

CERTIFICATE

Certified that this thesis entitled “**Family, Sexualities, and Ageing in Expatriate Sri Lankan English Fiction: Kinship Ties, Power Relations and the State**” submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the supervision of **Dr. Nilanjana Deb**, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Jadavpur University. And that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

Countersigned by the Supervisor

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Introduction

The Myth of 'Pure' Genealogies

Sankaran Krishna, writing about contemporary India and Sri Lanka, raises an important question:

'If the postcolonial nation-state in its present avatar has reached a dead end, what sort of politics can we envisage to produce spaces of tolerance, plurality and nonviolence?' (1999: xxix)

This 'dead end' in Sri Lanka was reached with the commencement of the civil war between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in July 1983, which continued uninterrupted for 26 years. Although the war officially ended in 2009, it has not found a closure yet. This thesis addresses the question raised by Krishna, through readings of contemporary expatriate Sri Lankan fiction in English. Every Sri Lankan writer, expatriate or local, who has emerged in the last three decades, is burdened with the responsibility of talking about the war. It is impossible not to talk about it. Even when authors wrote period pieces or set their stories before the war began, they could rarely circumvent the ethnic issue which, as it seems now, has always been central to Sri Lankan lives. I do not exclusively read the novels as cultural vehicles for understanding the emergence of the ethnic conflict. Theories on the causes of the conflict are available in abundance. My focus is on the alarming effects of the conflict on personal relationships depicted in the Sri Lankan English novel – the delineation of which may offer possible ways of peace-building in the country. Hardt and Negri write: '[T]he nation becomes the only way to imagine community... [and] the multiplicity and singularity of the multitude are negated in the straitjacket of the identity and homogeneity of the people' (2000: 106-107). This thesis concerns itself with family narratives, locating within them the 'singularity of the multitude', as against the overarching, over-determining frameworks of (sub)national identities; it not only dismantles the myth-making surrounding 'purity of identity', but in the process also proposes possible ways in which peace-building might be accelerated in contemporary Sri Lanka.

In the Sri Lankan context dismantling the received history of family genealogy, denaturalising identities and recognising and acknowledging resistance and differences is of immense significance. Krishna, writing about the construction of nationalist imaginaries in Sri Lanka, in terms of ‘purity of identity’, uses the analogy of the biblical beginning of the history of man, to trace this obsession, still prevalent in every nation-state. He writes:

History becomes the story of the fall from Eden, when the pristine purity of identity was defiled by the arrival of the “other”, and its eventual recovery was to be through annihilation of the impure outsiders... not only in the theoretical sense of the debt that identity always owes to otherness, but also in the historical sense that every linguistic, religious, nationalist, and ethnic category is bastardized and adulterated from the very outset. (1999: xx)

Postcolonial Sinhalese nationalist discourses sought to erase this ‘bastardized and adulterated’ family tree of the nation in an urgency to establish a pure Sinhalese-Buddhist genealogy. Krishna quotes Etienne Balibar’s (1991) critique of such bigoted inventions:

...genealogy is no longer either a body of theoretical knowledge or an object of oral memory, nor is it recorded and kept privately: *today it is the state which draws up and keeps the archive of filiations and alliances.* (qtd. in Krishna 41; emphasis in the original)

This process of drawing a family tree to establish the myth of a pure origin has been elaborate and intriguing; a pure Sinhalese past has been forcefully fabricated through intricate myth-making (J P Jayawardena’s *Golden Threads*, 1984) and falsification of history (K M De Silva’s *A History of Sri Lanka*, 1981). Although works such as “‘The People of the Lion’: Sinhala Consciousness in History and Historiography’ by R. A. L. H. Gunawardana (1990) tried to write a rationalist historiography of the Sinhala past, postcolonial Ceylon/Sri Lanka saw an increasing ‘othering’ of ethnic minorities, most glaringly underscored in the name change of the country in 1972; and before that in the infamous Sinhala Only act of 1956 which declared Sinhala as the sole language of administration; even before that, in 1948-1949, just after the official decolonisation, disenfranchisement of the Estate Tamils was another unambiguous tactic of keeping them out of the newly independent nation. The Tamil retaliation which took unspeakably violent proportions was provoked by the majoritarian Sinhalese government’s persistent efforts at homogenising the genealogy of the nation.

‘Into this issue has entered the “religious”’, says Deegalle, ‘particularly the “holy land” myth of the *dhammadīpa* invoked by some who are eager to assert their religious identity’ (2006: 11). Whereas the term *dhammadīpa* ‘refers to a universal state of mind that is prepared to accept *dhamma* as only refuge and goes from there towards liberation of the mind from bonds to the world’ (Schalk 2006: 88), the term gathered a significant political valence in the beginning of the twentieth century. Notably, the Sinhalese-Buddhist ideologue, Anagarika Dharmapala’s interpretation of the term as referring to a specified territory, that is, the island itself, had a momentous impact on the interweaving of the religious with the nationalist ideology. The idea of the *dhammadīpa* was reinforced by the introduction of the term *Sinhalatva* invented by Nalin de Silva (2004), infamous for his militant writings.

Nationalist and religious discourses converged with and buttressed each other with the single agenda of delegitimising any Tamil claim on the country, further strengthening the idea of a pure genealogy and ethnic hierarchy in terms of numerical majority. The *Mahavamsa* in particular imagined this Buddhist state in cosmological terms, patterned on the ‘mandala design’ (Roberts 2009), which in turn instilled in the minds of the Sinhalese a glorified self-image of, as Hoole suggests, ‘a people chosen for a mission in a world of impermanence and self-seeking’ (qtd. in Mohan 2012: 24). Buddhist reformist movement inspired by Protestant ideologies, ‘systematically denuded the rural Buddhism of the Sinhalese masses of its cosmological and ritual base and re-imagined it as rational, logical and scientific within an Orientalist framework that privileged religious, racial and linguistic markers of identity’ (Wijeratne 2006). In so doing, Buddhist-Sinhalese discourses could theoretically delegitimize all other minorities from having any claim on the island.

Violent assault on the Tamils continued at regular intervals after independence – several state sponsored pogroms and riots can be traced since 1956, followed by three more in 1958, 1977 and 1981, culminating in the bloodiest riot of all in 1983. Dissolving the ideologies of modern nationalism, post-independence Sinhalese government, utilising the ‘instrument’ of the state, sought to ‘re-define and reconstruct political relations of the state in such a way that ethnic relations would be reordered in a new hierarchical pantheon’ (Uyangoda 1994: 13). Subsequently, the Tamil demand for a separate homeland – the Eelam – was also premised on this idea of purity and homogeneity. In all fairness, it is important to note here, that the construction of a Tamil-Hindu identity was underway since the ‘Tamil patriot’ Arumugam Navalar founded the Saiva Paripalana Sabhai (Society for the Protection of Hinduism) in the

north and later in Colombo in order to preach the greatness of Hinduism. Navalar, though himself English-educated and exposed to western cultures like his Sinhalese-Buddhist counterpart, Anagarika Dharmapala, emphasised repeatedly on the sanctity of the Hindu caste system. Rather than dissolving this abominable social hierarchy, he reinstated it in an exigency to establish a distinctive Hindu identity. While the Sinhalese-Buddhist community aggressively devoted themselves to re-imagine the nation in majoritarian lines, the Tamil minority countered it with their own separatist, 'purist' identitarian discourses. The resultant civil war was therefore in the making for an infinitely long time. Krishna writes: '...the building of the nation along majoritarian lines serves as an impetus for the emergence of ethnonationalism. Here, as elsewhere, making of the nation is coeval with its violent unmaking' (1999: 77). The civil war, therefore, brought about a complete disintegration of the modern nation-state theoretically imagined as an entity in which citizens, notwithstanding ethnic or religious affiliations, have equal rights.

The chauvinism of both Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms had a major impact on families and dynamics of intimacy. Frantic promotion of ethnonationalism influenced and reinforced power hierarchies within the family: between man and woman, heterosexual and sexually divergent individuals, and the elderly and the younger members. The importunate emphasis on ethnic purity manifested itself in further marginalisation of sexual minorities that threatened the 'purity' of heteronormative coupledness. The hatred for the ethnic 'other' aggravated abomination of the sexual 'other' – an anathema to the family, a threat to the perpetuation of its genealogy. Simultaneously, women were also further marginalised. Symbolising the inner sanctum of the ethnically 'pure' home, the women became the target of the rival ethnic community - her body, often molested, raped and mutilated, became the site over which the ethnic battle was fought. Even when women were included as active participants in the warfare, they were forced to preserve their virginity. Chastity – 'purity' of the body – acquired tremendous political valence in the wake of the civil war. On the other hand, ageing citizens came to be increasingly devalued in a militant society, where they could not meaningfully contribute owing to the frailty of their body and mind. On the other hand, the youth participating in the warfare lost their youthfulness and aged immaturely. All of these significantly transformed the family and personal equations within it. The family also became an indispensable haven or refuge from the militant world outside, no matter to what extent the family replicated it. The modern Sri Lankan family, a product of colonial modernity, therefore, has a history of evolution parallel to the nation-state; and, both,

incidentally, have moved from more open heterogeneous to closed homogeneous forms under the auspices of colonial rule and thereafter.

Transnationalism, the Family and the Concern for Peace-building in Sri Lankan Expatriate Fiction Page | 5

The Sri Lankan English novel has undergone a significant transfiguration in the wake of ethnonationalist animosities – it no longer imagines the nation in conformance with dominant discourses of nationalism. The contemporary expatriate Sri Lankan English novel is more subversive than its earlier form. The subversion of and resistance to interpellation in hegemonic discourses are observed in non-conforming members of the family. While acknowledging the indispensability of the family's affective function, men and women, holding more cosmopolitan worldviews, constantly challenge any form of repression carried out in the name of maintaining the purity of the family blood, patriotism or parental right to interfere in children's lives with the purpose of destroying their individuality. As Weimann (2008) writes about the recent South Asian English novels:

The mode of subversion that these texts advocate does not, however, exhaust itself in de-essentialising the (binary) parameters of the hegemonic formation and replacing them with their radical simple negation, pure difference. It is the real existence of other stories that drives their assault on discursive monopolies ... Without denying the persistence of power relations and the ensuing necessity of “the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative”, the productive encounter in these texts opens up an ethico-political horizon that clearly transcends the dialectic model of a struggle for recognition ... as well as the structuralist mechanism of interpellation. (3)

What the second generation expatriate Sri Lankan literary critic Minoli Salgado (2007) says about her critical disposition in the introduction to her book, *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place*, can be partly applied to the expatriate novelists as well:

My approach is mediated by my own experience of multiple displacements. As a migrant Sri Lankan now resident in England, born in Malaysia to Sri Lankan parents

whose close connection to their native land was reflected in my initially being raised apart from them with my grandparents at ‘home’, I am conscious both of the spatiality of my historical experience and of the historical contingency shaping a mobile identity – my experience of ‘home’ constructed through the interplay between dwelling and travelling. Yet I aim to activate this in the service of what Anthony Appiah has called a ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ working within the cultural coordinates of a specific historical moment in Sri Lanka in order to create a context where dialogue between the local and global may be enabled. (3)

The family narratives I shall be discussing in this thesis also engender a ‘dialogue between the local and the global’, in the process of which they challenge the theoretical foundation of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism or the arguments in favour of a separate state for the Tamils. In so doing, they suggest effective ways of building peace in contemporary Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan ‘sub-nationalisms’, however, are not confined to the geopolitical boundaries of the island; they have, appallingly, spilled into diasporic spaces. Within the Sri Lankan Sinhalese as well as Tamil expatriate communities, one is confronted with an arrogant long-distance nationalism, facilitated by the economic affluence the communities have gained in the host countries. Although theoretically occupying transnational spaces, these expatriates spiritedly work towards supporting territorialist nationalisms back home. While the Tamil expatriate community has significantly contributed to the rehabilitation of war victims in North East Sri Lanka, it has also constantly funded the war for a separate homeland. Similarly, the Sinhalese expatriates, located within various first world countries, have participated aggressively in a long-distance Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism, aided further by the revolution in Information Technology.

The transnational space, one that is inhabited by the writers I have focused on, is not particularly liberating, for the nation remains inextricably embedded within the transnational. This is a peculiar condition of late, or as Bauman (2011) terms it, ‘liquid modernity’. In response to globalisation and the fluidity which characterises it, there exists a corresponding and almost pathological need for a more concrete sense of belonging. Bauman deploys the metaphor of a home into which one is born to explain this yearning. This is a home not of one’s making but one where origins can be traced. This home is outside people’s experience and in this way it acquires immense cultural currency because it is imagined rather than lived.

(171-172) Hence, a physical displacement from the original homeland, by force or will, engenders the necessity to belong, the need to retrace roots, and a desire to reformulate one's identity within homogenising multicultural societies which grossly essentialise identities. Hence a long-distance nationalism emerges within the diaspora: the same oppressive structures of the family are replicated and 'ethnic' walls are erected with an urgency to ghettoise one's identity.

The expatriate Sri Lankan novel is a peculiar literary form embodying the contradictions and paradoxes encountered by the modern global citizen who having gained unprecedented mobility, also often suffers from the agony of being rootless. So, how does the expatriate novel resolve these contradictions and paradoxes undergirding transnational lives? While participating in re-imagining the nation from a distance, and sometimes mourning its loss, the expatriate novel, focusing on personal histories, re-imagines the nation as *it ought to be*, exhibiting what Appiah calls a 'rooted cosmopolitanism'. In 'Grassroots Globalization and Research Imagination' (2000), Arjun Appadurai stresses on the importance of shifting from 'fixed geographies marked by pre-given themes' to 'process geographies' in area studies; owing to the unprecedented global flow of migrants and media in the present times, areas can no longer be imagined as 'immobile aggregate of traits, with more or less durable historical boundaries'. Rather, the question one must raise is how particular areas are 'globally widely distributed' and how they are constantly 'globally produced' by intellectuals and artists, primarily (7-8). This is the exercise in which the expatriate novel is engaged in – reproducing the local within the global. While moving from 'trait geographies' to 'process geographies' in their representation of a particular area, the expatriate novel also participates in changing how the world 'pictures' a particular region.

