buddhist architecture, mythological texts, ancient monastic sites in the text are subtle allusions to the mythical history(ies) of Sri Lanka and its dependency on its representation, through interpretation and narrativization. For the accounts of the mythical text to be transformed into history, the account is absolutely dependent on somebody making it so. In the Sri Lankan conflict zone that represents the history, to legitimise and sanction who and what, is of extreme significance. Responding to critics, (Quadri Ismail, Goonewardane et.al) who have commented on the novel’s pro-Sinhala-Buddhist politics, Marlene Goldman has argued that the opposite is the case. Goldman posits that Ondaatje shows the interconnectedness between Buddhism and nationalism and the way in which Buddhism is implicated in the ethnic conflict: “Far from advocating the restoration of ‘a pure Buddhism,’… the narrative calls into question the long-standing ties between Buddhism and Sinhala nationalism” (3). She points out that Ondaatje is drawing parallels between Palipana and the real-life Sri Lankan archaeologist Senerat Paranavitana, who deliberately misread inscriptions from the past in favour of the Sinhalese majority rule of the present (5). One cannot miss the subtle allusions to Buddhism early on in the text- the miner’s folk song with which the text begins, the “raksha bandhana” around Anil’s wrist tied during a pirrit ceremony. Goldman points out that “pirrit” comes from “pirrita” a set of protective chants, chanted during the “pirrit” ceremony to ward off evil and danger and no important function is complete without this ceremony(3). In the novel we are introduced to Anil’s pirrit thread under her surgical gloves before she begins her forensic investigations in the makeshift lab. The symbolism is significant here for Anil does not attach much religious import to the thread, but it is swathed with her “forensic” gloves, suggesting her scientific objectivity in the analysis of the conflict. Though in these parts, like Gamini’s gesture to touch the small Buddha statue in a niche in the hospital, Buddhism is associated with protection and unity, massacres and destruction are not far off from Buddhist spaces. This is suggested in the plundering by colonial and imperial forces of Cave14, where the
statues of the Bodhisattvas “were cut off the walls with axes and saws” (12). However Goldman points out gradually as the novel proceeds we realise that the violence that overwhelms Buddhism is not merely external but also from within. The story Sarath narrates of Palipana’s brother Naradha and his political killing by a novice suggests the complicity of religion in the violent national history of Sri Lanka. Goldman draws a connection between this episode and the historical 1980’s when the JVP recruited monks as “foot soldiers”. This idea is further enmeshed when Palipana narrates the story of the monks who could not escape the wrath of the ruler, and whose heads were cut off (4). Goldman sees this episode as Ondaatje’s attempt to address the complex relationship between religion, politics and violence in Sri Lanka rather than offering a “sanitised, apolitical and ahistorical account that ignores Buddhism’s enmeshment in national politics” (4).

In this approach the characterization of Palipana is a case in point. Palipana is introduced as a decolonising archaeologist who wrenched “archaeological authority in Sri Lanka away from the Europeans”. Within his decolonising strategy he had translated Pali scripts and recorded and translated rock graffiti’s. Repeatedly established as a scrupulous and conscientious researcher his research findings about rock graffiti of Sigiriya stun the academic world. However his protégé proves him wrong as there was no real evidence for these texts, and the quoted evidence is exposed as fiction. Apart from the earlier mentioned historical connection Goldman draws between Palipana and the real-life Sri Lankan archaeologist Senerat Paranavitana, Palipana is also used to comment on how mainstream historians and in more contemporary contexts politicians interpret mythological texts in this case The Mahavamsa (Culavamsa, as referred in the book). As explained by many Sri Lankan historians, according to this text Prince Vijaya and 700 followers exiled from his father’s Kingdom, land of the Vangas (located somewhere in North India) landed on the island in 500BC. Vijaya was the son of Sinhabahu (who was born of a lion and the abducted daughter of King of Vanga) and his sister Sinhasivali. Though rooted in bestiality, incest and patricide, the myth is primordial to the Sinhalese ethnic polity, in that it facilitates Vijaya’s progeny to call themselves “people of the lion”. It also partly explains the sword carrying lion in the national flag, which many minorities of the state disregard as it represents a hegemonic Sinhala symbol. The text also suggests that the island was destined to be a repository of Theravada Buddhism and hence the widely held belief that the country is “Sihadipa” (the island of the Sinhalese) and “Dhammadipa” (the island that preserves Buddhism). This belief is mainly influenced by the claim that Buddha died on the day Vijaya arrived and the Buddha arrived thrice on the island – to consecrate the island as a sanctuary for Buddhism. Though
Vijaya’s second marriage is to a princess from Madurai, the myth does not emphasize that the Tamils were not only kinfolk but also cofounders of the people of the land. De Volta comments that this myth is taught in schools and most children think it indisputable history. However De Volta remarks the myth most baneful to interethnic harmony in the text is the myth of Duthagamini who fought and killed the Chola king Elara. Buddhist nationalists of the 19th and 20th centuries have emphasized the ethnicities of these two kings to claim that the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict is at least two millennia old (150). Further it demonises non-Sinhalese and legitimises war as just if waged to propagate the Dhamma and protect Buddhism. The two myths are central to the Sinhalese racial consciousness and their claims as the true “sons of the soil” Buddhapatras’ and the kings as protectors and fosterers of Buddhism.

