

**Placing the Displaced: The Spatial Crisis of Females in Sri Lanka - A Discussion on Island of a Thousand Mirrors by Nayomi Munaweera and The Road from Elephant Pass by Nihal de Silva**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to unravel complexities inherent in the conflict between spatiality and the assertion of female identity within the distinct socio-cultural milieu of Sri Lanka, through Nihal de Silva's 'Road from Elephant Pass' and Nayomi Munaweera's 'Island of a Thousand Mirrors'. Spatial dynamics are crucial in shaping individual identities on the island due to its complex geography and diverse cultural influences. Women's experiences stand out as particularly prominent at the junction of these spatial narratives, offering a prism through which to observe the difficulties and victories women have encountered in maintaining their identity. As a qualitative study, the study employs content analysis and thematic analysis to address the spectrum. De Silva and Munaweera elevated the identity formation and affirmation of females through their participation in the liberation movement. The enlisting of Tamil women in the liberation movement challenges passive, weak, and docile socio - cultural female identity formation and gives a partial masculine female role. Munaweera and De Silva positioned Saraswathi and Kamala as female warriors who exhibit the tendency to embrace extremist ideologies to establish their identity as disciples of the minority female clan. The position of both personas in the Northern region of Sri Lanka made them victims of racial-violence and cultural tensions from the Black July to the ethnic struggle. The influence of these political junctures on the Tamil females led to a position of double marginalization of the female disposition amidst catastrophic milieus. On the other hand, Sinhalese females, who are epitomes of the majority, exhibit their identity formation through deterritorialization to different geographical spaces in quest of a distinct space of belonging.



**INTRODUCTION**

Sri Lankan writing in English emerged as a significant genre of postcolonial literature, reflecting the complexities of cultural and social change in a country that has experienced colonialism, independence, and ongoing political and social struggles. As per Salgado, these writers deviated from Sri Lankan realities and remained attracted to the notions that are western' (2007, p.6). On the contrary, Sri Lankan literature focused on describing the traumatic effects of living in a conflict zone, witnessing almost daily acts of violence, and experiencing trauma and survivor's guilt. In fact, the manner in which so many works expose various impacts of violence unites many literary protests and portrayals of violence in modern Sri Lankan literature. The female character portrayal in Sri Lankan writings in English is so controversial that Young (2006) critically examines the female marginalization in the Sri Lankan literary canon. According to him, 'women were often empowered during the liberation movements, only to find themselves disempowered by the new state that they had helped to create' (p.101). This notion is general to females belonging to both cultures, irrespective of ethnicities, classes and caste discrepancies. The female identity disposition in Sri Lankan literature in English reflects the complex and diverse experiences of women in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan literature in English has emerged as an important field of study, exploring issues related to gender, identity, and representation. Women writers have been instrumental in shaping the narrative of Sri Lankan literature, portraying the unique struggles and triumphs of Sri Lankan women. Many female writers explored the themes of displacement, identity, and cultural conflict through their tangible experiences. The female identity disposition in Sri Lankan literature in English reflects the diverse and complex experiences of women in Sri Lanka. Women writers have been instrumental in shaping the narrative of Sri Lankan literature, portraying the unique struggles and triumphs of Sri Lankan women. Many works by female writers within the country brought attention to the issues related to gender, identity, and representation in Sri Lanka, and has contributed to a deeper understanding of the experiences of women in Sri Lanka.

The notion of space is obviously related to the notion of non – space of belonging that both Munaweera and De Silva attempt to explore through female characterization in their respective narratives. As per Augé's (2009) definition, non-places or no- placeness derive from localized, occupied, familiar, historical and meaningful spaces where identities, relationships, and a story can be made, defined and explored. Thus, place is related to long-standing practices and means of living, evoking humanistic concepts and those associated with Heidegger (1957), as well as common conceptions of local spaces as constantly at risk from external, international influences.

In this regard, the study focusses on the difficulty of identity affirmation and formation by females owing to social, cultural, geographic, and political milieus. The research centers on examining the impact of spatial clashes on the identity formation of Sri Lankan women and the potential recognition of a unique female identity despite hegemonic divisions and biases, focusing on the works of Nayomi Munaweera and Nihal De Silva. Situating both authors within their respective contexts, each employs female character analysis to explore their identity affirmation amidst socio-cultural challenges and ethnic and political conflicts. Munaweera positions the Sri Lankan woman within the frameworks of Sri Lanka and America to compare identity crisis and attempts to establish a distinct identity through migration. De Silva's perspective as a male author offers a different viewpoint, allowing for a comparative analysis with Munaweera's portrayal of female characters. The diversity provided by varied spaces, such as domestic, cultural, racial, and political contexts, complicates and pluralizes identity affirmation. The researcher seeks to investigate the extent to which the acceptance or rejection of certain spaces by women leads to the formation or dismantling of a distinct female identity in Sri Lanka.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A Quest for Peace and Identity Affirmation by Munaweera and De Silva:**