Unlike its local colonial counterparts, these expatriate novels open up possibilities of 'heterotopic examination of mainstream rival nationalisms' (Mohan 28). These novels began to appear in large numbers, with increasing militancy, brutal ethnic animosities, violation of human rights, disintegration of filial ties, forced displacement, and most importantly, the emergence of a general ambience of fear, apprehension and distrust across Sri Lanka. In his assessment of the artistic experiment Michael Ondaatje engages with in *Running in the Family* (which is a fictionalised memoir of the author's family in the accompaniment of old pictures from the family album), Jeffrey Orr (2010) writes:

...we move from approaching the images included in the text as evidential illustrations of the historical truth value of the narrative to approaching them as family photographs with emotional, rather than evidential, value. (31-32)

This is exactly what each of the family narratives does – challenging the monopoly of a singular totalitarian history, by narrating emotional histories of relationships, personal tragedies and individual negotiations with history. In so doing, they also contribute significantly to the plea for peace-building – a necessary project in war torn Sri Lanka. In its exploration of human relationships and intimacy within the private sphere, which often replicates the public sphere in its tractable relation with the State, the Sri Lankan English novel, may be seen as participating in Paul Gilroy's (2005) entreaty for an 'agnostic planetary humanism' in his delineation of a profound postcolonial melancholia produced by the horrors the twentieth century has repeatedly encountered:

We [...] need to consider how a deliberate engagement with the twentieth century's histories of suffering might furnish resources for the peaceful accommodation of otherness in relation to fundamental commonality. (4)

Gilroy's thesis builds on Etienne Balibar's (2010¹/2013) notion of 'equaliberty' – a right to difference in equality – which does not seek to restore 'an original identity' or neutralise 'differences in the equality of rights', but stresses on 'the production of an equality without precedents or models' (221). These novels engage in such a task – advocating both gender and ethnic 'equaliberty' – while propagating a humanism which is agnostic and postmodern in character. As Appiah observes:

We can surely maintain a powerful engagement with the concern to avoid cruelty and pain while nevertheless recognizing contingency of the concern. Maybe, then, we can recover within postmodernism, the postcolonial writer's humanism – the concern for human suffering, for the victims of the postcolonial state ... while still rejecting the master narratives of modernism. (1992: 155)

¹ 2010 is the publication date of the French original, which was later translated into English in 2013.

Qadri Ismail, one of Sri Lanka's pioneer social scientists and literary critics, in his book, *Abiding by Sri Lanka*, takes up the project of deconstructing the founding principle of representative democracy, or in other words, the politics of majority rule. In the process of doing so, Ismail's book also participates in the mission of peace-building. This is one of the very few books on Sri Lankan literature which I have found useful in understanding the social importance of literary activities in the country at present. Ismail explicates the perspective he has taken in this book thus:

Included here is the indispensable enterprise of rethinking, from a minority perspective and from that of the critique of social science and of representation, the problem of democracy; of considering whether representative democracy, understood not as an egalitarian mode of government or as the best possible system one can conceive but as a structure of dominance (not hegemony), enables the minoritization, the making insignificant and of no count, of minorities. Reading the Sri Lankan debate leads, almost inevitably, to asking a question about not just the necessity or practicality but the very ethicality of what is arguably the founding structural principle of representative democracy: majority rule. (xvi)

In my thesis, I propose to problematise this concept of majoritarian dominance by extending the idea beyond ethnonationalist identities; while it is absolutely important to recognise this overarching framework of majority/minority discourse informing every novel produced within the country, I believe it is even more intriguing to investigate micro power structures and forms of minoritisation, besides the ethnic. I shall make an attempt to show with increasing militarisation of the Sri Lankan state organisation of power, affect, and relationships within the family underwent a significant transformation. With the failure of egalitarian democracy within the nation-state, the democratic space within families also shrunk; consequently, relationships within the family – between parents and children, husband and wife, brothers and sisters, grandparents and grandchildren – came to be determined by the larger political scenario. In a militant state, expectedly, aggressive hypermasculinity is promoted (Jeganathan, 2000; Silva 2009 and 2014) infinitely, leading to unprecedented reinforcement of heteropatriarchal power mechanisms. This in turn oppresses and marginalises not only women and queer citizens, but also, emotionally fragile men, not sufficiently militant in disposition, along with ageing men and women who fail to contribute

meaningfully to militancy, because of their frail body and declining cognitive potentials. In this thesis, ‘majority rule’ does not only signify the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority’s relentless dominance of Tamil-Hindu minorities ; within this overarching framework, I would like to examine, for example, how heterosexual women dominate their homosexual counterparts who refuse to be cast in the conventional mould of womanhood; how fiercely belligerent militant men denigrate others who fail to adhere to conventional codes of masculinity; how queer men and women are alienated by heterosexual family members; how empowered queer individuals often end up replicating the same power mechanisms they are victims of; how the young, a more valued group, dominates older people, and how the latter, by the virtue of having aged, often take upon themselves the right to dominate the young. And, all this happens within the family, which, therefore, appears to exist within an intricate network of power relations. However, whoever is minoritised, victimised or dominated is not without power – dissenting voices, non-conformist ideologies, and resistances further complicate this power mesh, often dismantling the heteronormative kinship structures. Once these power networks are unpacked, one realises the difficulty of the peace-building project, which can no longer end in attempts at building bridges across ethnic differences only. The fissures are so deep that there are no easy ways of mending them.

A note on the selection of novels

I have selected ten Sri Lankan English novels by both well-known and lesser known writers, now mostly settled abroad – Michael Ondaatje, ShyamSelvadurai, RomeshGunasekera, AmbalavanerSivanandan, V. V. Ganeshanathan, ChandaniLokugé, and Mary Anne Mohanraj. Most of these writers, belonging to the first or second generation expatriate communities and different ethnic groups, have had their major publications after the 1983 riots, considered to be the most devastating of riots happening in Sri Lanka since colonial times. The novels which I have chosen are written roughly over the ‘official’ span of the civil war: 23 July 1983 – 17 May 2009. The latter date marked the defeat of the LTTE by the Sri Lankan military, after which the Tamil National Alliance gave up its demand for a separate state in favour of a federal solution. However, the damage that was already caused in the twenty-six years of ruthless warfare could never be remedied. Two of the ten novels, Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* and Selvadurai’s *The Hungry Ghosts*, do not fall within the period mentioned above: the former was published in 1982, when the riots were building up,

and the latter was published in 2014, when the scars left by the war were still not healed. The other eight were published during the high period of the war: Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies* (1997), Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994), *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998), & *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* (2005), Lokugé's *If the Moon Smiled* (2000), Gunesekera's *The Match* (2007), Ganeshanathan's *Love Marriage* (2008) and Mary Anne Mohanraj's *Bodies in Motion* (2005). However, the internal time of all the novels do not necessarily correspond to the span of the civil war.

One of the reasons for selecting such an assortment of novels was the writers' different locations, for 'location needs to be considered because material conditions make a difference in a writer's output' (Jayasuriya 2012: 99): Sivanandan and Gunesekera are currently in the United Kingdom, Ondaatje, Selvadurai and Ganeshanathan are located in Canada, Lokugé teaches at a university in Australia while Mohanraj is from the United States. Of these writers, Gunesekera moved from his first expatriate home in the Philippines to Britain in 1971 and lives there since then. None of them are strictly diasporic writers, if one goes by the technical definition of the term; for all of them have regular connection with their original homeland, and they often return to it. All of them have experienced the impact of the war on their personal lives in one way or the other, and their location in comparatively more cosmopolitan, transnational spaces, has allowed them to take unbiased positions in their delineation of the war and its far-reaching repercussions within the personal space of the family. In other words, these ten novels, product of the same political and cultural milieu, when read together provide a holistic perspective on the changing nature of the family, ideas of masculinity and femininity challenged or reinforced by the war, predicament of queer citizen subjects within shrinking democratic spaces of the nation-state, and the changing social environment with which older citizens are forced to deal with. Many of these novels – such as, *Running in the Family*, *When Memory Dies*, *Funny Boy*, *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*, *The Hungry Ghosts*, *The Match* and *Love Marriage* – are partly autobiographical, translating personal experiences of history to fiction, soaking dry historical facts with lived emotions of the same.

Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*, for instance, is largely influenced by the author's own experience of displacement following the 1956 riots; the novel's meticulous delineation of the transformation of the village of Sandilipay and the gradual descent of Jaffna into an aggressively militant region demanding a separate homeland involves the writer's deep

personal involvement with leftist ideologies and his abiding concern with racism and politics of class. Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* was born out of the traumatic experience of Black July which scattered and displaced his family initially located in Colombo: '...Sinhalese mobs had started a campaign of destruction. They were armed with electoral lists that allowed them to isolate Tamil homes, which they burnt, often murdering the families within...Many Tamils fled to the North, but other, like us, left for Western countries' (2014: xxi). Ondaatje's fictionalised memoir, *Running in the Family* was a product of his two visits to Sri Lanka in the late 1970s, in search of stories about his own family, delightfully hybrid in nature. This novel by recalling a colonial past, partly true to history, partly fictionalised, reveals the diversity and mixed genealogies of families; a gradual marginalisation of these diverse and mixed lives, sometimes radical and non-conforming, has led to homogenous nationalisms that had devastating effects on the island which were difficult to cure. Mary Anne Mohanraj recalls how her family's return to Sri Lanka never happened because of the civil war; in 1983, when her parents were preparing to send her to Sri Lanka to reconnect with her roots, news of the war arrived, thwarting the plan –

It's called Black July in Sri Lanka. Riots erupted in Colombo, the capital city, killing thousands of Tamils, the ethnic minority group, the group to which I belong. Brutal chaos ensued – friends of mine who were there tell horrifying stories. They saw tires put around men's necks, saw them lit on fire. They saw women and children dragged from their homes, pulled from cars to be raped and killed in the street.

I saw none of this, but the stories haunt my fiction. (Sclazi 2013)

Ganeshananthan tells Suketu Mehta in an interview following the publication of *Love Marriage*: 'I can't think of many Sri Lankan families the war has not affected. Sure, the war has affected my family. My father in particular comes from Jaffna, and Jaffna has of course been incredibly affected by the war.' And then she adds, 'They pick up and go when they have to', referring to sudden and frequent evacuation of entire neighbourhoods in Jaffna. (Mehta 2008: 303-304).

The Sinhalese Christian writer Romesh Gunsekera's *The Match* was created out of his penchant to make sense of the violence his homeland has been subject to for decades: 'One

reason the stories have tended to go back to that setting is my desire to understand violence. It could as easily be Nazi Germany or Rwanda, but Sri Lanka is the one' (Jaggi 2007).

Interestingly, all English novels produced after 1983 have the ethnic conflict as an important element of the plot. Aimed at producing the naked truth about human suffering caused by the war, these novels could not but locate their narratives within families, several of which were scattered, destroyed or displaced forever, with no hope of returning to their original locales. My reading of the ten novels mentioned above in this thesis, along with several others which I could not include, revealed to me certain similarities not only in terms of their condemnation of the war, but also, in their representation of human relationships, conditioned by notions of masculinity, femininity and queerness. I believe, apart from differences in style, narrative technique or other technical experiments these novels exhibit, the discourses these novels produce and are products of are more or less similar. Yet, it would be reductive to read these novels with the post-structuralist assumption that these can be satisfactorily appreciated by laying claims only to the ideologies of the times in which they are produced. Rather, in my selection of the novels, I have taken into account the author's emotional investment in the texts. Since my thesis is concerned with the understanding of human relations within the complex matrix of gender and sexuality discourses, I have deliberately chosen two writers, namely, Shyam Selvadurai and Mary Anne Mohanraj, who are unambiguously open about their queer-feminist politics. In an interview with me, Selvadurai, reflecting on the lack of identity-defining terms such as 'gay' or 'queer' in *Funny Boy* and *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* says:

[A]s gay people we often have the feeling before we can associate it with a term whether negative or positive. This was certainly so for the time before the internet when material and understanding of being gay was not widely available as it is now, not just through the net but also films, popular TV shows like Glee etc. My characters live in that time and I wanted to reflect their reality. Also *by placing the feeling before naming it, I wanted to convey clearly that gayness was natural to the protagonists, an innate part of them*, rather than some fad, addiction etc that they took on after being corrupted by the West or western influences. (Selvadurai 2014c; emphasis added)

Lived experience of homosexuality within a predominantly homophobic nation-state, and feelings of alienation within queer circles in the diaspora, on the account of skin colour or

body type, automatically bring to Selvadurai's fiction a radicalism, which is certainly difficult to sympathise with by those who have developed positive attitude towards queer lives on humanitarian grounds or under the compulsion of observing political correctness. The fact that he thinks it is important to 'place the feeling before naming it' brings to his delineation of queer lives a deep emotional involvement which is not possible to approximate by a non-queer writer. Similarly, I was struck by the iconoclasm of Mohanraj's text in which she represents both queer and heterosexual female sexualities with such frankness, that she almost effortlessly deconstructs the foundation of apparently happy families based on heterosexual monogamous relationships. In an interview, Mohanraj says:

I have always been a bit of a sexuality activist. We need to accept that healthy sexuality is an important part of our world and we need to stop hiding it away like some dirty thing. This is reflected in my writing. For me it is important to imagine characters in their sexual element, because how people are in their bedroom is very different from their everyday life. (Mohanraj 2005)

The erotic dimension of *Bodies in Motion* invites close scrutiny for within familial spaces sex is often shoved into the closet as taboo. Especially, women are imagined as asexual, without desire, as evident from how women have always been imagined within nationalist discourses on the home and the world. Mohanraj attributes to her women, heterosexual or homosexual, a tremendous sexual agency which in effect debunks a lot of patriarchal assumptions about women, most importantly the overemphasis on preserving the purity of the body. The same feminist drive, albeit less radical, is seen in Chandani Lokugé's *If the Moon Smiled*; it initially intrigued me for her representation of the wedding night of Manthri and Mahendra. The fact that Manthri has lost her virginity before marriage and does not hide her pleasure during sexual intercourse, end up turning this marriage into a lifelong imprisonment for her. In the process, Lokugé raises intriguing questions about masculinity, as she subtly questions men's obsession with the premarital purity of the female body. In fact, the inescapability of heteropatriarchy becomes all the more apparent in V.V. Ganeshanathan's *Love Marriage* delineating the history of a Tamil Sri Lankan family. She raises questions about the hyper-masculinist obsession with the quest for Tamil Eelam by pitting one kind of masculinity against another – a sober, emotionally vulnerable, peace-loving father against an aggressively militant uncle critical of the former's unmasculine frailties. Ganeshanathan's feminist insight into construction of gender, in my reading, uncovers the family's repressive

mechanisms, and in turn, the futility of an endless battle in demand of a separate homeland. The queer-feminist and feminist politics of these novels have been for me the standard template with respect to which I have read the novels of Ondaatje, Sivanandan and Gunesequera. I was not surprised to find in their novels a greater comfort with family structures, dominated by the patriarch. Despite their critique of aggressive nationalisms, there is a relatively greater snugness in their delineation of gender relations. This is not to suggest that these writers extol hetero-patriarchy; they do not. Only that they are a little distant from the iconoclasm of Selvadurai or Mohanraj. Alternative familial spaces disrupting hegemonic homes built on classist and heteronormative ideals emerge powerfully in the novels of the latter.