Sankaran Krishnan further notes how political leaders using the Mahavamsa, mix up myth and history to emplot their lives as coherent, redemptive narratives. He particularly refers to Jayewardene’s Golden Thread which ties Sri Lanka with Buddhist cosmology and anchors Sri Lanka’s origin in this Pali chronicle. Jayewardene passes up the interracial marriage which could have been used to suggest heterogeneous Sri Lankan identity; rather than the homogenous Buddhist identity (90-91). Further Jayewardene anchors himself amongst a genealogy that includes names of Sinhala kings with a wide currency in Sri Lankan universe. In the novel the dangers of interpreting religious myths to facilitate ethnic tension is best illustrated in the “contemporary practice of burying Twentieth Century victims of conflict in ancient graves located in sacred sites” (Anil’s Ghost 404).

Through the character of Palipana the supposedly flawless archaeologist, who falsifies historical texts, the text challenges the Sinhala interpretation of the myth as deliberately construed by hegemonic Sinhala historians. Palipana is an important device in the novel’s postmodern interpretation of historiography- through him the text shows how history is used and abused, how the discipline of history has lost its privilege as the purveyor of absolutisms like “Truth” and “Facts”. His inaccuracy suggests that past is not retelling of reality but is one version of all the hundreds and millions of possible versions of the past. Significantly he is blind, visualising only in his mind’s eyes, attempting to reach truth by making an imaginative leap rather than “seeing” through his physical eye. He questions Anil’s methods of arriving at what she believes is the truth. Palipana does not admit the possibility of adifference between his seeing as “truth things that could only be guessed at” (83) in deciphering inscriptions on stone and hers in examining bones to arrive at the truth. When
Anil quotes the central sacred text of Western culture, the Bible, saying, “‘The truth shall set you free’. ‘I believe that’”, Palipana replies “truth is just opinion” in “our world” (102). Although the text never reconciles the two approaches, the analytical method of Anil and the creative reconstructionist method of Palipana both contribute to the ultimate discovery of “Sailor”. That “truth” is an “opinion” is again illustrated in the way Ananda the sculptor reconstructs “Sailor’s” skull. In giving “Sailor” Sirissa’s (his missing wife) tranquil face, the text demonstrates the slant of interpretations, further even as Sailor is emblematic of the missing many, for Ananda the only face he can give the skull of Sailor is the face that has left a blank in his life- Sirissa.

No doubt Ondaatje’s novel attempts to recover submerged stories, challenge Western discourses and perceptions and self-critically challenges the long distance gaze. Further it privileges plural discourses and perspectives, challenges hegemonic mythic texts and their majoritarian interpretations. Through these myriad ways, he shows that the Civil War (ongoing during the time of the novel) cannot be compartmentalised into tidy binaries in which the just vs. unjust, victims vs. perpetrators are clearly distinguishable. Despite these significant angles and positions the novel takes to view the conflict, Ondaatje leaves several problematic gaps and, creates more conundrums by mending fissures which many readings of the text have problematised. Jayasuriya for instance comments, “Though critical of the long distance gaze,… it is hard not to wish that Ondaatje, in crafting his novel, had acted more consistently on his own advice about the necessity of providing ‘archaeological surround’” (269).