It is obvious that the commitment to create peace in a war-torn societal realm leads an individual to work against conflict, violence and insecurity along with ethical considerations. The employment of the survival motif is presented as a strategy in this peace-building process. As per the perspective of Pokharel and Adhikari (2018), it is not appealing to suggest the necessity of people reaching across cultural and ethnic polarizations, transforming their prior estrangement and hostility into intimacy and emphasize the prospect of a peaceful coexistence between the two rival ethnic groups as a strategy of survival. On the other hand, Rathnayake (2021) critically engages with hegemonic constructions and normative readings of South Asian identities to examine bodies with disabilities in the Sri Lankan sphere. Disability as an indicator of social identifications that transgress hegemonic social identities is vital to examine the complex experiences that are peculiar to South Asian nations as a result of their shared challenges with ethnic conflict, religious extremism, and economic inequality. According to Rathnayake (2021), bodies with disabilities are alternative spaces that struggle over concerns of religious beliefs, gender stereotypes, and dominance of western culture in the production of knowledge in to a third space of hybridity. He views bodies with disabilities or broken bodies as bodies with the ability to transgress boundaries and restrictions that are full of immense potential that South Asian authors can employ to portray the distinctive experiences of living in South Asia to a global audience.

Moreover, Perry (2012) explores De Silva's examination of the way the narrative endangers a renegotiation of identities through the effects of ethnic conflict upon attitudes, behaviors and ideologies through the populace of Sri Lanka which are symbolically represented by a Sinhalese soldier and Tamil militant. Thus, the turmoil that confronts them and the difficult journey both Kamala and Wasantha undergo is witnessed through the prism of their increasing understanding and acceptance of one another. In addition to assisting the text in narrating the novel's understanding of the ethnic conflict, Wasantha and Kamala's chats reflect the changes in their relationship, their growing emotions, and their eventual coming together. In addition, Perry (2012) asserts that 'The Road from Elephant Pass' focuses on re-examining ideological explanations for the continuation of the ethnic struggle through discussions of current doctrines centred on the political utilization of the country's past. The characters of 'The Road from Elephant Pass' describe the two competing ideas that led to the racial conflict that overtook the island at the onset of their voyage. The

physical body turns into a stage or performance space for ideals that have been internally accepted and realized.

Assella (2020) locates Munaweera's narrative to a varied perspective that voices both as a diasporic fiction that creates 'power and dominance' (Lau, 2009, p.572) as a writer who migrated and resides in the west, although she is an epitome of the diaspora as a re-structuring of South Asian American identity that is a novice spectrum to Sri Lankan women's fiction. The opening paragraph of *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* establishes the setting for the shared history of prejudice and injustice experienced by both the Tamils and the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka during colonial rule. Furthermore, the novelist negotiates gender, class, and ethnic identities through two female narrators who inhabit two dissimilar socio-ethnic worlds in her work rather than constructing yet another postcolonial Re-Orientalist narrative. Due to her socioeconomic projection, Yashodara, a Sinhalese upper-class Anglophone narrator, is able to analyze and evaluate her own society and its involvement in the ethnic struggle, as well as to exercise the necessary critical distance to gaze at the Other, the Tamils, without harbouring any animosity. Due to her straightforward sociocultural upbringing, Saraswathi, a middle-class Tamil woman who later joined the military, lacks the empathy necessary to coexist peacefully with the Sinhalese. As a result, rather than being an exoticized representation of the distinction between class and spatial dislocations that affect personality and socio-political decisions in women, it becomes a deeper understanding of the East and the West (Assella, 2020).

According to Lim (1993), Munaweera also employs the trope of the oppressed woman who must follow patriarchal rules as well as the dehumanized male characters who give the female narrators and their narratives more power (p. 580). In the story, Yashodara controls her own destiny, while Saraswathi becomes powerful only because of her demise, in which she becomes a suicide bomber and uses her corpse as a weapon. Consequently, the transgressions carried out through her physical form balance the ones directed towards it. The attempted suicide bombing in Colombo that killed Lanka links the diverse accounts of many ethnic groups, highlighting the differences between the majority and minority. In the story of ethno-national identities, the suicide bombing attempt in Colombo that killed Lanka links the divergent narratives of many ethnic groups, rendering the divisions between the majority and minority as well as between classes unimportant. The simple Orient-Occident duality investigated is complicated by Munaweera's portrayal of the diverse forms of difference investigated in her work. Huggan (2001) further argues that Munaweera's representation of gender and sexual differences in her story subjects challenges the exotic marginality of postcolonial writers by demonstrating how such marginality can be exploited to promote one's individuality to the west. By employing distinctive female characters from disparate ethnic backgrounds, Munaweera creates autonomous female characters who transcend beyond the mere commercialization of differences, rather than creating an exotic marginality.

Assella (2020) reinforces Munaweera's narrative questions about the distinct objectives of diasporic writers. Munaweera's conscious disregard of the political discourse that re-structured the identity of the Sri Lankan - American diaspora's identity is employed as a marketing strategy and a 'apolitical move to avoid contradictions and repercussions' (Assella, 2020). Similarly, Assella identifies the same neglect, which can also be understood as an effort to give voice to the neglected lives of women trapped within the larger socio-political issues in the country. Munaweera's narrative highlights the lives of women who negotiate ethno-social hierarchies and stereotypes while negotiating ethnic identities and spatial (dis)locations. Munaweera and her fiction, therefore, emerge as distinctly Sri Lankan American because of the plot, which negotiates ethno-social identities in search of distinctive female characters that travel between homelands and diasporic locations and fashion new identities.