The canon of Sri Lankan English novels – local as well as expatriate – is still in the making, and newer texts are entering the canon every day. However, the gate-keeping in case of entry to the canon is no longer as rigorous as it used to be, and I believe, every new research makes a strong case for the entry of some more new texts into the canon. This thesis deals with texts which have already found access to the canon, and also with those which have not. In my opinion, one of the primary reasons of a text's guaranteed place within the canon depends significantly on its effortless availability and unimpeded circulation. Many Sri Lankan English novels, for example, Channa Wickremesekera's *Walls: A Novel about a Sri Lanka Family in Australia*, to name just one, are not easily accessible. Two other novels, A. Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies* and Mary Anne Mohanraj's *Bodies in Motion*, which I procured from the west, are not usually spotted in South Asian bookstores. Although online bookstores have made many rare titles available in recent times, Sri Lankan novels are still not very easy to procure. Locally published novels are even harder to find.

Some of the authors I have selected—Ondaatje, Selvadurai, and Gunesequera – have a greater visibility on the bookshelves compared to Mohanraj or Ganeshanathan. Critics have written widely about the novels of the first three, while the latter two have received comparatively scant critical attention. However, in case of Selvadurai, it is only his first novel *Funny Boy* which has been prolifically commented upon and the novel subsequently emerged as a contemporary queer classic, now included in university curriculums. The writer's other three novels which further problematise questions of negotiating one's queerness with one's heteronormative family, have not yet fetched much critical interest. Mohanraj's novels have not been treated with the kind of critical earnestness they demand; my conjecture is because

of the novels' forthrightness about female sexuality and engagement with erotica, they have not been considered serious enough to be written about. Sivanandan's novel has been a favourite literary example to fall back on among leftist commentators on ethnicity, the LTTE, and class politics leading to the war, for *When Memory Dies* evinces a painstaking historiography of the civil war. But, the novel's gender politics within the family (apart from the recognition that women have been unfairly marginalised within the narrative²) has not been understood as an important element of constructing this historiography. The same is true of Ganeshanathan's extremely nuanced unravelling of a family saga in *Love Marriage*: the writer's diasporic anxieties of subscribing or not subscribing to the ethnonationalist ideologies of the Tamil community have been the primary focus in the little critical attention the novel has received so far. What has not been reflected upon is the novel's relentless questioning of the repressive structures of the family, as it goes on pulling out from obscurity hidden stories about those who have refused to conform to the family's ideals of what constitutes a normative life. Chandani Lokugé's critics have commented upon what is overtly evident in *If the Moon Smiled* – the woman as a diasporic category in her eternal homelessness, and the baggage of the cultural repository she is compelled to symbolically bear upon herself within expatriate homes. But, what is more intriguing about this novel is its production and critique of masculinities – the irrelevance of traditional notions of masculinities derived from nationalist discourses within transnational spaces, within which other forms of masculinities emerge debunking older models. This, in turn, impacts father-son or father-daughter relationships, bringing about the necessity to re-imagine the family. While the works of both Ondaatje and Gunesekera have been frequently written about, gendered assessment of their novels is practically non-existent. Especially, the two novels – *Running in the Family* and *The Match* – I have looked at have not been even remotely considered as advancing critiques of conventional masculinity and femininity.

In addition, these novels in their capacity as family sagas often have intergenerational conflicts at the centre of their plots. These conflicts challenge the compulsion to revere age, in the process undoing the family's hegemonic discourses often endorsed by ageing members; apart from questioning the power that comes with ageing by default, the novels, in the dramatisation of the relationship between youth and old age, often advocates the necessity of meaningful dialogue between the past and the present, in order to make sense of what went

² See Ismail, 2005 Salgado, 2007, Jayasuriya, 2012.

wrong, without privileging the belief that wisdom comes with age; for, the cosmopolitan, non-conforming worldviews of the younger generation often attribute to them a wisdom unavailable to an older generation confined to more closed places and interpellated in purist ideas about nation, nationalism, gender relations and family. No secondary material available on the novels under scrutiny focuses on this aspect of filial relationship. The canonicity of texts is further reinforced every time they are revisited from different critical perspectives; in this sense, this thesis also contributes to the process of canonisation of Sri Lankan expatriate novels.

It is practically impossible for researchers to bring within their critical purview all novels produced within a certain period of time; and the period I have chosen is particularly a prolific period in Sri Lanka in terms of novel writing, both in the vernaculars as well as English. So, a large number of novels have been automatically left out. As new historicists, such as Stephen Greenblatt, would have us believe:

...after a thousand, there would be another thousand, then another, and it is not at all clear that we would be closer to the understanding we seek. So from the thousands, we seize upon a handful of arresting figures who seem to contain within themselves much of what we need, who both reward intense, individual attention and promise access to larger cultural patterns. (1980:6)

Although the usefulness of this theory of selection has been recognised by many, the rejection of texts should be done with the consciousness that every text *may not* conveniently fit into the hypothesis of the research question raised by the investigator – for, the hypothesis, in the first place, should not be founded on *a priori* conclusions. In fact, my reading of the ten novels revealed to me the impossibility to arriving at a single conclusion about the families represented in the novels selected. I realised that what one can at the most hope to achieve is significantly contributing to the critical discourses around Sri Lankan English writings already in existence. Inclusion of ten novels other than the ones talked about may not make a remarkable difference to the new contribution that is being made. But, certainly, those other ten novels, because they are not passive recipients of and subscribers to existing ideologies of the times in which they are produced, might open up other sites of resistance, other nuances of the same history, which are textualised within the narratives.

Analytical frameworks

In this thesis I take a multidisciplinary approach in close textual readings of English novels produced within contemporary Sri Lankan expatriate communities. The methodology used is akin to what Judith (Jack) Halberstam terms, 'queer methodology', which s/he defines as a scavenger methodology that deploys a variety of processes and knowledge systems to accumulate and generate information on subjects who are kept out of traditional studies of human behaviour (see Halberstam 1998: 19). I would tweak this slightly and say that I use several knowledge systems not only to delineate the marginal lives of queer citizen subjects within the family, but also to provide a different perspective from which traditional, normative subjects (such as, fathers, mothers, grandparents) and interpersonal relationships within the family are viewed. This analysis draws heavily from sociology, anthropology, history and cultural studies in its attempt to make sense of the production of the novels and the people in them in question. However, one must be wary of the risk of reducing these novels to evidences of history; but, this could be minimised by the very fact that all these novels belong to the present – to the very *presentness* of terrorist activities plaguing the world, redefining of national boundaries, unprecedented mobility across the globe, emergence of queer politics, reinforcement of and rebellion against traditional gender roles, the global concerns about ageing populations and ageism studies, and so on and so forth. History, society, and literature are overlapping, interpenetrating entities, as Said (1983) brilliantly articulates in the following oft-quoted extract:

Texts are worldly, to some extent they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted. (4).

But in this case, the moment of production of the novels and the moment of interpretation more or less coincide with each other. However, the spectres of the past continue to haunt the present, and the cross-currents of anthropological, sociological and historical discourses which inform the interpretative model adopted here, help make sense of the *arrival* of the present within which these novels are produced.

The overarching analytical framework is informed by Foucault's concepts of power, especially how power operates within apparently affective spaces. It is best understood through the ideas of governmentality and biopower both embodied within the technologies of the state of which the family is an important component. Power structures are mostly hidden

and power is not necessarily implemented through repressive tactics; rather, it is more effectively implemented through a “multiplicity of discursive elements” (Foucault, 1984, p. 100) disseminated through various nodal points within society, which has an essentially rhizomic structure. One way in which power functions is through ‘internalisation of regulation’ engendered by the development of worldviews based on certain accepted truths that come to be regarded as ‘common sense’, and, therefore, unfringeable (See Foster 2011). These internalised discourses *govern* one’s understanding of right and wrong. Biopower, a technique of governmentality, is especially embodied within heteronormative ideals of family and gender roles. It manifests itself most conspicuously in the repressive ways in which the body and sexuality are controlled so as not to upset the machinery of capitalist economies. This basic model of power relations is deployed in making sense of masculinity, femininity, queerness and the ageing body within the network of affective relationships. I have taken a predominantly queer-feminist approach to make sense of the organisation of power relations within the family, much of which is informed by this Foucauldian model for understanding power and disciplinary mechanisms. This queer-feminist standpoint also takes into cognisance the abiding postcolonial anxieties of being co-opted by the Euro-American discourses of feminist and queer politics at the expense and risk of overlooking local histories.

The disruptive power of ‘queer’ is succinctly articulated in a tweet by the iconic Colin Self, ‘a trans-disciplinary, post-riot *grrl* diva’: ‘If you are not queer, you are not paying attention’ (Duncan 2014). This is precisely the basic tenet of queer theory that shook the foundation of both feminist and gay and lesbian studies, changing their identity-based politics forever. It is not without reason that Sri Lankan activists prefer to replace ‘queer’ with ‘questioning’³ in the ever-expanding acronym LGBTQ. For, being queer is not about being gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender; it is not simply an umbrella term for the entire spectrum of sexualities that exist between two apparently opposite extremes of ‘heterosexuality’ and ‘homosexuality’; rather, being queer implies a political position that relentlessly questions any form of normativity. The necessity of the term ‘queer’ was felt to debunk the ‘supposedly stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender and sexual desire’ (Corber and Valocchi 2003: 1). But, ‘queer’ has a broader implication than that – queer politics constantly challenge and subvert dominant ideologies, predominant among these being discourses of

³See the ‘About Us’ page of Equal Ground, a non-profit Sri Lankan organization fighting to obtain human and political rights for the LGBTIQ community: <<http://www.equal-ground.org/newweb/aboutUs.php>>.

heteronormativity. In this thesis, the suspicion towards the family which underlies the primary argument is queer in import, for it starts by refusing to abide by the dominant notion of the family as an affective structure founded on emotions.

Queer theory pioneered by Judith Butler, Michael Warner, David Halperin, Teresa de Lauretis, Eve K Sedgwick, while resisting all forms of normativity,

...rejected the Renaissance notion of the subject [being] fixed, unifying and self-determining ... [and] argued that this notion ... was an ideological fiction that worked to conceal, and thereby perpetuate, modern relations of power. (Corber and Valocchi 2003: 3)

Queer theorists were highly influenced by the works of Althusser, Foucault, Derrida and Lacan, and particularly, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; second edition, 1999) opened up a completely new horizon for gender and sexuality studies. This book, shunning identity politics in favour of a new coalitional feminism based on the belief that not just gender, sex is also constructed, facilitated the convergence of women's studies and gay and lesbian studies under the broader rubric of queer studies. Butler's anti-essentialist approach to gender and sexuality decried the existence of any original form from which gender and sexual identities draw from. Rather, she emphasised on the repetitive performativity of certain cultural signs and conventions through which the subject comes into being, whereby she deconstructed feminist and gay and lesbian studies' humanist project based on the idea of a pre-existing 'true' self. Butler's *Gender Trouble* infinitely broadened the idea of non-normative sexualities by making way for transvestism, transsexuality and even sadomasochism to enter the field of sexuality studies. More importantly, by organising her argument of performativity around questions of power, discourse, body and affectivity which should be understood in their historical specificity, Butler inaugurating post-structuralist queer theory made of it an extremely useful tool to make sense of masculinities and ageing, among other things. This is precisely why the queer theoretical paradigm comes in handy in understanding the organisation of power and affect within the apparently 'sanctified' space of the family.

Interestingly, *Gender Trouble*, albeit resistance from many quarters, remarkably changed the identity based politics of feminist movements of the 1970s, bringing the latter closer to the

LGBTQ movement. Even before Butler, Gayle Rubin (1984) advanced a strong argument against the feminist belief that sexuality was the site at which women's subordination was consolidated. Challenging the anti-pornography campaign by Catherine McKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, Gayle proposed that feminism could not successfully elucidate how sexuality operates as a system of social stratification distinct from gender. Gayle turned attention to this hierarchical organisation of sexual practices, arguing that this hierarchy is not fixed but dynamic, changing with the times. In her hierarchy, married heterosexuals having sex with the purpose of procreating are at the top, monogamous or polyamorous gays and lesbians are in the middle, and those (heterosexual or homosexual) who are engaged in commercial sex or sadomasochism are further down the rung, not accepted by any society. Sometimes, within certain societies, one of these categories might rise up to acceptance (for example the legitimisation of same-sex marriage in some countries). But, what is more foundational to Rubin's argument is that these sexual hierarchies, based on social acceptance, often marginalise the heterosexual white male, if he is known to be engaged in any of the sexual practices of the lowest rung. This brought within the field of gender and sexuality studies the heterosexual white male so far neglected by feminist movement on the assumption of his having absolute power.

In this sense, Rubin laid the foundational stone of queer studies, and it is, therefore, not surprising that the 1980s saw the emergence of masculinity studies across the globe. Another book, published three years earlier than Rubin's, also deserves mention in this context: Joseph Pleck's *The Myth of Masculinity* (1981) that inaugurated a critical discourse on normative organization of male sex role. It was not until the mid 1980s that hegemonic definition of masculinity was vociferously called into question by men whose masculinities were perceived as deviant from the hegemonic model: black men, gay men, physically disabled men, men belonging to former colonies, etc. Even heterosexual white men who did not conform to normative sexualities were also embraced by this new branch of sexuality studies. It was time to talk about *masculinities*, as opposed to a singular, monolithic, homogenous masculinity. The 1980s saw the publication of a whole range of books on masculinities: Harry Brod's *The Making of Masculinities* (1987), Michael Kimmel's *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity* (1987), Tim Carrigan, R.W. Connell, and John Lee's "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity" (1985), R. W. Connell's *Gender and Power* (1987) and Jeff Hearn's *The Gender of Oppression* (1987). Therefore, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* which pushed the sexuality envelope to a

completely unforeseen new limit was produced in a fertile theoretical force field which was vehemently challenging the essentialist nature of feminist and gay and lesbian studies. Butler's book created ripples by suggesting, as opposed to even Rubin, that 'sex is not gender's biological foundation, but one of its most powerful effects. The category of sex works to naturalize the binary organization of gender by functioning as the seemingly neutral referent of gendered identity' (Corber and Valocchi 2003: 8).