Hence while the suffering and destruction caused by violence is delineated frequently, very little is said about the factors that have led to the turmoil in Sri Lanka on which the novel is focused. Ondaatje identifies terrorism in the north, insurgency in the south, and government-sponsored paramilitaries as sources of Sri Lanka’s violence, but he avoids even the hint of speculation about the motives behind the violence enacted by the northern separatists, the southern insurgents, and the government, choosing rather to catalogue the means by which the perpetrators disposed of bodies. The complex identities of Sri Lanka’s
multi-ethnic space are blurred, when such complexities lead to the conflict in the first place. Critics further add that by refusing to indicate the reasons for the conflict in Sri Lanka in his novel, Ondaatje risks generalisations, making it seem as if the violence in Sri Lanka is the same as the violence in the former Yugoslavia or Guatemala or any other war-torn country.

The novel actually begins with a scene in Guatemala where Anil has been working on an investigation. Ondaatje represents Sri Lanka as part of a continuum of global violence that goes on everywhere around us. Critics argue that while Ondaatje’s attempt to universalize the problem in Sri Lanka enables non-Sri Lankan readers (Western readers) to relate to what is happening in a different country, it can also make it appear as if the conflict in Sri Lanka is somehow both inevitable and incomprehensible. It undermines the possibility that there are specific reasons for a conflict that occurs in a specific place, and that there are in fact specific ways in which such a conflict can be resolved. If one section of critical readings bemoan the lack of historical contextualization, another half bemoan the very opposite. Other critics like Quadri Ismail et al comment on the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism of the text.

Even though Sarath is tortured and killed in the latter section of Anil’s Ghost, the novel itself ends on a somewhat optimistic note. Ananda, the eye-painter turned alcoholic miner, reconstructs an ancient Buddha statue that has been blown up by thieves in search of treasure, and paints the eyes of a new statue of the Buddha amidst the elaborately described Netramangal ritual. This ending suggests the healing power of the arts as well as the possibility that the violence and destruction in Sri Lanka can be repaired. On the other hand, the emphasis on the Buddha statues and rituals and the Sinhalese eye-painter— along with the predominantly Sinhalese cast of characters, the mention of only Sinhalese place names on the map of Sri Lanka, and the inclusion of only Sinhalese names on the “disappeared” list— seem to suggest a type of chauvinism and Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that were factors which led to the ethnic conflict in the first place. Still other critics like Mendis have been critical of the book’s undue criticism of the State and the Government, thus silencing the terrorism of the LTTE.

Thus Ondaatje has been alternately criticised for being not political enough and for being chauvinistic in his political ideology, for not naming some or for naming only some. This quandary can be best explained if Ondaatje’s perspective of the conflict can be read from his position as an exile. Within the dialectic of exile Ondaatje holds contradictory positions in variable alternating binaries and perceives his conflict- ridden homeland in an irreconcilable antithesis. Santis in his essay “Caught between Two Worlds Bakhtin’s Dialogism in the Exile Experience” states, “Monological thinking is characterised by a bias
towards unitariness” (5). But if we do not subject the text to this “unidimensional” theorising that lacks “dialogical” consideration, one can find satisfactory answers to the contradictions, simultaneities and middle ground of Anil’s Ghost (Santis 7). Being a voluntary exile from Sri Lanka, the text is the outcome of a guilt-ridden Diaspora. Towards this the text undermines the perspective- “the long distance” of the Diaspora and privileges the local’s perspective of the conflict who reveals a vague archaeological surround to the exiled writer. Despite attempting to telescope the conflict in his homeland, Ondaatje is unable to enter the fray from his host land in the West. The perspective of the violence that terrorises his homeland remains long distance sans archaeological surround therefore, although this position is exploited by Ondaatje to blur the identity of the perpetrators. If the long shot-privileging –a – close –up is one dialectic of Ondaatje’s exilic position, this exilic position is also used to debate the Sri Lankan problem from many perspectives, resulting in McClennen’s terms “opposing, contradictory antinomies” in its points of view(31). It is this exilic dialectic that causes Ondaatje’s work to be an ongoing dialogue between a “centripetal” and a “centrifugal” force. Therefore the Buddhist Sri Lankan identity coexists in an irreconcilable antithesis- as the perpetrator of violence and as the victim of violence, as the creator of conflict and as the possible site of reconciliation. To this end all victims in the novel have Sinhala names, all spaces are Sinhalese, the chief victim Ruwan Kumara-Sailor is taken away and tortured and killed by government forces and the reconciliation is also left in the hands of the miner-sculptor who is named after Buddha’s chief disciple Ananda. Like in The English Patient, where Italy the centre of art in Europe lies “In near ruins” after the Second World War, Sri Lanka with its caves, Buddhist architecture, drawings, graffiti lies in fissures with the ongoing Civil War. Yet it is through art and architecture, with a Buddhist slant that the novel offers its resolution. If the novel cannot provide one with “archaeological surround”, it certainly provides ritual-ceremonial surround to the Netramangal festival. Yet the “eye-painting” is significant to understand not just Ondaatje’s ideological stand in regard to the conflict but the reconciliation he offers.