The rationale for selecting Munaweera and De Silva in exploring the notion of spatiality is the uniqueness of deriving the idea of space by both writers. As an instance, Munaweera as a resident of America, views the depictions of Sri Lanka during the catastrophic era from an exotic perspective. She employs an exotic language to write about Sri Lanka. This radical shift is obvious when she depicts a free and comfortability encountered by both Yashodara and Lanka after migrating to America. Her depiction of freedom in America compared to Sri Lanka exposes the exotic way that she is handling the Sri Lankan space. It projects her own personal struggle in identity affirmation as a female in the native locale in the west which will be analyzed in the research. Simultaneously, De Silva's manifestations of space are exploited to strategically challenge spaces to restructure female identity. As an instance, Wilpattu becomes a liberating space for

Kamala and it is exploited that Kamala and Wasantha who were disciples of the two poles of the ethnic struggle. Most importantly, Kamala reveals the truth about her mission in a church that epitomizes the unique way of deriving the notion of space by De Silva in the identity portrayal of Kamala. The idea of women empowerment is suggested by both Munaweera and De Silva through the clash of spaces and the active way of handling multiplicity of spaces encountered by their respective female characters.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research is predominantly qualitative in nature that locates both ‘The Road from Elephant Pass’ by Nihal de Silva and ‘Island of a Thousand Mirrors’ by Nayomi Munaweera in depicting the clash of spatiality and identity affirmation by females in postcolonial Sri Lanka. As the research reinforces an in-depth articulation of the multiplicity of spatiality and the female identity affirmation espoused by both De Silva and Munaweera, the researcher intends to utilize a qualitative research approach. In an universal perspective, the researcher derives a comparison of the postcolonial female identity formation with the western identity affirmation in the coeval scope. Through the exploration of participants making a sense of their personal and social realms, the researcher located the research in a wider arena to unearth underneath articulations of experiences, events and processes of spatial crisis and female character disposition.

To locate the research in the postcolonial arena, the researcher employs postcolonial conceptualizations of Homi. K. Bhabha, with notions of spatiality by Henri Lefebvre and Mitchel Foucault. By means of that, the research attempts to explore the female identity formation of postcolonial Sri Lanka after the war who entrapped in multiple spaces. As the research problem amalgamated with the ideological structure and impressions of female identity affirmation parallel to the spatial crisis, the researcher intends to utilize qualitative methodologies to unearth related notions through Sri Lankan literature. In exploring the research phenomena from a feminist viewpoint, the researcher employs feminist theories of Judith Butler, Simon de Beauvoir, Gayatri Spivak and Malathi de Alwis predominately to interpret the above texts. The analysis of qualitative data entails encountering varied transcripts, texts and subsequently reflecting thematic demonstrations and improving categories. The researcher utilizes the Evidence Triangulation method to derive a comparative analysis on characterization, thematic concerns and most importantly the disposition of space by both writers. By using Evidence Triangulation, the researcher gained the opportunity to provide a methodology in realizing the social phenomena of postcolonial female identity formation and spatial crisis to a unique realm of analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Female Marginalization vs Identity Affirmation as a Female Minority:**

‘In truth women have never set up female values in opposition to male values; it is men who, desirous of maintaining masculine prerogatives, have invented that divergence. Men have pretended to create a feminine domain-the principle of life, of immanence-only to lock up women therein (Beauvoir, 1988).

As indicated by Beauvoir, Saraswathi and Kamala are presented as female warriors who tend to re-establish the lost female identity through the liberation movement led by a male leader. Both characters were victims of racial violence and cultural tensions resulting from the Black July and ethnic conflicts because of their positions in the Northern part of Sri Lanka. In addition to the impact of these political transitions on Tamil women, the female inclination in disaster-prone regions became double marginalized. Because of the atrocities she experienced as a child regarding the Black July of 1983, Kamala feels driven to seek revenge on the Sinhala majority, both men and women equally. However, Saraswathi was compelled to avenge herself after being violently sexually abused by a group of Sinhala army members, and she even adopted the radical notion of being a female martyr in an attempt to reclaim her lost chastity and reinforce her identity through the movement.



These females gaining identity formation through the movement is challenged by the following official statement. In 1986, the LTTE released an official statement declaring that women should take pride in their attire, makeup, and pottu.

'Wearing conventional clothing does not imply that individuals are held as slaves. Some married ladies claim that wearing saris is costly. That can't be tolerated. It is recommended that women wear modest clothing so as not to draw attention from males. Long hair can be challenging to manage, according to some women. These assertions are false. We are involved in a national liberation movement. However, our civilization will only be denigrated by the cultural shifts that have been occurring'(Salgado,2012).