Butler's argument propelled the queer movement towards identifying variant sexual experiences and desires that could not be accommodated within the categories of gay or lesbian or bisexual. Lesbianism, for instance, as Judith Halberstam (1998) argued may include a wide range of heterogeneous desires and mindsets. By focusing on the manners in which lesbian women feel and demonstrate their masculinities, Halberstam reinforced the necessity of marrying feminist projects with the queer movement. Consequently, the category of queer traversed across and transfigured other disciplines, one of them being gerontological researches centring on ageing, sexualities and the body. The ageing subject, depending upon their gender, is also often coerced into performing ageing in certain normative ways; one significant parameter of this performativity is the rejection of sexual desire, which is even more pressing within South Asian cultures such as Sri Lanka where Buddhist and Hindu theological texts associate ageing with renunciation of material desires. The works of Gott and Hinchcliff (2003) and Lynne Segal (2013) contest the moral registers which the ageing subject is often expected to adhere to, by repeating certain forms of behaviour considered appropriate. What post-structuralist queer feminist theory achieved in its challenging of all dominant ideologies and different forms of institutional regulation (among which the family occupies a high stratum) through foregrounding peripheral variants of sexualities, such as intersexuality and transsexuality, among other variants, is concisely summarised by Corber and Valocchi:

The institutional regulation of these forms of identity...suggests that on some level the dominant society recognises that there is no natural or biological relationship between sex, gender and sexuality and it must vigorously enforce the belief that there is. (2003: 9)

This is best manifested in regulation of non-normative sexualities by implementation of penal codes, such as 365A of the Sri Lankan Penal Code, or instilling the fear of falling from grace,

into the minds of women who fiercely protect their chastity, at the expense of foregoing bodily desires. The construction of the Virgin Warrior within LTTE discourses is a case in point.

However, as both queer and feminist theorists from the former colonies point out, that one must be wary of appropriating Euro-American theories to their own postcolonial situations. While drawing from the overarching framework of such theories and the political loci queer and feminist movements traversed in the west, the former colonies of South Asia must intervene these models with their own histories. In the 1980s itself, feminists of colour vociferously dissociated themselves from Euro-American feminist discourses, refusing to be re-colonised by them. Participating in an international conference in Mainz in 1981, Kirsten Holst Peterson (1984) challenged the concept of universal sisterhood, pointing out the necessity to isolate women's issues which were specific to Africa or the Third World in general. In 1989, Ketu H Katrak called for a decolonisation of postcolonial theory, emphasising on returning to local traditions and oral histories and on the abrogation and transmutation of the English language in order to develop a discourse distinct from its western counterpart. Similarly, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) critiqued western feminism's proclivity of erasing local histories and subsuming a wide range of women's experiences of patriarchal oppression into a single model. Sara Suleri (1992) took the debate further warning against the formation of simplistic dichotomies within feminist discourses by collapsing feminist struggles on to the question of racial identities. The works of Sri Lankan feminists, such as Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis, again underline the supreme importance of class, caste and ethnicity in making sense of position of women within Tamil or Sinhalese communities. In other words, the identity-based politics which post-structuralist queer feminist discourses decried was increasingly found indispensable within postcolonial societies.

Queer interventions of postcolonial theory following the rhetoric of third world feminism found articulation in several articles, a seminal anthology of such articles being John C Hawley's edited volume *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections* published in 2001. Shivananda Khan's 'Culture, Sexualities, and Identities: Men Who Have Sex with Men in India' published in the *Journal of Homosexuality* in the same year raised the alarm that South Asian LGBTQ movement has been co-opted by Euro-American discourses of sexualities, resulting in a gross neglect of local histories. Two other volumes, both from India, namely,

Because I Have a Voice: Queer Politics in India edited by G. Bhan and A. Narrain (2005) and *The Phobic and the Erotic: The Politics of Sexualities in Contemporary India* edited by Brinda Bose and Subhabrata Bhattacharya (2007) introduced debates about recognising the cultural specificities of sexual histories and of the importance of critiquing the neoliberal metropolitan ‘gay’ colonisation of the LGBTQ movement, at the expense of marginalising underprivileged sexual minorities with no access to the global libretto of identity politics. A recent anthology, *Decolonising Sexualities: Transnational Perspectives, Critical Interventions* (2016) including articles by diverse writers of colour from various geopolitical locations, seeks to make sense of queer forms of being that cannot be explained by western knowledge system of the queer:

An examination of the impact of the erasure of diverse ways of being becomes crucial in queer contexts, since the west is construed as the progressive champion of queer subcultures globally. Cultural racism within queer circuits functions in tandem with the cultural imaginary of the Global South as a necessary homophobic site and produces hegemonic codes of coloniality that garner support for neo-colonial and neo-imperial ventures by positing the Global North as the sole guarantor of human rights for all peoples including women and queer subjects... Decolonial queerness is therefore gradually being placed at the centre of scholarly critique of western conceptions of sexuality. (Bakshi, Jivraj and Posocco 2016: 2)

Race and class are the two coordinates along which postcolonial queer theorists advance their arguments – while one group finds Euro-American queer theory counter-nationalist and elitist, another protests against the universalisation of queer terminologies incapable of addressing local sexual experiences of challenging the normative. For instance, the Sri Lankan local term *ponnaya* could not possibly be translated into ‘gay’, for the latter term cannot accommodate within it the specific cultural meanings contained within the former. The necessity of decolonising queer studies is aimed at dismantling the ‘singular force of such coloniality that follows from western colonial encounters regulates the inegalitarian worlds that we inhabit through a mono-epistemic organization around the modern west and its capitalist/heteropatriarchal/Christianized productions’ (Bakshi, Jivraj and Posocco 2016: 1)

William J Spurlin (2001), for example, complicates the issue even further by pointing out a terrible downside to adopting Euro-American discourses of queer liberation – ‘By remaining otherwise narrowly Eurocentric in perspective, the discipline helps to underwrite nationalist strategies at work in many colonial and postcolonial contexts that read homosexuality as foreign to non-Western societies’ (186). In this connection, a book such as Robert Aldrich’s *Cultural Encounters and Homoeroticism in Sri Lanka: Sex and Serendipity* published in 2014 becomes helpful in establishing homosexuality as integral to Sri Lanka’s sexual history. Local NGOs, such as Companions on a Journey and Equal Grounds, while betraying their debt to Euro-American discourses of queerness, also make an attempt to dissociate from their hegemonic influences. Spurlin’s observation in particular applies perfectly to the Sri Lankan situation: both feminist and queer activists even today are routinely projected as anti-nationalists by the press and religious bigots, for obtaining funds from foreign agencies to keep their sexual debauchery afloat (See de Alwis 1998b). The fact that these movements are sponsored by foreign agencies makes them vehicles of neo-colonialism.

In my analysis of the organisation of power, affect and sexualities within Sri Lankan families, I have drawn theoretical frameworks from both global and local discourses. The writers, all expatriates and closely associated with world literature and politics, bring into their works a convergence of the global and the local – local histories are retold with the consciousness of how those are perceived globally. The Sri Lankan women’s movement, for example, is extremely difficult to understand without the knowledge of the local obstacles to it, and the specific historical contexts of consecration of women as repository of cultures within ethnonationalist discourses. The construction of Sri Lankan masculinities has run parallel to Sri Lankan femininities – one is *not* separate from the other. Both men and women are routinely interpellated within discourses of what Gananath Obeyesekere (1984) calls *lajjabaya* (*lajja* meaning ‘shame’, and *baya* meaning ‘fear’ and also ‘fear of being shamed’), central to the socialisation of Sinhalese children. It is difficult to assess the manners in which hegemonic masculinities operate within familial spaces without probing into the social histories of the very idea of hegemonic masculinities undergoing a remarkable transfiguration in the wake of the ethnic strife: Jani de Silva (2009 and 2014) through ethnographic researches shows how this transfiguration has taken place – how hegemonic masculinity defined by ‘bodily dignity’ and a ‘sedateness of bearing’, as against bodily aggression or perpetrating violence, within both Sinhalese and Tamil communities, has approximated the latter model with the rise of aggressive nationalisms and the degeneration of Sri Lanka into a

militant state. Pradeep Jeganathan's 'A Space for Violence: Anthropology, Politics and the Location of a Sinhala Practice of Masculinity' (2000), delves into the social conditions that make space for certain forms of aggressive masculinity to originate and thrive. Similarly, Sri Lankan ideas of ideal femininity constructed over a long period of time with an emphasis on chastity, beauty and observance of decorum, when affronted by the feminist movement's demand for women's rights, led to the perpetration of state violence on protestors. When in the 1980s the state eventually relented to recognise women's demands for equal rights, it was co-opted by the state in such a manner that it totally robbed the movement of its radicalism. The works of Kumari Jayawardena, Malathi de Alwis, Radhika Coomaraswamy, Neluka Silva, Helen Goonatilake, Sitralega Mauneguru, and Neloufer De Mel, among others are absolutely essential in order to make sense of women's oppression within the family and the resistance they encounter in refusing to conform. Although the rhetoric of women's movement has been borrowed from the West, it has developed its own lingo over a period of time; western feminist movements could not possibly provide meaningful templates to counter peculiar oppressive structures at home. Although no Sri Lankan queer theorist has so far emerged, the newsletters and other publications of the NGOs, such as Companions on a Journey and Equal Grounds, reveal the difficulty of coming out in apprehension of social rejection by both friends and family. However, as mentioned earlier, Robert Aldrich's *Cultural Encounters and Homoeroticism in Sri Lanka: Sex and Serendipity* provides an interesting historiography of homosexuality on the island – distinct from other South Asian countries. The trajectory of Sri Lanka's women's and LGBTQ movement when closely analysed reveals much about the organisation of power and sexualities within the Sri Lankan family. The models for understanding ageing and ageism are also drawn from these local discourses of masculinity and feminist and queer resistance to hegemonic ideologies, while taking cognisance of the primary arguments in gerontological researches across the globe.

Review of secondary literature on Sri Lankan expatriate novels in English

My understanding of the internal spaces of the Sri Lankan family has been to a great extent formed by memoirs such as Yasmine Goonetratne's *Relative Merits* (1986), Jean Arasanayagam's *A Nice Burgher Girl* (2006), Bevis Bawa's *Brief* (2011), Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (which I have included in my thesis for its peculiar generic fluidity of being a novel and a memoir at the same time), and the very personal introduction which

Shyam Selvadurai wrote to his recent anthology *Many Roads through Paradise* (2014). These personal narratives have been extremely helpful in shaping my vision of the postcolonial/transnational Sri Lankan bourgeois families the novels which I have examined are set in. In this sense, these books have served as secondary sources to my thesis. The volume of writings on Sri Lankan expatriate novels in English is still quite thin, even though expatriate literatures have emerged in a significant way in the past three decades. I shall name a few anthologies and monographs which have been instrumental in helping me shape the research questions I raise in this thesis.

As mentioned earlier, a book that occupies an important place in the recent history of Sri Lankan literary criticism is Qadri Ismail's *Abiding by Sri Lanka: On Peace, Place and Postcoloniality* (2005). The title of Ismail's book became a catchphrase in the arena of literary criticism, and its leftist perspective is one which has been 'abided by', by several other critics of Sri Lankan literature. 'Abiding by' connotes a strong-willed persistence in speaking to, intervening in, and negotiating politics through one's work, while not misinterpreting the theoretical as political. One of Ismail's primary arguments, which many other critics took up later, is the fact that good literature has the capacity to interrogate social science, particularly anthropological and historical scholarship, that has framed Sri Lanka's ethnonationalist conflict naively in terms of animosities between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority. His deconstructive readings of two well-known histories, K.M. de Silva's *Reaping the Whirlwind* (1998) and A.J. Wilson's *Break up of Sri Lanka* (1988), reveal that they conceptualize lack of peace in Sri Lanka as a problem of positivist history, not of politics itself. This is a major flaw. His detailed readings of two literary texts, A. Sivandan's *When Memory Dies* (1997) and E. Macintyre's play Rasanayagam's *Last Riot* (1993), seek to make amends for the flaws in history: these literary texts, by locating history in the realm of fiction, underline the necessity of dialogic re-theorisations of democracy in Sri Lanka that could restore muted voices and identities from oblivion. Ismail's book has been highly influential in changing the rhetoric of literary criticism in Sri Lanka. My thesis too, in its emphasis on deconstructing family narratives in fiction, has as its starting point this belief that personal histories, imaginary, non-empiricist and unverifiable, have the immense potential of unveiling mechanisms of power politics within the nation-state.

One of Ismail's reviewers, Premakumara De Silva, in a detailed review (2007) of the book in *The Island* writes:

For Ismail the “task is intellectual, not activist: interventionary, not interpretive” and it cannot be done through empiricism (anthropology/history) but through “postempiricism” (literature). In this sense, postcoloniality, whose contemporary state remains authorised by empiricism, must become postempiricist in term of re-evaluating its own relation to and reliance on history. The future of postcoloniality, as he proposes, would have to be the future of postempiricism. In other words, what Ismail demands from us is to understand Sri Lanka non-empirically or more precisely understand it as a “text”. (n.pag)

He moves on to contradict Ismail a bit, in suggesting: ‘In my view, Sri Lanka should be understood not just as text but as a textual as well as empirical problem, a problem for liberal democracy itself. Can such thinking produce ‘a lasting peace’, in any sense, in a country like Sri Lanka?’ (n.pag). The book concerned with understanding peace and conflict abiding by a place, he agrees, has opened up a new way of looking at literary texts produced within the country. The claim which Ismail makes might seem a little too lofty, but, the book has played a significant role in inspiring researchers, like myself, to engage more politically with literature produced by the islanders.