The novel ends with another destruction, but as the narrative voice tells us “this was not a political act”, only some thieves looking for treasure. The three thieves blow up the 120 ft Buddha statue in Buduruvagala and the “great expressive face of the Buddha” falls forward and smashes(295). It is to reconstruct this that Ananda Udugama, the same artisan who reconstructed “Sailor’s” face is summoned. As Dora Wuyts notes that this is a reconstruction and not a recreation, so Ananda’s process is a variant of the “collage method”. This time the collage is more like a jigsaw puzzle as he has to put all the separate pieces of
the statue back together again (73). So what emerges is a fragmented face, like Ondaatje’s fragmented novel. While themetafictional function of the statue will be explored in the fourth chapter of this research, the symbolic reading of the fissured face is done here to delve into Ondaatje’s ideological position with regard to the conflict. The fragmented face can be interpreted as a testimony of the real-life fragmentation of Sri Lankan life due to the conflict. These fissures that Ananda tries to fuse could also be the author’s acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of the postcolonial Sri Lanka. The statue’s eye looking north- the direction of Eelam - no doubt suggests this space as the main site of dissent, a dissent the novel does not condone. However the face where the eyes are is not the old unified one. Ondaatje’s vision for his homeland is not a univocal homogenous particularistic utopia but an enriching of a pluralist sense of nationality, where minor peripheral identities are not erased. Nevertheless the face itself remains singular though fragmented, thus Ondaatje does not concede the secessionist state of Eelam neither does he condone state sponsored violence, but envisions a Sri Lanka which is unified albeit with differences through a mainstreaming of its margins.

VI

Conclusion: Conflict and the Contrapuntal Exiles.

As Post-modern exiles, Shobasakthi and Ondaatje through their critique of structures whether of the state or parochial militant groups offer a contrapuntal view of the conflict, unlike writers writing from within Sri Lanka who write from a particular place hence a distinct frame. They privilege from this position the margins over the centre, allowing alternative histories to emerge that critique nationalist narratives. Using characters who are like them in being “cast” out of the nation, not withstanding their different contexts and circumstances of exile, their nationalism is usually contrary to the discourse of the hegemony, and provides what McClennen identifies as accounts that are an “alternative to the official position” (36). These versions- Dasan’s tale of victimisation, Rocky’s critique of the power dynamics and internecine fighting between the Tamil militia, Nesakumaran’s story that narrativises silenced, tortured histories like the Welikadamassacre and Ondaatje’s exhumation of interred stories of nameless victims in religious burial sites, are ones suppressed by official narratives. These stories therefore can no longer be told within their countries, censored within the state, their stories that are narrated as McClennen notes “in proxy” are “the truer version of the place from which they are barred” (36). The exilic position allows their narrative to circulate uncensored something not possible within the
tyranny of the state which bowdlerises such voices as evident in Sarath’s death at the end of *Anil’s Ghost*.

Though Shobasakthi and Ondaatje as exiles challenge counter-hegemonic discourses, the nature of the site on which they counteract authoritarian discourse and the language of the counteraction vary. Since Shobasakthi writes from a felt experience of combat and exile he challenges therefore through the genres of Autofiction and testimonial narratives the national political history of Sri Lankan state and the Grand narratives of the LTTE. Ondaatje having chosen to leave before the outbreak of the conflict locates his counter-hegemonic discourse in the processes of narrativising history and the perception of the Diasporic subject like himself. Through the character of Palipana, the text self-reflexively parodies the writing of history, interpretation of mythical histories of homeland, and challenges Western discourses and rhetoric through the “Orientalist” perception of Anil.