Here, women are primarily responsible for perpetuating patriarchal roles, institutions, and images. Male aggressiveness and sexuality are the responsibility of women. It is expected of women to apply their clothing to repel male attention. Any expression of female freedom that deviates from the militant role that the patriarchal system has assigned is seen as *demeaning* society and the story of the Nation. It articulates that the participation of the Tamil minority female in the war is devoid of giving them complete physical, social and cultural space of belonging. The juxtaposition of facing the future by sexually exploited Parvathi and Saraswathi are positioned in different identifications where the sexual abuse by the Sinhala army soldiers had become a catalyst for Saraswathi to explore possibilities of reclaiming her space of belonging. Rather than identifying committing suicide as the mere form of liberation and identity affirmation by an ethnographic female, Saraswathi partakes in her role as a Tamil Tigress and even undertakes the extremist ideal of becoming a female martyr. On the other hand, despite the projection of sexual abuse as a retaliation towards Tamils by the Sinhalese, the repetition of the term 'Tiger Bitch' by countless rapists of Saraswathi is demonstrating the fundamental crisis of the struggle. The de-humanization of the female body is projected through the echoing of the auditory declaration of the Tiger bitch. It articulates their right to rape a Tamil woman as they are disciples of the gigantic scope of patriarchy and her belonging to the Tamil minority who is represented by the LTTE which is in conflict with them in the war.

'It's a little like womb space within the structure of the house. And then the foils about of course, is like the room in. In the north where Saraswati is rape, which is the inverse. That's just space in which violence like sexual violence is conducted. Central assault is conducted against the woman's body. By the nation. Like by the nation, but also like at some point later she could constantly. So, rapist with the leader of the Tigers. So really, it's like all misogynistic forces acting on her (Jayakody,2023).

In a way, through a masculine point of view, the phrase justifies their right to pacify their sexual impulses through Tamil females. On the contrary, it projects the opportunistic nature of masculinity and generalizes the concern to all Tamil civilians as participants of the LTTE in order to rationalize their acts of sexual exploitation. Saraswathi was not merely the victim of such tragedies. This further exemplifies the extent of marginalization undergone by Saraswati. The reconstruction of her identity as a 'Tiger' undermines the innocent, Tamil young woman aspiring to bet the village school teacher to a masculine female who attempts to regain the lost chastity and purity by becoming the perpetrator of violence. The repetition of the word 'break' by the persona is reminiscent of this transformation into different spaces of female identity disposition that she will aspire to through militarism in the future. The disposition of physical abuse marked by wounds from soldier's nails, bites and saliva all over her body depicts her own disgust over her own body. Her comparison of rapists to dogs defines the complete retaliation towards the army soldiers who were disciples of the Sinhala majority. As per soldiers' generalization of Saraswathi as a Tiger bitch, she generalizes all Sinhalese who has contributed in one way or the other for the plight of her. There is an unresolved vengeance and retaliation that is nurtured in Saraswathi with the sexual abuse. This notion is depicted through the repletion of the phrase 'Break' that she identifies the physical, psychological, social and cultural break or the transformation incurred in her with the tragic event. This breaking away and her disgust over her own body with her identification that her own body is disowned by herself projects the transgression of previous spaces that determine with different contours to the novice space that she reclaims as a tigress.

'My wrists and ankles are caught in their iron grip. *Tiger Bitch*. I am pulled apart, uncovered, and exposed. They hold me down. Their sweat falls in shining drops and they will not let me avert my

face. I am drenched and soaked. Their mouths come down upon me like the salivating tongues of dogs. They tear me open with their nails, bite me with their fangs, their spittle falls thick across my breasts. They break into me. Break me. Break into me. Break me ..... *Tiger bitch! Tiger bitch! Tiger bitch!*..... (Munaweera, 2012)

Munaweera's articulation of Saraswathi's loss of virginity by the Sinhala rapists is a claim of this war of reclaiming her lost self by the persona. These victimized females are survivors of violence that tend to upsize their spatiality as its perpetrators. The notion of women militants gained significance around the 1990s with the Tamil women militants in combat. 'In fact, the women's wing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam – Suthanthirap Paavaikal (Birds of Freedom) – has acquired almost as much notoriety as their male counterparts since a female suicide bomber killed Rajiv Gandhi, former prime minister of India in 1993. The increased visibility of these women militants' anti-state movements, a familiar question to those who have studied the positioning of women fighters in guerilla groups. Much of this feminist debate is framed in terms of whether the women in the LTTE are liberated or subjugated agents or victims (Coomaraswamy (1998), De Silva (1994) & De Mel (1998).

'LTTE's female cadres also represent a type of feminist ideology, bolstering the LTTE contention that female emancipation is one of the key benefits it has achieved' (Gunawardena, 2006, p. 83). Their ideology was stronger than the men combatants. Female combatants constitute between 20-30 percent of the total LTTE, do so in order to liberate themselves from the Hindu culture. That is why they were named as 'Freedom Birds' or Sometimes referred by media as 'Black Tigresses' or 'Birds of Paradise' (Gunawardena, 2006).