Minoli Salgado’s *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place* (2007) is another significant contribution to the evaluation of recent literary trends in Sri Lanka. The book focusing on eight Sri Lankan writers, Michael Ondaatje, RomeshGunsekera, ShyamSelvadurai, A. Sivanandan, Jean Arasanayagam, Carl Muller, James Goonewardene and PunyakanteWijenaikē, develops an intricate theoretical framework, while raising questions about these writers’ engagement with the discourses of territoriality and boundaries. Salgado also traces a history of Sri Lankan English novels, both local and expatriate, as she pits ‘insider’ against ‘outsider’, ‘resident’ against ‘migrant’ and the ‘authentic’ against the ‘alien’. Investing her assessment of literary texts with her own subjectivity as a second generation expatriate Sri Lankan, Salgado through detailed textual analyses, brings out the role Sri Lankan writers have played in challenging the official versions of history. She maps out the trajectory literary criticism should traverse in order to make sense of the emergence of Sri Lankan writings:

[H]ow do literary critics – both inside and outside the country – successfully mediate textual products generated from a context that is not only provisional and unstable but itself subject to the contestatory dynamics of competing nationalisms? Of course all history is provisional and contingent and all contexts inherently unstable, constituted as they are through discourse. But the problem of negotiating the relationship between history (as factual event), historiography (or the discursive construction of the past) and literary writing is especially pertinent to the critic of Sri Lankan writing in English, for here we have an emergent literature whose very terms of affiliation are being subject to contestation at the very moment of evolution. (2)

Like most literary critics writing on Sri Lanka, Salgado also offers to deconstruct the hegemony of Sinhalese nationalism in her reading of the paradigms of territoriality and boundary marking in the texts under her scrutiny:

Sinhala nationalism, in particular, has operated on the understanding of spatio-temporal continuity, of granting a timeless continuum to Sinhala presence and ownership of the land. By emphasising the territorial implications both within the texts and critical contexts of reception and production, I intend to rupture the assumptions underpinning this continuity – to reveal the fissures in belonging and identify some of the sites of contention and belonging. (3)

No responsible critic cannot but have as her starting point the suspicion towards the constructedness of a Sinhalese history that claims an exclusive ownership of the island. As mentioned earlier, this is also where my thesis takes off, analogically – the importance of challenging purist familial genealogies. However, I also move a little further in critiquing the emergence of an aggressive Tamil nationalism which also replicated to some extent purist, homogenous ideas of the nation adopted by the Sinhalese majority.

The 2012 special issue of *South Asian Review* (33:3) on Sri Lankan Anglophone Literature guest-edited by Maryse Jayasuria and Aparna Halpé is another important collection of recent writings. This volume featuring such pioneering critics of Sri Lankan literatures such as Walter Perera, Chelva Kanaganayakam, Chandani Lokugé, Minoli Salgado and Neluka Silva, also featured younger writers such as myself. My article ‘The Queer “Outsider”’: Family and

Sexuality in ShyamSelvadurai's *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*" written under the guidance of Perera, Halpé and Jayasuriya, is the first full-length critical study of Selvadurai's third queer novel. Some of the material used in this article has been reproduced in this thesis but in more details. I would like to mention a few articles in this issue of the journal which I found particularly helpful in shaping my argument. Balasubramanian's 'History as a "Well-told Lie" in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*', Salgado's 'Rebirth of a Nation or the Incomparable Toothbrush: The Origin Story and Narrative Regeneration in Sri Lanka', Silva's "'No Place Called Home?": Representations of Home in ChandaniLokugé's *If the Moon Smiled* and Roshi Fernando's *Homesick*', Hamilton's 'Uncertainty and the Future: A Reading of V . V. Ganeshanathan's *Love Marriage*', Lokugé's 'The Novelist and Censorship: A Sri Lankan-Australian Perspective', Jeyathurai's 'Drawing Maps of Pain: An Interview with V . V. Ganeshanathan' and Halpé's 'A Fox's Wedding: Sitting Down with Michael Ondaatje'. Both Balasubramanian and Salgado explore the novel's role in re-imagining the history of Sri Lanka: they show how fiction reveals a shift from celebratory drives of nationalism to a critique of patriotism, in the process questioning dominant narratives of history. While Silva's article engages with the anxieties of female expatriation, Hamilton focusing on the anguish of uncertainty shrouding a militant state shows how *Love Marriage* brings out the possibility of reconciling warring communities. Lokugé and Halpé bring out the peculiar concerns of the Sri Lankan expatriate writers, and the interview with Ondaatje reveals the sorry state of the publishing industries in Sri Lanka, leading to unavailability of a great many books the literary merit of which is of a high standard. This has indeed been my experience while looking for books, information about which I found on the Internet and got interested. Ganeshanathan's interview is of particular significance to this thesis, for she claims her engagement with 'people's feelings' which have the power to challenge the dehumanising narratives of the State, which, within a year of the official end of the war, had begun to fabricate truths about the war.

Some other books also deserve mention. YasmineGooneratne's *Celebrating Sri Lankan Women's English Writing* (2002), consisting of analytical biographies of some seventy-four female authors located in Sri Lanka or abroad, provided an insight into understanding political, social and cultural circumstances that produced a certain kind of women's fiction, diverse in theme, but similar in concerns. Two recent books, Maryse Jayasuriya's *Terror and Reconciliation: Sri Lankan Anglophone Literature 1983-2009* (2012) and Alexandra Watkins' *Problematic Identities in Women's Fiction of the Sri Lankan Diaspora* (2015),

dealing with the questions of nation, displacement, war, and predicament of the average citizens as observed in the works of Shyam Selvadurai, A. Sivanandan, V. V. Ganeshanathan, Chandani Lokugé, Yasmine Gooneratne, Michele de Krester and others, have made interesting interventions into the Sri Lankan English novel, through detailed textual analyses. While Jayasuriya's book provides an interesting insight into the idea of terrorism and terror informing the writings of contemporary Sri Lankan authors, Watkins' book, as she says at the very outset, concerns itself with the 'problematic of identity' to be read as a 'subset of diasporic literature' (2015: 1). Two chapters, namely 'In Fear of Monsters: Women's Identity and the Cult of Domesticity in British Ceylon' and 'ChandaniLokugé and Yasmine Gooneratne: Deconstructing Postcolonial Tourism, Exoticism, and Colonial Simulacra', have proved immensely helpful in drawing a historiography of women's lives from colonial times to the current moment within the diaspora. Jayasuriya's book while dealing with the questions of identity and nation under the broader rubric of understanding terror as affect foregrounds the immense potential of literature to re-narrativise the war through humanizing stories, thereby reassessing the myths of purity, heroism and martyrdom that propelled the war. This re-narrativisation in turn helps make a strong case for peace-building, in a manner similar to Qadri Ismail's book.

Anupama Mohan's *Utopia and the Village in South Asian Literatures* (2012) shifts the focus from cities to villages in Indian and Sri Lankan writings that 'emerged out of the colonial experience, of the Gandhian politics of *swaraj*, and village economies in the case of India, and out of dominant Sinhala and Buddhist literary and cultural traditions in the case of Sri Lanka' (1). Mohan's reading of the Sinhalese novels of Martin Wikramasinghe, whose works present 'a literary equivalent to the anthropological interest shown in rural Ceylonese history and tradition' (3), is of particular significance in the field of literary criticism in Sri Lanka, dominated by investigations into English writings. Examining configurations of villages along the lines of utopia/dystopia and national/local, Mohan shows the construction of what she calls 'rural heterotopia' through the vernacular and postcolonial Sri Lankan novels (such as Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*), thereby revealing the all-pervasive effects of colonial modernity the locus of which is often imagined to be the city. Mohan's book helped me make sense of the evolution of the form of the novel in Sri Lanka, as I have already shown in a previous segment.

The unpublished doctoral dissertation, *Sacred Bodies, Profaned Bodies: Psychology, Politics, and Sex in the Literatures of Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict* by Hyojin Han (The University of Texas at Austin, 2010), focusing on four texts – Anita Pratap’s memoir, *Island of Blood: Frontier Reports from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Other South Asian Flashpoints*, , Santosh Sivan’s film *The Terrorist*, Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* and Sivanandan’s *When Memory Dies* – takes an interesting standpoint in analysing the focus on the body in Tamil nationalist discourses. Prabhakaran’s fashioning of his own ‘absent or invisible body and the bodies of the suicide bombers as the focal point of Tamil nationalism’ (iv) and the other kind of bodies – the mutilated and raped bodies of women for example - that are ‘anomalous in military conflicts’ are the two kind of bodies Han reads in the dissertation. Han argues that the ‘mute presence [of unidentified bodies of human rights violations] serves as a powerful amplifier for the survivors’ while bodies which are victims of ethnically incited rape and murder ‘could paradoxically be the agents of social integration, especially in the time of unrest’ (v). The primary objective of the thesis is to re-vision power relations between the aggressor and the victim during the time of armed conflicts. I see my own intervention as carrying forward this apparently unending quest for understanding power relations with a primary focus on sexualities.

None of these anthologies and monographs has engaged with the question of power relations from a queer-feminist standpoint within the intimate space of the family like I do in this thesis. In fact, there is a huge lacuna in the secondary literature available on expatriate Sri Lankan writings in English in this respect, although some feminist readings of the novels are available. There is a glaring lack in the studies of masculinity and ageing that the novels in question represent. Apart from a few articles written on ShyamSelvadurai’s *Funny Boy* and Aldrich’s *Cultural Encounters and Homoeroticism in Sri Lanka: Sex and Serendipity*, queerness has been largely bypassed in literary criticism; by queer, I reiterate, I do not only mean homosexuality, but all forms of non-normativities, dismantling hegemonic structures. It is strange that a book-length study *Shyam Selvadurai: Texts and Contexts* by Sayantan Dasgupta (2007) completely overlooks the novels’ queer politics, although it meticulously maps out the historical-political contexts which led to the production of *Cinnamon Gardens* and *Funny Boy*. This deliberate elision of the novel’s queer radicalism, in my opinion, failed the very novels the book sought to analyse. It is immensely surprising how the author maintained a studied silence about the novel’s queer protagonists although *Funny Boy* in particular had already begun to draw a lot of critical attention as a queer novel by then. Since

then, there have been several studies of *Funny Boy*, although no other Selvadurai novel found as much critical attention. I would like to name a few: Jayawickrama's 'At Home in the Nation? Negotiating Identity in ShyamSelvadurai's *Funny Boy*' (2005), Jazeel's 'Because Pigs Can Fly: Sexuality, Race and the Geographies of Difference in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*' (2005), Lesk's 'Ambivalence at the Site of Authority: Desire and Difference in *Funny Boy*' (2006), Gopinath's *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2007), Perera's 'Some Responses to Colonial/Neo-colonial Education in *Funny Boy*, *Petals of Blood* and *The Castle of My Skin*' (2000) and 'Writing to Protest and Reconcile' (2015), Salgado's 'Writing Sri Lanka, Reading Resistance: ShyamSelvadurai's *Funny Boy* and A. Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*' (2004; republished in her 2007 book), and Gairola's 'Limp Wrists, Inflammatory Punches: Violence, Masculinity, and Queer Sexuality in Shyam Selvadurai's *FunnyBoy*' (2015). To this list, I would also like to add my own article, the latest publication on *Funny Boy* in *Postcolonial Text* (Vol 10, No 3 & 4): '*Funny Boy* and the Pleasure of Breaking Rules: Bending Genre and Gender in "The Best School of All"' (2015).

At the end of their introduction to the special issue of *South Asian Review* (2012), Jayasuriya and Halpé write:

One of the paradoxes of Sri Lankan Anglophone literature is the way that it straddles the conventional boundaries between a minority and majority literature, between nationalism and diaspora, between ethnic identity politics and human rights advocacy. (24)

They move on to add, that as national literatures are being increasingly understood in relation to transnational currents, 'The contested space of Sri Lankan Anglophone literature, marginal though it may seem becomes broadly representative of the contestations and negotiations of a planet inescapably interconnected and ineluctably local in its particularities' (24). This thesis moving on the same line, makes an attempt to understand organisation of power, affect, and sexualities within Sri Lankan families, both local and transnational, and in the process also tries to participate in the larger question of peace and reconciliation which is still a raging issue in the country, even eight years after the official end of the war.

An overview of the chapters

The thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter, 'The Family, Colonial Modernity, and the Novel: the Sri Lankan Context' is a short introduction to the mechanism of power and affect within the family, followed by the history of the emergence of the modern Ceylonese/Sri Lankan family in the colonial period. The chapter then moves on to examine the continuities and ruptures one encounters in unproblematically exchanging the family with the nation, taking the former as a symbol of the latter. The chapter ends with the delineation of the emergence of the expatriate Sri Lankan English novels, their repeated focus on personal relationships, displacements and anxieties of belonging in ethnically, racially and sexually divided spaces.

Chapter 2, entitled, 'Fathers, Husbands and Sons: Politics of Masculinity and the Family', deploying theoretical frameworks of masculinity studies originating in First World countries, and intervening those with discourses of masculinities in circulation in postcolonial South Asia, analyses seven novels: Shyam Selvadurai's *Cinnamon Gardens*, *Funny Boy* and *The Hungry Ghosts*, A. Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*, Romesh Guneseckara's *The Match*, V. V. Ganeshanathan's *Love Marriage* and Chandani Lokuge's *If the Moon Smiled*. Focusing on the male protagonists of these novels, this chapter seeks to examine how certain forms of masculinity are privileged over others under certain political circumstances. Selvadurai's novels provide a queer diasporic author's perspective on construction of bourgeois masculinities in colonial Ceylon and in postcolonial Sri Lanka, standing precariously on the verge of an ethnic conflict, while also throwing light on a conformist matriarch who rules her empire by endorsing hegemonic masculinist ideals of power and control. Sivanandan's epic novel offers a complex perspective on how masculinities have been understood over a long swath of history, beginning from the late colonial period till very recently with the LTTE coming to power in war torn Sri Lanka, by locating the main action of the narrative within underprivileged classes and their everyday realities. Guneseckara's *The Match*, exploring the hierarchies of father-son relationship and its associated emotional and power dynamics, is an interesting narrative of how masculinities are reformulated in the diaspora, when certain ideals appear increasingly difficult to achieve. Lokuge's novel is an exploration of a woman's emotional investigation into the fear, insecurities and arrogance of a conservative husband who finds it difficult to come to terms with his waning power over his family in his new home in Australia; Ganeshanathan's novel is an intense family drama interwoven with the politics of the homeland left behind. A sensitive portrayal of an LTTE loyalist and his

justifications of the liberation war for Tamil Eelam, *Love Marriage* is a second generation Sri Lankan diasporic woman's reflections on a rebellious uncle and an emotional father, who escaped the dreadful political realities of Sri Lanka in search of a peaceful home. The range and diversity of diasporic locales, sexualities and class positions bring forth interesting perspectives on fathers, husbands and sons, which in turn, reveal intriguing and often contesting facets of Ceylonese/Sri Lankan masculinities. The questions which this chapter raises are: how performative is masculinity, and whether it is possible to reduce inequalities if the adverse effects of compulsory performance of masculinity into which most men are thrust are revealed?