Language is an important site on which this counter hegemonic portraiture of the conflict is mounted. The Tamil language was an important site on which Eelam, the imaginary homeland was constructed. Shobasakthi writes in Tamil the language that was marginalized by the Sinhalese state. The use of Tamil becomes a source of power to narrativise a conflict that had quelled the language. The site from which these alternative discourses are recovered are memories- individual memories of a child soldier, collective memories of trauma of an ethnic minority or stories that record these memories collected through research and study. Shobasakthi and Ondaatje use different modes of remembering to reconstruct and recreate the conflict. Based on lived experiences their own and others, Shobasakthi and Ondaatje, blur the lines between fact and fiction in narrativising these memories of the conflict. By giving voice to those previously silenced factions of memory, these works constitute an imaginative counter-memory that challenge hegemonic memories of the State. These reinterpretations are not a univocal one but a pluralisation of the past and thus reveals what Ramachandra Guha argues about history, that the same facts and the same individuals are susceptible to multiple interpretations, making, history today more of a narrative, than a science, providing alternate perceptions, thus making the historian an interpreter, in this case of the Sri Lankan conflict. The texts hence become in Neumann’s terms “echo chambers where a complex past resonates in the present” (331).

In these “echo chambers” the “dialogism” of exile makes these polyvalent experience remain distinct, in order to counterpoint their multiple stories. Shobasakthi’s subjective encounter of the conflict gives him a close-up which throws light on shadowy spaces and makes visible the invisible. Through his personal and the collective memory of his people
imperceptible things like intra-ethnic conflicts between Tamils are made evident. Oral testimonies of survivors are used to disclose furtive violence like torture that is usually cloaked within stentorian chambers. Ondaatje’s novel is not based on personal memories; his memories are those of others, as he concedes in his acknowledgements. The acknowledgements also suggest whose memories these are primarily: victims of the conflict. However, Ondaatje’s is a neutral position in being a Burgher and not being Tamil or Sinhala. If we virtually view the conflict in Shobasakthi’s texts, in Ondaatje’s text we do so “vicariously” (James Young). Terror in Anil’s Ghost lies in the invisible, in the unseen but omnipotent power of the state, in our nightmarish reconstruction of what could have been the tortures inflicted on “Sailor” even as in Shobasakthi’s novels the horror lies in the visible and the perceivable.

With his proximity-distance viewing, Shobasakthi resorts to intertextual and interdiscursive parody to show the false, half-formed idealism of his protagonists, while Ondaatje’s long distance gaze of the homeland from the West parodies through Anil, Western Occidental monological thinking. If the distance leads to blank spaces and collapse of significations in Anil’s Ghost, names are significant for Shobasakthi’s factional agenda to emerge. While retaining the names of historical figures like Amirthalingam and Kuttimani or peripheral but real life survivors like David “Aiya” and others’, Shobasakthi blurs his identity as Anthony Dasan through the pseudonym “Shobasakthi” to auto-fictionalise his experience. Shobasakthi’s lifewriting self-consciously blurs fact and fiction to address a silent but implied spectator.

Through their contrapuntal vision both Shobasakthi and Ondaatje deal in dialectics. While the former defines binaries that are constantly shifting and thus blurs distinctions, in Anil’s Ghost identities are undefined and hence blurred. If there is no distinction in the terror strategies of the state and the guerrillas in Shobasakthi’s works, the Buddhist State is at once the perpetrator of conflict and the ideology on which the text offers its reconciliation. If initially unidentified individuals like Ruwan Kumara—“Sailor” represent a collective, Traitor and Gorilla assemble individual stories into a collected.

As “intellectual marginals” Shobasakthi and Ondaatje feel compelled to offer testimony of the events, seen, heard or experienced, though in the case of Shobasakthi it’s all the three. The literary space enables a witnessing of the conflict, through this space these writers arm themselves to combat silencing and restraining. As postcolonial and postmodern exilic writers, Shobaskthi and Ondaatje critique powerfully armed conflicts of postcolonial Sri Lanka its utter waste of human lives and the carnage with its human rights violation. As,
Shobasakthi, with no place to call his own, deeply critical of the various Tamil militant rhetorical forms that keeps afloat a death culture in the name of Tamil ethnicity, now comments, “This war has created an accursed generation not only within the Tamil community but also nationwide. ..This miserable war has produced a generation that has no faith in democracy or in fellow human beings and only trusts the power of the gun” (Warscape, 2012).