The juxtaposition of facing the future by sexually exploited Parvathi and Saraswathi are positioned in different identifications where the sexual abuse by the Sinhala army soldiers had become a catalyst for Saraswathi to explore possibilities of reclaiming her space of belonging. Rather than identifying committing suicide as the mere form of liberation and identity affirmation by an ethnographic female, Saraswathi partakes in her role as a Tamil Tigress and even undertakes the extremist ideal of becoming a female martyr.

Saraswathi's revelation of the impact created by soldiers with the rape exemplifies the establishment of revenge instincts in her. Her depiction of letting her live after the rape without murdering her is an extreme projection of refusal by the majority of the country as well as the hegemonic patriarchy. Saraswathi portrays the mistake of rapists to let her live from their end as an in-depth form of harming and marginalization herself as a female body while from her end she attempts to generalize vengeance on all Sinhalese people irrespective of searching their innocence or individual contribution to the war. The power instilled in her after partaking in the movement is epitomized with the ownership of the weapon or the gun. It alludes an equal positioning of females with males within the movement where the equality is valued and regarded. For Saraswathi, the equality, power wielded inside the camp of the LTTE is a foil to the powerless life of a female that she lived outside the camp. 'My body itself has changed; it is no longer soft, but made of a certain destiny (Munaweera, 2013).

Saraswathi's identity as a suicide bomber conceals under the pretentious form of a pregnant woman shows the clash of spaces offered for women in Sri Lanka. The representation of the slayer Saraswathi, a form of the Hindu god Shiva, is compared to the Hindu goddesses Durga and Kali. She reincarnates as those goddesses, shattering the stereotype of women as peacemakers, innocent, and non-violent. In her final mission, where she detonates the bomb hidden inside her, she destroys her identity as a spoiled girl and becomes into a predator. The bomb, Saraswathi's child, ensures not the continuation of any man's dynasty, but rather her own immortality as a martyr. The imitation of marriage and pregnancy, which are seen as socially significant turning points in a woman's life, is in favor of an unorthodox, violent, and hazardous alternative. Saraswathi is reduced to a simple vessel, her agency and autonomy taken away, and her body converted into a weapon. It serves as a sobering reminder of how urgently these repressive institutions that support gendered violence and dehumanization be contested and overthrown. The sense of belonging that Saraswathi attempts to seek and establish is illusionary even in her attempt to transform herself from a victim to a perpetrator. Her quest for a true feeling of belonging is shaped by the difficult encounters she had, which impact her decision-making and prevent her from getting it in the end. Saraswathi's complex

and multi-layered picture of a person coping with severe trauma and the demand of armed combat is emphasized by her identities as a Tamil woman, a victim of sexual assault, and a female martyr.

### **The Identity Formation of Kamala Velaithan:**

Kamala's victimization with the Black July in 1983 had become a catalyst in harboring vengeance against the Sinhala majority. The incident had a void in Kamala with regard to the loss of the father figure in her life who was a psychologically retarded person owing to physical abuse by Sinhala mobs. Kamala's dedication to the mission and her desire to achieve the required objectives by the success of the mission dilutes boundaries and polarizations offered by the societal formation of the female body and character in Sri Lankan society. According to the novel, gender is mostly the product of a sequence of performances. The protagonist, Kamala, is both a chaste woman who dresses modestly even while she is wandering through the forest and a warrior. Even when she deviates from this norm and turns militant, she still behaves in a way that is characteristic of a Tamil lady. For example, Kamala needs Wasantha's assistance to remove a leech bite from her body. He continues by stating that we are a conservative people and that of the many ethnic groups, Tamil people are arguably the most restrained. A Tamil girl would not normally even show her ankle to a stranger, much less an opponent. In Wasantha's first-person narrative voice, Kamala epitomizes tradition regardless of her identity disposition as a rebel. Yet Kamala's ability to transform herself into a more Westernized female by wearing Samanathi's clothes in Pali's house is another forceful implication of identity on Kamala.

This articulates that for Kamala it was difficult for herself to affirm a distinct, autonomous identity as a Tamil woman. This re-creation of female identity is further extended in different encounters of territories in the journey. For an instance, the descriptions of the book regarding Mannar as a place full of Muslims and the attribution of Kamala to a Muslim articulates the forceful identity disposition on a female identity by a masculine entity. The central theme of the work is the contestation of identities and the disturbing of parodic performativity, which forms the basis of the primary narrative.

Consequently, understanding the imposed character of identities may be gained by examining the performative aspect of identity in the novel. In this setting, identity becomes a construct – a manufactured pattern of conduct that serves as a point of differentiation. Instead of being based on apparent physical, ethnically varied identities become reliant on recognized standards of cultural capital. As Kamala can pass for a Muslim lady in Mannar, she could also pose for a Sinhalese woman if she discovered the language more well. The performative aspect of class identification is also emphasized in the text. Due to her portrayal as having the ability to adopt many class identities at different points in the story, Kamala is particularly intriguing. She transitions from a humble, traditional woman and skilled warrior to a confident member of the upper middle class in Colombo. Her versatility between the many classes illustrates the performative aspect of the class identity in the book. To be brought inside the parameters of Tamil and even Sri Lankan patriarchal patterns of acceptable feminine behavior, it is vital that the female militant be re-established as feminine in the text.