Chapter 3, 'Mothers, Wives and Daughters: Narratives of Respectability, Repression and Resistance', begins with examining the Women's Question that was central to the formation of nationalist discourses in Ceylon under colonial rule; it then moves on to examine the trajectory of women's movement in Ceylon and postcolonial Sri Lanka which provides an extremely useful framework for understanding women's position within the family today; repressed into adhering to certain codes of respectability (both in their traditional roles as mothers, daughters and wives as well as female combatants in the civil war), the average Sri Lankan woman is severely disempowered to rebel. Yet, there are occasions when she resists heteropatriarchal domination not always epitomised by her father, brother, husband or son, but also by her mother or other female relatives. The novels I analyse in this chapter are either set in Sri Lanka or abroad, and are written by both male and female authors, among whom ShyamSelvadurai takes a radical feminist position, connecting the 'women's question' with cultural politics of recognising (or not recognising) queer desires. I shall analyse three of his novels, *Cinnamon Gardens*, *Funny Boy* and *The Hungry Ghosts*, in which Selvadurai addresses issues of internalization of patriarchal ideologies by women, the problematic of radicalism and non-conformance to prescribed gender roles, and the 'othering' of women who refuse to subscribe to dominant ideologies relating to both nation and gender. In all three novels, as we shall see, non-conforming women who refuse to fit into categories, allegorically produce a diasporic condition of un-belonging. In Chandani Lokuge's *If the Moon Smiled*, the expatriate woman protagonist, caught between two worlds, one comparatively liberal, but carrying within it the imported values from a conservative world left behind, struggles to outgrow her passive interpellation in the long-distance nationalist project of reconstructing a home in the diaspora. *Love Marriage*, V. V. Ganeshanathan's family saga, locates its woman protagonist between a transmitted nostalgia for a

revolutionary tribe warring for a separate homeland, and her lived experience of a transnational space, which fails to transcend the forces of totalitarianism, which remain as strong in the diaspora as it was at home. Mohanraj's *Bodies in Motion*, on the other hand, while freeing its women into a comparatively sexually liberated space, the transnational location allows, constantly draws limits to the extent such freedom can be exercised. In *When Memory Dies*, Sivanandan's socialist novel, radical women voices are suppressed or totally eliminated, whereby a predominantly patriarchal hyper-masculinist world is established as inviolable, and always unavailable to the woman. The chapter raises the question of whether women could ever meaningfully have any agency at all, and whether, the availability of such agency in a way mark the possibility of loosening the heteropatriarchal grip on organising relationships within the family and the nation-state at large.

Chapter 4, entitled, 'Queer Sons and Daughters: The Family's Other', examines the postcolonial anxieties about non-normative sexualities, an anathema to the family and a threat to the perpetuation of its bloodline. Queer citizens, in my reading are always, already a diasporic category, for they are always outside the national imaginary. Even within transnational spaces, in comparatively queer-friendly host countries, queer migrants are faced with other forms of repression, not known in the homeland. In addition to that, in many cases, it becomes difficult for queer migrants to trounce impediments to sexual freedom erected by the symbolic re-territorialisation of the homeland in the host country. Whether local or expatriate, the family is obdurately opposed to accommodate queer members, and therefore, the latter is often forced to invisibilised themselves. However, this invisibilisation does not necessarily take away from their resistance its political edge. This chapter, tracing the history of colonisation of non-normative sexualities and the postcolonial struggle to *naturalise* them, analyses five novels: *Funny Boy*, *Cinnamon Gardens*, *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*, *The Hungry Ghosts* and *Bodies in Motion*. I begin with *Cinnamon Gardens* set within an emergent metropolitan culture of upper class Colombo during the late colonial period; it is an interesting documentation of how colonial discourses of sex and sexuality had begun to be adapted by the Ceylonese colony, resulting in the breeding of pathological homophobia that led to the criminalisation of all forms of non-normative sexualities. Both *Funny Boy* and *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* are coming of age novels and are both beset with anxieties of 'homing desire' (Fortier 2003) and the inability to find a home that would accept them unconditionally. *The Hungry Ghosts*, just like *Funny Boy*, problematises queer identities by locating them within discourses of conflicting ethnonationalist identities, and within local and

expatriate families, none of which could accommodate the queer protagonist. Mohanraj's erotic family saga, *Bodies in Motion*, constantly shuttling between Sri Lanka and the United States, speaks back to a Sri Lankan model of family in which the national constantly seems to be challenged as well as reinforced by transnational experiences. Mohanraj tells stories of both queer male and female family members who could never be comfortably "out there"; by bringing these hidden narratives out of the closet, Mohanraj debunks the hetero-patriarchal foundation of the nation-state and myths of homogeneity which are passed as incontrovertible. While all these queer narratives underline the failure of egalitarian democracy the postcolonial nation-state had initially promised, I also examine how far these novels could sustain their radicalism, when there are too many obstacles to overcome.

The fifth and the last chapter, 'Ageing Parents, Grandparents and Other Older Kin: Ageism and the Family' examines intergenerational relationships within the family symbolic of intricate power structures within which the balance of power is constantly shifting. This chapter while unveiling ageist attitudes of the younger lot towards those advanced in age, also reveals the other side of the story. The nature of relationship ageing individuals share with younger people within familial spaces is usually twofold: one, as subordinates to the younger generation, or as absolute voices of authority oppressing the young. Therefore, ageing within South Asian joint families does not always mean complete loss of power or gross victimisation. Although in discourses of ageism, elderly people are most often perceived as victims and ageing is seen as aberration with respect to the more 'valued group' of younger people, it is not always the younger generation that 'others' the elderly. At the same time, the experience of ageing within a certain culture is not always homogenous. Heterosexual men and heterosexual women do not age in the same manner; similarly the experience of ageing among queer communities cannot be understood through the heteronormative lens of ageing. Especially in a country like Sri Lanka, dominated by Buddhist and Hindu ideologies of ageing, which dissociate ageing from all forms of material and sexual desires, it is interesting to examine ageing bodies and their negotiation with normative models of ageing. Locating the novels within the discourses surrounding ageing in a country where older people would comprise a quarter of the population by 2030 (Department of Census and Statistics 2013a), this chapter delves into intergenerational conflicts which open up interesting debates about understanding the nation-state and its involvement with the civil war, the possibilities of re-imaging the nation-state by replacing age-old traditional ideas with newer, cosmopolitan ones, and the ways in which dominant

power structures often epitomised by the aged could be dismantled to make way for more democratic spaces. In this chapter, I analyse seven novels, each revealing a different dimension of ageing within both local and expatriate families. Ageing brings with it a deeper sense of nostalgia for the past, of lost roots, if the ageing subject is away from his or her original homeland (as it happens with several characters in Gunasekera's *The Match*). Ageing also mellows down hypermasculine, autocratic father figures such as Mahendra in *If the Moon Smiled*, while ageing also brings with it an intense sense of detachment from the family as it happens with Manthri in the same novel. Disability and an anguished awareness of impending death sometimes also occasion confessional narratives – confession with or without qualms about something which is perceived as wrong. Ganeshanathan's *Love Marriage* is one such novel, in which the narrator Yalini's interaction with an aged and dying LTTE leader reveals to her a chequered history of her family, intertwined with Sri Lanka's political history. Again, the changing political scenario of an increasingly militant Sri Lankan state alienates ageing citizens, such as Uncle Para (*When Memory Dies*), who, despite his leftist leanings, cannot identify with the violence and bloodbath – the extreme tactics resorted to by the Tamil militants. Ageing also makes one more orthodox, conservative and intolerant of liberal ideas – one example being Shivan's grandmother Daya in *The Hungry Ghosts*. While coming of age narratives of queer citizen-subjects look forward to a more hopeful future in Sri Lanka or in foreign lands, they also betray the possibility of sinking into terrible loneliness: *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*, by pitting the teenaged Amrith's story against the ageing gay architect Lucien, uncovers the bleak side of ageing queer lives. Mohanraj's *Bodies in Motion* addresses this bleak side in a more effective way in its representation of the 71 year old Mangai, a lonely lesbian woman living like an outcast away from family members.

This thesis, therefore, makes an attempt to understand human relationships in the time of the war. By taking a queer-feminist position, the thesis challenges the hegemony of all normative structures, particularly, power hierarchies within the family. While critiquing the family, the thesis also proposes the importance of envisioning the reorganisation of its power mechanisms. The family, though often seen as a micro unit of the nation, is not simply a political entity like the latter. As I shall show in the following chapters, privileging the affective functions of the family over its function as a state apparatus might help address the root causes of the ethnic and religious divisiveness that has fragmented Sri Lanka seemingly beyond redemption. In this way, the thesis hopes to contribute to the intellectual conversation

in South Asia and around the world that has been steadily working towards peace-building in the island country.

CHAPTER 1

The Family, Colonial Modernity and the Novel: the Sri Lankan Context

‘People say family-family, but the courts are jam-packed with children suing parents, brothers suing sisters, sisters suing brothers. Disgusting.’

----- Shyam Selvadurai, *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*, 66

‘You cannot go unfettered into a family’s history if you are one of them. The nature of certain unions will be hidden from you, rephrased to you, the subject dropped, the music changed.’

----- V. V. Ganeshanathan, *Love Marriage*, 1

‘Who would not want to be part of a functional family?’

----- Chandani Lokugé, *If the Moon Smiled*, 202

‘I said I thought babies don’t have to have their fathers casting shadows over their lives; not even their mothers’.

----- Romesh Gunsekera, *The Sandglass*, 52

‘With three sisters of his own, all of whom were now married, he was perfectly familiar with the constraints imposed upon young women by conservative families intent on guarding their reputations and the family name. But, he told himself, times were changing.

----- Yasmine Gooneratne, *The Sweet and Simple Kind*, 539

From the *famulus* to the family: Mechanisms of power and affect

The five extracts quoted above are all from contemporary expatriate Sri Lankan novels in English, underlining the ubiquity of the trope of the family in these novels. In fact, of the total number of novels written in the world till this day, a very few are not about the family. Even when they are set in far-flung, exotic places, and traverse dangerous, unfamiliar terrains, away from the comforts of the living room, the family has still lurked on the fringes of the narratives. Novels written for children have been most instrumental in establishing the

family as a cherished institution.⁴ Fiction and family – on the pages of a novel or children’s books or on the television or silver screen – have an extraordinarily long and intriguing relationship. But, what always remains to be seen is how this relationship is forged, depending upon social, cultural and political circumstances.

Since the novel as a genre emerged with the unprecedented rise of the middle class, with the coming of democracy and an increasing individualisation of society, it has, frequently, returned to the family, the intimate site of middle class life that has in different ways replicated the state’s power mechanisms. In fact, deconstruction of family narratives leads one to the basic structure of these power mechanisms, effectively concealed under the raiment of affect – parents’ affection for children, children’s reverence for parents, spousal commitment to each other, love between siblings, and so on. As Foucault famously puts it - “[P]ower is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to an ability to hide its own mechanisms.” (1976: 86). The family’s expertise in this is incomparable to any other social institution. At times, the family is unambiguously repressive as well. Althusser (1969) listing the family as an ideological state apparatus, reveals how it ‘functions secondarily by repression’:

⁴ Ann Alston (2008), in her analysis of the trope of the family in English novels for children, writes:

As the child learns from his/her parental role models, and competes against and works with siblings, he/she learns to co-exist with others. Literature for children, it seems, is the perfect space in which to foster both the Darwinian and cultural concepts of family, to introduce children to and immerse them in a set of adult constructs and ideals. (8)

The same concepts of family are preached to children belonging to queer families, as well as to those who do not belong to one, but need to develop acceptance for such families. In these children books, the family headed by two fathers or two mothers is celebrated, keeping intact almost all the other parameters of heteronormative coupledom. These books, to use a Lisa Duggan term, are unapologetically ‘homonormative’, designed with the noble intention of *naturalising* queer families. Most of these are finely illustrated storybooks; others are directly educative or instructional. Lesléa Newman’s *Donovan’s Big Day* (2011), operating on the motto “Love makes a family”, notwithstanding the sexuality of parents, is about a little boy’s role as ring-bearer at the wedding of his lesbian mothers; Patricia Polacco’s *In Our Mothers’ House* (2009) dramatises the coming of age of children in a queer family, and learning to accept it, despite circumstantial hostilities; *Tango Makes Three* (2005) by J Richardson and P Parnell, adopts the beast fable mode in telling how two male penguins create a family, when the zookeeper gives them an egg all their own to hatch. Several such examples can be cited.

...Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to 'discipline' not only their shepherds, but also their flocks. The same is true of the Family The same is true of the cultural IS Apparatus (censorship, among other things), etc. (145)

This repressive dimension of the family, even when acknowledged, is often cloaked in emotional rhetoric. For example, an oppressive father adopting all possible means to thwart his daughter's marriage to her love interest whom he does not approve of, is often excused on the grounds that it is a loving and dutiful father's legitimate concern for her daughter's future and wellbeing. In fact, the assumption that the family is founded on love, care, mutual understanding and harmony is so overpowering that any other form of community's success is described in its approximation of the family model: "We are like a family" unwittingly acknowledges and privileges the family as a hegemonic form of affective relations which needs to be replicated within other forms of community lives in order to guarantee its legitimacy and sustenance. The power of this affect is so enormous that it is often impossible to forge relationships without using the family's rhetoric of understanding their nature. For example, two friends often identify themselves as akin to brothers or sisters; within *kothi* communities of South Asia, older feminine queer men often take under their wings younger feminine men, describing the relationship in mother-daughter terms. It is interesting even how non-normative families, challenging the hegemonic model of the normative one, cannot effectively outgrow the latter. Therefore, a closer look at families, with the purpose of unveiling its power mechanisms, de-familiarises it to an extent that those interpellated in its affective narratives might end up feeling irredeemably betrayed.

The family is endlessly romanticised in cultural texts and more often than not overrated; this is infinitely buttressed by neoliberal emphasis on the family and family values as central to

the project of the free market order⁵. Political figures, such as Margaret Thatcher, in her adoption of neoliberal policies, harped on the breakdown of family values as the primary cause behind the rise of crime and unemployment (See, Douglas 1990).⁶ With neoliberalism spreading beyond the shores of the United Kingdom and North America, in South Asia too the same wistful reminiscing of a more glorified past of the family has become commonplace. Raymond Williams' mild sarcasm in the last two sentences of his delineation of a 'fascinating and difficult history' of the family in his *New Keywords* (2005) is worth quoting in this connection:

...it is a history worth remembering when we hear that "the family, as an institution, is breaking up" or that, in times gone by and still hopefully today, "the family is the necessary foundation of all order and morality". In these and similar contemporary uses it can be useful to remember the major historical variations, with some of their surviving complexities, and the sense, through these, of radically changing definitions of primary relationships. (132-134)

The family as it is understood today is a recent social invention, compared to the word's long etymological history. Williams writes:

The dominance of the sense of small kin-group was probably not established before eC19. The now predominant pressure of the word, and the definition of many kinds of feeling in relation to it, came in mC19 and later. This can be represented as the apotheosis of the bourgeois family, and the sense of the isolated family as a working economic unit is clearly stressed in the development of capitalism. (133)

⁵Neoliberal thinkers such as Milton Friedman, Gary Becker and James Buchanan advocated that the private family should replace the social insurance state as the primary source of economic security.