The text requires Kamala to follow the expected path of a conservative Tamil woman, despite the fact that she has broken the mold by joining the war and fighting against the Sinhalese government, in order for her to be a model heroine within the constrained boundaries of rural, traditional, Sri Lankan sensibilities, which she supposedly embodies via her love for Wasantha. As she defies and transcends ethnic boundaries and demonstrates the ability to adapt to Colombo culture while speaking excellent English, Kamala is presented as the epitome of a modern-day metropolitan woman. Kamala admits Wasantha that she never imagined she could love a Sinhalese man, which renders it very hard for her to be in a romantic relationship with him. Her love for Wasantha the person provides sufficient motivation to overcome her assumptions about Wasantha's ethnic background.

According to De Mel (1996), victimization can provide certain victims the ability to rethink and renegotiate their status in a society since the pain they endure allows them to do it. Kamala's early sorrow gave her the freedom to refuse the customary Tamil role of a subservient lady and join the LTTE as a warrior. Kamala's acquisition of power was determined through this victimization. There is a sense of disarray and confusion in the Sri Lankan surroundings, where ethnic strife has emerged as a result of colonialism. Kamala is

portrayed in the book as being entrapped in between her intimacy and Romance with Wasantha and the revenge implanted in her due to her bitter personal experiences. The encounter with poachers signifies the sexual objectification of the female body irrespective of biases and polarizations. The juxtaposition of female bodies as sexualized objects in irrespective of geographical, racial, cultural biases which encountered by both Kamala and Saraswathi. The knowledge of poachers that one of the people in the forest is a female, attempt to entrap her to pacify their repressed sexual desires. This is an instance that establishes the lustful aspects of poacher sin contradiction to the humane aspect of Wasantha.

Most importantly, the narrative unfolds through the perspective of Wasantha which further depicts this marginalization. 'I hated the weakness of it, especially in front of an enemy. Especially in front of a woman!' (De Silva, 2003.p.15). In the Northern locale, it is Kamala who initiated and directed the power of the mission which challenged the hegemonic masculinity and ego of Wasantha. The conflict of viewpoints, ideals, and personal history that define Kamala and Wasantha's identities is highlighted by their heated disputes. Through revealing their weaknesses and encouraging introspection, the characters are able to express their beliefs at these tense moments. When she was in Northern territories, she was independent in decision making and taking actions. South is a new region to Kamala where the majority is Sinhala people. When she comes to Pali's house, she seeks the assistance and perspective of Wasantha before doing anything. This indicates the physical spaces that determines the identity formation of females. The complete acquisition of the identity affirmation of the LTTE Tamil informant is depicted with the revelation of Kamala's information as a trap that is revealed at the moment before entering the office of the DMI. Kamala reveals the authenticity related to her real mission, at a place where Wasantha was unable to react to the declaration. While Wasantha emotionally involved with Kamala, she remained truthful to her original mission even making Wasantha accountable for the concern as he spent more than 10 days with the informant. As Saraswathi sacrificed her life as a female martyr, Kamala as an informant sacrificed her entire life for the movement knowing consequences of falsifying information. Her repetition of her desire to travel to Canada after the supply of the information is juxtaposed with her complete confinement as a terrorist at the authority of the enemy. In a way, by casting her vengeance back to the Sinhala majority as a strong and powerful persona dissolves the hurt psychology of Kamala as a child who victimized by the reprisal attacks in 1983. On closer examination, Kamala's disclosure represents the protection and preservation of the patriarchal inheritance on two fronts. Thus, on a "domestic" level, she protects Wasantha's reputation and profession, which would have been destroyed had her "given objective" been accomplished. Secondly, when relating the narrative to the broader political framework of national conflict, she defends the integrity of the '*Sri Lankan state*' which is the dominant patriarchal and chauvinistic power in the midst of a long Civil War.

### **Back to the Womb: Dislocations and Relocations in-between Geographical and Socio-Political Spaces**

The concept of dislocation, relocation and reterritorialization with deterritorialization are concepts initially used in migrant literature. Munaweera elaborates on the elements of physical deterritorialization in her work, and reterritorialization is one such solution with several appearances. Thus, whereas Nihal de Silva utilizes the physical and psychological dislocations of female character representation, Munaweera utilizes racial diversity as a reason for the physical reterritorialization. Munaweera's work demonstrates the deterritorialization that results from social disputes inside the nation's political realm.

According to the perspective of the Sinhalese, "This island is ours, given to us from the Buddha's own hand long, long before they came... For the Sinhala, there is only this small island. If we let them, they will force us bit by bit into the sea" (Munaweera, 2013). The novel portrays the nature of belonging to one's territory. For example, the novel demonstrates the territory of Sinhalese culture in Sri Lanka. Therefore, according to their perspective protecting their territory will preserve their culture as well.

Yasodhara describes their experiences on the west and east coasts of the globe and the differences they encountered. When individuals leave the borders of their own nation, they lose the characteristics of being locals. These individuals could find themselves able to locate a suitable location inside the new border when they bring such characteristics with them in the migration. They encounter a new set of people who have welcomed them into this melting pot, in addition to the new geographic setting. Although these girls



expected a white society in America, in the real picture it is a place which accommodates a vast area of populism.

According to Munaweera's interview with Dutta,

"Yasodara and Lanka experience the frustration of being mistakenly labelled 'Indian' and the agonizing adjustments to a new kind of body awareness that being a foreigner requires. The novel portrays America as a land of freedom, yet every immigrant carries their own native qualities that are innate to them. These innate unchangeable qualities uphold the gap between the self and others. On the other hand, they had to accept the Americanization in order to survive in that territory. The way in which these definitions of 'home' have become naturalized interests; it has evolved into a place that is already reserved (both materially and symbolically) for a particular type of resident" (George, 1996, p.21).

The main reason behind this is the difference or the gap between the "First and the Third worlds" (Bhabha, 1994). Both Yashodhara and Lanka identify a void in their identity formation as migrant females. Yashodhara's and Lanka's returning to Sri Lanka was also impossible to derive their lost identity which entrapped them in two physical spaces. The decision of not returning to Sri Lanka with the death of Lanka is also a part of the reterritorialization process. It is obvious alike the Tamil minority, Sinhala majority who become victims of reprisal attacks and violence are devoid of a unique identity of belonging. The decision of Yashodhara of not returning to Sri Lanka exemplifies that she won't be never able to acquire a unique identity affirmation for herself not in the motherland or in the distanced alien land in the west.

Mala, Nishan's twin sister is an obvious example of the clash between different spaces offered to the female identity disposition by the coeval society. From her childhood, she was criticized owing to her dark complexion especially by her mother describing the future difficulty of finding an eligible bachelor for marriage. This is a complete objectification of the female body that articulates appearance as a predominant factor in finding a prospective partner. From her childhood Mala is positioned as a competitor with Nishan that his masculinity was a catalyst in winning this battle. Mala's physical strength is higher than a female that Nishan's friends' states that none of the boys are talented in scoring cricket irrespective of Mala. The desire for Mala growing interest on Cricket, the sport of males according to the gender-based society and climbing of trees are instances that she directly challenges gender demarcation. Mala's marriage to Anuradha, the engineer is an instance of transgressing hegemonic polarizations of class, caste, race, society and determining of female identity through physical appearance. The mother agrees to the proposal of Anuradha as it will be difficult to find an eligible partner for Mala owing to her dark complexion. Yet this combines the way education places as a catalyst in re-shaping contours of female identity affirmation and acquisition in the society. Mala's marriage in one of the successful marriages in the family clan that many relatives viewed their unison at parties where each of them value in their own company in family gatherings alike a newlywed couple. Mala's complete accusation of her identity affirmation by challenging the clash of spaces is evidenced with the juxtaposition of Anuradha's death by the mob in 1983 and her decision to adopt the Tamil child Poonam as her own daughter. For her, the death of Anuradha by violent mobs is not elaborated as a vengeance towards the entire tribe of Tamils or Sinhalese. She does not generalize her plight to all Tamils or Sinhalese yet she understands that it is a part of violent mobs irrespective of race, and class differentiations.

### **Wilpattu as the Space of Diluting Gender Demarcation:**

The travelogue genre is expertly employed by Nihal de Silva in '*Road from Elephant Pass*' to critically illustrate the varied elements of relocation that Tamil ethnographic females during Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis. Kamala's first physical Deterritorialization occurred with the impact of the 1983 Black July that forced her to reposition herself in the North from Colombo. It is obvious that the writer is projecting authentic details related to the fauna, flora and significantly the socio-political background in the form of a travelogue and the central focus attributed to the concept of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of protagonists is upsized through the employment of maps in the narrative. It is clear that the physical space that they represent derives their power and authority that manifests their conflicting ideologies and them partake in two different entities in conflict with each other. 'We'll be at Palamdu soon. It is a junction with a track

leading to some villages in the interior..... After that we would be in government territory (De Silva, 2003, P.48).

Wilpattu was the space that uprooted Kamala and Wasantha from the prejudices and biases in the objective world. The flora, fauna and their exposure to common dangers attributed to the dissolving of retaliation towards each other that they generalized owing to the macrocosm of the society. As a symbol of their growing knowledge, their survival becomes a cooperative effort. In spite of this terrifying environment, Wasantha and Kamala's growing understanding and mutual dependence is questioned by the very dangers that threaten them. Cultural differences and initial mistrust start to fade when they are forced to rely on one another for survival. The encounter of common danger increases the coordination and understanding among Wasantha and Kamala. From the perspective of Kamala, facing common dangers together has the ability to dissolve boundaries of gender, race, and class and then partake in two parties which are conflict in with each other. These common dangers can be categorized as human-made and nature-made challenges. Wasantha and Kamala's strategy of travelling through Villus is a landmark in the journey which fulfils sanitary facilities, cooking and drinking purposes that are essential for the survival in the forest. Owing to the survival training in the army of Wasantha, he identifies villus as an accurate way to find the direction. Furthermore, Kamala's depiction of Kalivillu and other villus are owned by Tamils as they resemble the Tamil language in the naming and Palmyrah trees as Tamil trees signify the internalized polarization of the 'other' owing to territorial transitions. Wilpattu serves as an ideal space in order to understand each other as two human beings irrespective of ethnic divisions.