⁶ David Cameron in more recent times echoes the same views in his identification of 'problem families' and 'broken value system' (See, Bennhold 2011).

But, what is indeed fascinating is the origin of the English word from its Latin root – *famulus* meaning ‘servant’. In fact, my enquiry into the family and the ‘many kinds of feeling in relation to it’ is primarily informed by the word’s genesis, which contains in it the idea of ‘un-freedom’. As Engels writes in *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*:

The original meaning of the word “family” (*familia*) is not that compound of sentimentality and domestic strife which forms the ideal of the present-day philistine; among the Romans it did not at first even refer to the married pair and their children, but only to the slaves. *Famulus* means domestic slave, and *familia* is the total number of slaves belonging to one man. As late as the time of Gaius, the *familia*, *id est patrimonium* (family, that is, the patrimony, the inheritance) was bequeathed by will. The term was invented by the Romans to denote a new social organism, whose head ruled over wife and children and a number of slaves, and was invested under Roman paternal power with rights of life and death over them all. (n. Pag)

Although it is assumed that the father, the patriarchal head of the family, is vested with maximum power and is in command of everyone under him, I shall try to show in this thesis, everyone, no matter how powerful one is within a given family, is, by default subservient to it – abiding by a series of codes and norms deemed necessary for its subsistence. As Tina-Karen Pusse and Katharina Walter say in the introduction to their recent book, *Precarious Parenthood: Doing Family and Literature in Film* (2013): ‘[F]amily like gender or race, is not primarily based on biological criteria, but has to be performed. The rules of the construction of the family, however, change’ (1). Since ‘doing the family’ is a performance, subversion of its codes and norms threatens to disintegrate it – bringing it down from its all-important, inviolable status. Interestingly, the root word, ‘servant’, inadvertently reinforces the power immanent within the family – a social institution, which like all social institutions, operates by certain rules and safeguarding of hierarchy. What interests me is not only how

this power is sustained through the mechanism of affect, but also how such power is resisted from within the family or, what happens when one refuses to accept one's subservience to the family. To quote the oft-cited passage from the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case... (95)

The main objective of this thesis is to identify not only these numerous points of resistance within the family, but also the points of compliance, in the name of love, duty and sacrifice.

Anne McClintock in an illuminating article, 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family' (1993), provides an effective argument that dethrones the family from its noble pedestal, although that is not my only aim in this thesis. Despite my awareness of the family's hidden, sometimes overt, mechanisms of repression, I am also interested in making sense of how love, compassion, pain of separation, sense of duty, respect, and selflessness also make the family a more liveable place than the world outside, a haven quarantined by emotions, notwithstanding my understanding that 'love is an investment that should be returned' (Ahmed 1). However, McClintock's essay provides a valuable theoretical framework. She explains how the family trope, in nationalist discourses, fulfilled a twofold function: first and foremost, it legitimised social hierarchy:

Since the subordination of woman to man, and child to adult, was deemed a natural fact, other forms of social hierarchy could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social difference as a category of nature ... The metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial - the 'national family', the global 'family of nations', the colony as a 'family of black children ruled over by a white father' - thus depended on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere. (1993: 64)

Secondly, the evolutionary family provided a potent trope for 'the idea of social discontinuity (hierarchy through space) and temporal discontinuity (hierarchy across time) as a natural, organic continuity': 'National or imperial intervention could be figured as an organic, non-revolutionary progression that naturally contained hierarchy within unity: paternal fathers ruling benignly over immature children'(1993: 64-65).The thrust of my argument in this thesis, partially takes its cue from McClintock's delineation of the family and its intimate relationship with the imagination of the nation.

Two of the ten Sri Lankan novels – *Love Marriage* (2008) and *Bodies in Motion* (2005) – I have based my argument on, begin with a family tree, and a third with a black and white photo from an old family album dating back to 1928 (*Running in the Family*, 1982). McClintock talking about the secular Tree of Time writes:

Inconvenient discontinuities are ranked and subordinated into a hierarchical structure of branching time - the differential progress of 'racially' different nations mapped against the tree's self-evident boughs, with 'lesser nations' destined, by nature, to perch on its lower branches. (66)

Personal family trees also trace a linear progression from an ancestry, often recording with discomfort as it were the points of discontinuities: especially, where unpaired names hang

wistfully from branches overburdened with couples, their wedding date and children born of the union. Another point of abrupt halt in the progression is caused by childless couples. These family members, the unmarried and the childless, stand out in the family tree, in an uneasy relation to the rest featured on it, as if guilty of thwarting the progress and perpetuation of the family name. These discontinuities, these loose threads – or in other words, the sites of resistance, difference and otherness – which have the power to demolish the family's compliance with hegemonic narratives and foil its undeterred progress, are where my interest lies.

Colonial modernity, the modern family and nationalist resistance: A peculiar paradox

In Ceylon, the holy trinity of the father, mother and child representing the normative family was an import of colonial modernity that slowly marginalised all other forms of pre-existing kinship association. In Victorian England, the family, increasingly differentiated from the world outside, became an emotional asylum, protecting individuals from the anguish of public life and inculcating in them moral values and uprightness. For instance, Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* (1859), which became a best-seller, outlined the role that home and family was expected to play:

Whatever may be the efficiency of schools, the examples set in our Homes must always be of vastly greater influence in forming the characters of our future men and women. The Home is the crystal of society—the nucleus of national character; and from that source, be it pure or tainted, issue the habits, principles and maxims which govern public as well as private life. The nation comes from the nursery. (qtd. in Nelson 4)

The family was, therefore, loaded with the mammoth task of nation-building, a role which its imported form also played in Ceylon and other South Asian colonies. However, the idealisation of the family ‘as a model of parental authority, loving relationships, inner harmony, and secure values untroubled by pressures from the public world’ (Mitchell xi), was most successfully accomplished by the Queen, notwithstanding her occasional critique of the family, encountered in her personal letters –

All marriage is such a lottery—the happiness is always an exchange—though it may be a very happy one—still the poor woman is bodily and morally the husband’s slave. That always sticks in my throat. When I think of a merry, happy, free young girl—and look at the ailing, aching state a young wife generally is doomed to—which you can’t deny is the penalty of marriage. (qtd. in Nelson 6)

These personal exchanges undid the sacrosanct nature of the family and unravelled its power mechanisms; but publicly the Queen celebrated it, as testified by pull-out portraits of the royal family at home becoming a regular feature of the illustrated magazines, which were so priced that even less affluent people could afford to purchase them. The family was, thus, endlessly sentimentalised, and upheld as the most important institution providing stability, emotional anchor and access to eternal values. It was around this time, a more distinct segregation of public and private spheres emerged, whereby women came to symbolise the latter. As John Ruskin says in his famous speech entitled, “Of Queens’ Gardens,” (1864):

By her office, and place, [the woman] is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in the open world, must encounter all peril and trial:—to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be

wounded, or subdued; often misled; and always hardened. But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence. This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. (qtd. in Nelson 7)

While Victorian sages such as Ruskin constructed a grand illusion for women of having supreme authority of the inner sanctum of the home, poets celebrated modest, passive, virtuous women – dedicated mothers and wives – as the epitome of ideal womanhood. The title of Patmore Coventry's poem *Angel in the House* (published in parts between 1854 and 1862), dedicated to his compliant wife Emily, became a catchphrase of sorts for the desirable image of the Englishwoman – an image that soon found its way into nationalist discourses of South Asian colonies, as exemplified by the Sinhalese version of the *kula kanthawa* – the ideal woman, rooted in traditions, submissive, dutiful, and also, good-looking.⁷ The construction of the public/private binary opposition was related to the emergence of an aggressive capitalist economy, within which the middle class rose in power and magnitude like never before. Nelson observes:

But even though at least 85 percent of the population was working-class, it was middleclass ideology that was dominant in Victorian society, because it was the middle class that controlled the presses, writing and producing most of the books and periodicals that voiced and shaped public opinion. Thus it was the middle-class

⁷The Sinhalese word *kanthawa*, meaning woman, carry in it this patriarchal association of femininity and sexual magnetism: *kantha*, the root word, means attractive, and the word, *kanthawa* was often associated with prostitutes. Soon, *kanthawa* was prefixed with *kula* (meaning family or dynasty) to distinguish the respectable, noble, domestic woman from the sexually active prostitute of the streets. Nonetheless, the word *kanthawa*, that remained unchanged, underscores sexual attractiveness as an important marker of the 'complete' woman (See de Alwis 1999: 187).

model, in which work was generally divorced from home that gave rise to an idea crucial to the era's construction of family, namely the concept of separate spheres. (6)

The same model of the modern family, intact with its notions of the home and the world, was gradually adapted by the more urban bourgeois classes in Ceylon, and it took a few decades to become the ubiquitous model of kinship, based on heterosexual marriage and blood-relations across the island. It was not long back when Ceylon had its indigenous laws specific to different communities which governed marriage, property distribution, custody of children, divorce, etc., until those were rendered ineffective by the Marriage Ordinance (No. 6 of 1847) passed by the colonial government. It made marriage monogamous, which, in turn also led to the amendment of the Kandyan Law, an indigenous law that applied to the entire Sinhalese community, notwithstanding their location. Although pre-colonial Kandyan customary laws recognised polygamy, polyandry and monogamy, the Kandyan Marriage Ordinance of 1859 enlisted monogamous marriage as the only legitimate form. Interestingly, it continued to recognise both *diga* (patriarchal) and *binna* (matriarchal) forms of marriages, though eventually the latter receded into oblivion. Under the Thesawalami Law – a Dravidian law – that applied to the Tamils of Jaffna, polygamy was recognised until the Marriage Ordinance of 1847 made it illegal. Polygamous marriage, limited to four wives, however, remained permissible under Muslim law, which unlike the other two, is a religious law. The purpose of summarising these pre-colonial laws is to underline the fact that the modern family, as it is understood today, is but a recent phenomenon, and not necessarily the only form of filial association known in Ceylon. Cohn (1987) and Price (2004) note how difficult it was for colonialists to arrive at a fixed, standardised definition of the South Asian family, *not* always characterised by fixed residences, while implying co-sharing of property and resources. Sreenivas writes:

Encouraging the severance of ritual ties linking [non-kin] groups to particular households, colonial laws and revenue policies instead enforced contractual obligations based exclusively in economic relations. State policies thus began to characterize the household/family as a group of blood-related kindred who occupying a fixed residence, lived together. (2008: 26)

As several commentators have observed, the transformation of the pre-colonial family had the most visible impact on the position of women. This was, however, nothing surprising, for, as Spivak says: ‘On the simplest possible level, it is evident that notions of kinship are anchored and consolidated by the exchange of women’ (1988: 217). Sreenivas observes that the colonisation of the pre-modern family forms – the dissociation of kinship, lineage and households from state authority – effectuated a de-politicisation of families, which in turn, made women the primary target of state regulation, much in the same way as Victorian discourses on the home and the world unremittingly harped on confining the woman within the domestic sphere:

Women, in particular, bore the brunt of these changes as legal assumptions about caste and rituals distinguished the rights and privileges of “wifedom” from the lower status of “concubine”. Yet, despite their importance to the state’s regulation of family life, women were typically situated as objects within, rather than subjects of legal discourses. (2008: 16)

Marecek (2009), talking about the transmutation of marriage and divorce laws in Ceylon, writes:

Defining marriage as a lifelong monogamous union concentrated land ownership and economic power in the male members of a family. Moreover, such unions made women more dependent on their husbands and diminished their connection to their families of origin. More generally, Western ideals of womanhood and family were imposed upon local conceptions of marriage, divorce, adoption, offspring, rights of widows, women's work and sexual morality. Ironically, it was these conceptions, practices and values—not pre-colonial ones—that figured in the anti-colonialists' ideologies of righteous Sinhala womanhood and their vision of an indigenous and specifically Sinhala civilization. (142)

Colonialists, especially, missionaries, wrote derisively about the miserable condition of the women of Ceylon, advocating their liberation from the self-righteous and tyrannical Sinhalese or Tamil men, and by extension, primitive kinship structures which dehumanised and commoditised them. No matter how sarcastically postcolonial critics write about the pitfalls of this rescue programme, it is incontestable that women indeed had a wretched life. These popular proverbs - "There are three things you can beat – the dog, the drum and the woman" and "Like tobacco, tighter shut the woman's mouth the better" – one from the Sinhalese and the other from the Tamil community respectively underline women's status within each of these communities. Again, Nur Yalman (1963) in her famous study of the caste system in Ceylon gives a glimpse of the subordinate position of women in assessing the social repercussions of inter-caste sexual liaisons. Whereas hypergamy was widely practiced, hypogamy was strictly prohibited. It was believed that a man who has sexual relation with a lower-caste woman is only externally polluted, but a woman who has sexual intercourse with a lower-caste man is internally polluted and can prove deleterious to the purity of the family

blood. Through her, contaminated blood could be introduced into the caste or family if she bears a child through him. This belief led to more stringent monitoring of women's sexuality.

Yalman notes:

The Sinhalese always used to say, "it does not matter where a man goes; he may sleep with anyone, but the woman must be protected". Men, in other words, can have sexual commerce with women high or low, but women's pleasures are curtailed. (41)

The punishment for women, for marrying or getting sexually involved with lower caste men, was ruthless – the mother and the child could be drowned to death. This is, however, only one aspect of the oppressive life women were thrust into.

Malathi de Alwis in an extremely well-researched essay, 'Domesticity and its Discontents' (2007), enlists several colonialists worrying over the dreadfully subordinate status of women in Ceylonese society. Tennent (1850) condemned Buddhism for equating women with sin and temptation, constructing an extremely ungracious and vicious picture of the female sex; he was equally disdainful of the Tamil community within which women were no better off, having been condemned to a life of terrible domestic toil. Scandalised by comparatively free sexual traffic between men and women, the Victorian moralists reproached the 'disgusting' customs of polygamy and polyandry equating them with prostitution and incest (Hardy 1864; Sirr, 1850; Forbes, 1841). While projecting the sordid and abominably scandalous state of affairs in Sinhalese and Tamil conjugal lives, the colonialists frequently emphasised on the taming of women, not appropriately tutored in doctrines of feminine virtue, chastity, shame and conjugal fidelity – the celebrated markers of the Victorian 'angel in the house' (Sirr 1850; Hardy 1864). This is where 'benevolent' missionaries stepped in with their noble and

ambitious project of liberating the miserable women of Ceylon, by interpellating them in discourses of Christian propriety and etiquette. The colonial project of the liberation of women had a stupendous impact on the reconfiguration of the family, the formation of separate gendered spheres, and reformulation of male-female relationship.