The enthusiasm and interest in bird-watching is a re-awakening to the exposure of each other's personal histories. This dissolving of divisions led to the Romantic rapport of Kamala and Wasantha. The living spaces of Kamla and Wasantha eradicates Kamla's misconception of the South as the land of plenty and opportunities with Wasantha rationalization that all Tamils are terrorists. The shift of physical spaces is undergone with a visible change when both protagonists encounter the civilized space beyond the forest. Through perspective the writer illustrates the geographical differentiations in cities alike Chillaw, Wariyapola, Kurungala, Pelawatta and Colombo. The transition from Palmyrah to coconut trees, the absence of checkpoints and the climatic change in a way dedicates them with a sense of belonging to the community. The way Kamala wears the westernized attire of Pali's wife Samanthi denotes the possibility of undermining her own racial identity and embracing a new identity that secures herself. The shift of physical spaces determines the agency attributed by Kamala throughout the journey. She gained supremacy of power in the northern areas while Wilpattu offered her with the dual distribution of power irrespective of gender differences. When she comes more to the South significantly to Pali's house, she completely relies on Wasantha and his opinions. The shift of geographical spaces determines the extent of autonomy and independence gained by kamala as a Tamil minority female and a LTTE informant.

#### **Female Identity Formation by Munaweera and De Silva:**

In the process of identifying the clash of spaces depicted by Munaweera and De Silva in respective narratives, it is significant to explore different writing structures in their novels as a male and a female writer. The literary works Munaweera and De Silva skillfully negotiate the difficult terrain of identity, conflict, and the indispensable position of women in their different civilizations, all against the turbulent background of Sri Lanka's civil war. In her memoir, Nayomi Munaweera employs a dual narrative framework to deftly combine the stories of two ladies from different ethnic origins, Saraswathi and Yasodhara. This multigenerational framework gives readers a comprehensive understanding of how the conflict has affected these women and their families. On the other hand, De Silva chooses a more conventional linear storyline, concentrating on the travels of Captain Wasantha Ratnayake and Kamala Velaithan across the war-torn Northern Sri Lanka. Although the text's narrative approaches are different, they are similar in that they examine female identity, question social norms, and emphasize the resilience that women are when faced with hardship. The dual narrative format of enabling a detailed examination of Saraswathi and Yasodhara's individual experiences. Munaweera's characterization of two females belonging to both racial polarizations and the exposition of tangible experiences of each of them provide unbiased viewpoint regarding both parties to the reader. It also articulates different prejudices and biases different to each other, geographically, socially and psychologically that made the process of identity

affirmation plural and partial to females irrespective of their racial identifications. This is further established by the first-person narrative authority given to Yashodhara and Saraswathi.

On the contrary, De Silva employs the first-hand narrative authority of Wasantha, a disciple of the Sinhala majority and the Sri Lankan army. Kamala's identity affirmation is not completely addressed by De Silva as the narrative voice is of Wasantha. Kamala's inner realities and thought process is not exposed to the reader as she is silent within the narrative. Yet, the characterization of Kamala as a disciple of Tamil minority and an informant of LTTE derives her viewpoints and prejudices related to the struggle. On the contrary, the decision of man leading the authority and narrative voice in a narrative written by a masculine author indicates the gender demarcation prevalent in the hegemonic society irrespective of his attempts to equate both characters in the journey and sharing of common dangers. By contrasting these two novels, it is apparent that Munaweera and de Silva both support the assertion of female identity in the midst of conflict by using different narrative structures to portray the experiences of women in Sri Lanka. Munaweera's dual narrative highlights the interdependence of women's existences throughout generations and enables a more in-depth examination of the female experience over time. De Silva's story, on the other hand, is clearer and more concise, giving readers an overview at the problems his characters are facing – especially Kamala, who breaks conventional gender norms.

## CONCLUSION

It is obvious that, militant spaces had the power to give independence and a distinct form of identity formation for the females who participated in the Liberation movement. In a way the identity formation of the Tamil women with their symbolic representation in the LTTE provides them with a space of belonging that equates their positioning with the status of males and as an opportunity to transgress the hegemonic polarization of culture, socio-political milieu, gender and other rigid notions. To fully comprehend female identity in postcolonial Sri Lanka, it is critical to acknowledge and confront the complex interconnections of ethnicity, gender, and spatiality. The researcher identifies the necessity to absorb diversified varieties of ethnicities by deviating from ideological paradoxes of superiority complex implanted by gender dispositions and cultural differentiations identifying more open-minded considerations on the 'other'. The awareness of 'Gender Fluidity' in society must be implemented to welcome the 'other': diversified ethnicities, cultures, races and female identity formation.

'What is crucial to such a vision of the future is the belief that we must not merely change the narratives of our histories yet transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and identities, spaces, both human and historical' (Bhabha, 1994).

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