The ‘noble mission’ of replacing pre-colonial forms of conjugality with a companionate form of marriage, with men and women fulfilling separate but complementary gender roles, led to the stiffening of the patriarch’s hold on the family and its members. Rather, this new arrangement ended up marginalising and practically eliminating matriarchal families of pre-colonial Ceylon. The colonial project of ‘civilising’ native women was *not* actually aimed at liberating them from patriarchal bondage; it was simply aimed at handcuffing them to a more rigid patriarchal set up, sanctioned by the law. The educators of the native women primarily sought to make of them good mothers and dutiful modern wives to their English educated husbands, as attested by the curriculum of girls’ school that had on them elaborate courses on home science. The impact has been such that decades after decolonisation, when women entered the public sphere as professionals, for a long time they practically continued ‘their domestic chores in the “public” domain’ –

For upper and middle class women, this has meant transitions into professions such as teaching, doctoring and nursing the sick, providing secretarial services, dressmaking, and catering...with the tourist boom in Sri Lanka from the late 1970s onwards, [lower middle class, working class and some peasant women] have been engaged in cleaning and servicing tourist hotels, making souvenirs and providing sexual services to tourists;...in the 1980s they have become the dominant workforce in garment factories. (de Alwis 2007: 209).

In other words, the sexual division of labour prescribed by the colonial advisory on reconfiguration of family structures, spilled over into the public domain, and it continues unchallenged even now. This in turn creates complex gender hierarchies, not only subordinating women to subservient positions, but also inconveniencing men who fail to live up to the ideals of being a man. In short, by uncritically accepting the Victorian Christian notions of

...a “man’s man” at the top of a hierarchy with inferior women, monogamy, heterosexuality, etc., every incidence of a culture, that did not conform to this model was both embarrassing and, potentially, helped buttress British claims that [South Asian] culture was decadent and “needed” the firm hand of British paternalism. (Naphy 240)

The pre-colonial family, conjugality, and sexualities were most significantly affected by the introduction of colonial laws which delegitimized everything that did not conform to Victorian Christian moral templates. These laws brought with them European ideals of masculinity and femininity, in the process eliminating and delegitimizing ambiguous and liminal sexualities and alternative forms of sexual associations other than the heterosexual one. The introduction of the anti-sodomy law in the colonies, which is still retained by India, Sri Lanka, and other former British colonies, while outlawing any form of same-sex association, also succeeded in inculcating a profound shame in the minds of the colonial subjects, who willingly participated with the colonialists in disowning homosexuality as decadent, sinful and a symptom of genetic abnormality. In fact, in Britain and Europe, the new science of sexology contributed relentlessly to denaturalising homosexuality, often

identifying it as a disease that was congenital and hereditary. The medical practitioners and scientists did not stop at shaming the homosexual individual, but also pulled down his/her entire family with it. Richard Krafft-Ebing's infamous analysis of the 'problem' of homosexuality emphasised how 'in almost all cases where an examination of the physical and mental peculiarities of the ancestors and blood relations has been possible, neuroses, psychoses, degenerative signs, etc. have been found in families' (qtd. in Naphy 207). Social anthropologists wrote prolifically about homosexuality and ritual transvestism in cultures across the world – from Kimberley District in West Australia to Morocco, from the Cameroons to Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and the Indian subcontinent. Everyone did not necessarily take an anti-homosexual stance. Whereas many, such as Edward Westermarck in *The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas* (1917) or Edward Carpenter in *The Intermediate Sex* (1908) and *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folks* (1914), argued that homosexuality was "no abnormality at all", the predominant view, nonetheless, was that homosexuality was a detestable, unspeakable perversion which was against the law of nature.

Alan Strathern in *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth Century Ceylon: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land* (2007), for instance, hints at the commonplace practice of sodomy among the indigenous people in Ceylon. He quotes a Portuguese man expressing his horror at the prevalence of the 'sin of sodomy'. He enquired of one of the principal men of the kingdom whether they were not ashamed of engaging in such 'dirty' and 'ugly' sexual practices, to which the latter answered that they practiced it since the king practiced it, and whatever the king practiced was considered the 'custom' (see Strathern 122). Robert Aldrich in a more recent book, *Cultural Encounters and Homoeroticism in Sri Lanka: Sex and Serendipity* (2014) draws a fascinating picture of Ceylon, which, in modern day tourist parlance, could qualify as a 'gay paradise'. Sex between men and sexual fluidity in terms of

clothing and body structure appear to be the talking point in many travelogues and memoirs of European visitors to the island. Aldrich writes:

Some men who visited or sojourned in Ceylon felt more evident erotic and emotional attractions to other men. Those who were inclined could find partners, young fellows whom we would now term 'men who have sex with men', and who might have erotic relationships with other Ceylonese as well. They might become houseboys, gardeners, studio assistants or live- in mates for Europeans; they provided sex, affection and companionship, and an introduction to the cultures and daily life of the island. Not all of these relationships were lasting or meaningful, but they could be mutually enriching. (2)

The erotic abandon in which European travellers often revelled in was one of the reasons of outlawing homosexuality by the implementation of the anti-sodomy law in 1883. Though the law could not really put a ban on homosexual liaisons, 'gay activists ... continue to complain of social stigma, discrimination and harassment, as well as the nominal legal prohibition on homosexual acts' (8). The idea that homosexuality was ugly and dirty was instilled in the minds of the colonial subjects by Christian invaders, the impact of which was so insidious that even as late as 2017 orthodox religious or political groups in Sri Lanka reiterate the same argument in opposing decriminalisation of homosexuality. Spewing hatred to inflame public wrath, 'The Island Nation of Sinhale' (or 'The Island Nation of Lion's Blood'), a politically motivated group, openly called for taking laws into their own hands to prevent 'faggots' from holding the Pride March in 2016:

Faggot activities aren't legal. Let's take the law into our own hands. If the police aren't going to do anything about it our community is ready to do it ourselves. We will not let these mother f**king dogs to ruin our culture. Ladies and Gents of Sinhale, join us on the 28th to look at the faces of these faggots at Race course.

Decades after the British are gone these minds are still to be decolonised.

In Ceylon, the transformation of Buddhism, in the lines of Protestant ideologies, colluded with the British denigration of the colony's juvenility and decadence, and sought to reform lives in the manner prescribed by the colonialists. Anagarika Dharmapala, the Buddhist ideologue who had the pioneer role in forming a Protestant Buddhist community, in his widely circulated book *Gihi Dina Chariyava*⁸ listed injunctions which women were supposed to abide by. Installing the husband as the inviolable master of the house and extolling the virtues of monogamy, *Gihi Dina Charivaya*, just like the Christian missionaries, sought to instil propriety and decorum in the native women: 'The making of this new petit-bourgeois woman was required that she either be pried loose from her Christian and westernised upbringing or have the "peasant" in her reformed' (de Alwis 2007: 202). The 'respectable' Sinhalese bourgeois woman, who also came to bear the symbolic brunt of representing the nation, was constructed vis-à-vis several countertypes of indecorous or unrespectable women – the English educated, westernised woman, the uncivilised peasant woman, the guttural and masculinised woman of the new proletariat class, and the woman demanding political rights. Arumugam Navalar, the Tamil nationalist, also dictated similar injunctions to the Tamil woman, rescuing her from morally damaging western influences, and reinstating her within Tamil indigenous traditions (see, Silva: 2004). Simultaneously, new notions of masculinity

⁸See, Guruge, 1963.

emerged, which demanded of men absolute protection and controlling of their women – wives, sisters and daughters. The colonial discourse of masculinities became more nuanced and complicated within the colonies, as nationalist leaders constantly drew inspiration from pre-colonial models – of a hyper-virile race of men, disgracefully feminised by their subjugation to colonial rule and in their penchant for mimicking the colonial masters, at the expense of abandoning more morally uplifting indigenous ways of life. The modern family, as Partha Chatterjee (1993) argues, within the project of nationalism, became a sovereign inner domain which was distinct from both previous traditions and western forms of modernity. This is clearly attested by Dharmapala's list of injunctions on women's behaviour and conduct as the homemaker within the family.

Construction of rigid gender hierarchies, emergence of modern notions of masculinity and femininity, marginalisation of non-heteronormative sexual associations – all of these – were simultaneous to and contingent upon the overhaul wrought in the social scene by rapid replacement of the pre-colonial feudal economy with an aggressive capitalist one, facilitated by the expanding commercial trade, which immensely benefitted those engaged with the production of arrack, plantation agriculture and those who owned considerable land. Kumari Jayawardena's *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka* (2000) historicises the transition from a predominantly agrarian to a global capitalist economy; the transition facilitated upward social mobility for those who were so far denigrated as low caste, while engendering a cultural colonisation of these indigenous upper and upwardly mobile classes. At the same time, arose the question of identity and a desire to appropriate social manners and lifestyle of the colonisers. Jayawardena writes:

To the new rich man or woman, the individual question “who am I?” had a particular relevance. If the answer was “I am rich, but of ‘low’ caste, ‘heathen religion, despised

ethnic group, with illiterate daughters”, clearly the situation called for change...Thus, along with the growth of merchant capitalism, there developed a preoccupation with image, self-representation, status, social hierarchy and women’s position in society.

(xiii)

However, as Jayawardena notes,

As in many colonies, the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie was the product of a specific colonial form of capitalist production. It was an appendage of imperialism, a “dependent” as opposed to an “independent” class...the bourgeoisie as a class did not develop any serious antagonism to the colonial rulers and it remained satisfied with political concessions and limited constitutional reforms. (viii)

It was not long that they remained satisfied with the political representation they were granted within the constitution. Instead of resisting the colonial government’s infamous ‘divide and rule’ policy, the colonial bourgeoisie turned against each other, as they were alerted to their ‘separate’ ethnic identities which now began to have political implications. Although ethnic identities pre-existed colonisation, those were so far not codified with political meaning and value. Ethnic identity was till then not associated with the question of representation of numerical majority or numerical minority, and therefore, was not so blatantly linked to power to rule over the island. Krishna writes:

The fragmenting of an incipient Indian or Sri Lankan populace into these eternally divided groups changed the politics in a fundamental way: it moved the idea of *representation* from within a realm of equal citizens to one of numerically proportionate *representativeness* of these fragmented groups. To put it differently, it was now argued that political and economic power, in order to be fairly and equitably distributed, ought to match closely the numerical proportions that various minority

communities and majority communities comprised in the nation-at-large. (1999: 51; emphasis in the original)

It was, therefore, not a very simplistic fragmentation between numerical majority and numerical minority initially – the thrust was more on representation. For example, the Tamils were overrepresented in the white collar jobs, whereas the Sinhalese were underrepresented in the same. Later, when electoral politics based on universal suffrage came to decide the fate of the nation, ethnic tensions were infinitely fuelled; and the nation came to be imagined in more flatly majoritarian ways. The numerical majority, as discussed earlier, hell-bent on ousting the Tamil minority, began re-imagining the nation by inventing a history of an exclusively Sinhalese ownership of the island.

The rise of the colonial bourgeois consciousness of identity was significantly buttressed by the revivalist movements launched by all religious groups during the colonial period as a resistance to the Christian missionary zeal of converting the natives – Buddhist, Hindus, and Muslims. These movements were launched, not only to reinstate faith in the indigenous religions but also with the view of modernising older ways of life. The Protestant makeover of Buddhism was a result of this revivalist project, as explained above. This was the moment when ethnic and religious identities converged with each other to form distinct sub-national identity categories – Tamil Hindus or Sinhalese Buddhists – which did not have such definitive boundaries and were not understood in majority/minority terms.

Although Ceylon did not have an organised freedom struggle, the nationalist ideologies on which the revolution turned were adopted by the Ceylonese colonial bourgeoisie. Within nationalist discourses, the family, as a symbolic site where values and morals are inculcated in the future citizens of the nation, underwent a further transfiguration, whereby women were pushed further into the domestic sphere, at least metaphorically. The family was, ironically,

saddled with the social and cultural functions attributed to it in Victorian England. Malathi de Alwis (2007) echoes Partha Chatterjee (1986, 1993) in analysing the transition of the family, in the wake of nationalist consciousness in Ceylon:

The home became the ultimate space which the missionaries sought to encroach upon and re-fashion while the nationalists, in turn, sought to close it off...Woman, as the repository of tradition and culture, as the core of the home and exemplar of domesticity, and most importantly, as the reproducer, nurturer and caretaker of future generations, was the terrain upon which such discourses and debates were articulated and fought over. (185)

This figurative association of the family and the woman with national honour and prestige was derived from Victorian Christian ideas of the home and the ideal womanhood, as explained above. But, it was indigenised with an aggressive dismissal of the West as corrupt and morally depraved, much in the same manner as Protestant Buddhism, despite its indebtedness to the organisational forms and norms of Protestant Christianity, vociferously resisted Christian colonisation of the Ceylonese home and its faith. (see, Obeyesekere, 1970). As I shall be discussing in the following chapters, this symbolic currency imposed upon the woman was theoretically sustained during the ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamil, notwithstanding conspicuous participation of female combatants in the war. Repeated rape and molestation of women of both communities during the war, a symbolic emasculation of the men of the rival community, underline the role women still played within each ethno-nationalist discourse in post-independence Ceylon. Ironically, women's and queer rights activists are still socially vitiated as anti-nationalists for being funded by foreign (western) agencies. Freedom from hetero-patriarchal power structures demanded by the sexually marginalised is still projected in the media as unpatriotic and equivalent to debauchery. (See, Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002; and De Rose 2016)

The family has undergone remarkable transformations, owing to the war, both intra- and international displacements of several families caused by the war, and emergence of women-led households, for it was mostly men who got killed in the war. While women no longer remained confined within the precincts of the domestic sphere and acquired high visibility within the public domain with increasing gender equality in access to education, queer men and women began ‘coming out’, assisted by the emergence of a global LGBTQ Movement which was adapted by local Sri Lankan NGOs in the mid-1990s, more than a decade after the economic liberalisation in 1977. Despite these changes, the hetero-patriarchal model of the family has remained unaltered, and can still be explained by the colonial model of the heteronormative monogamous family discussed above. Although some amendments to the law in the 1980s, especially, the introduction of the penal-code to eliminate gender-based violence, can be seen as positive developments, the legal system, in general, is still not supportive of women’s rights as human rights. The same holds true for queer citizen-subjects. Jayaweera (2002) rues:

It is doubtful whether any policy over the years has been purposefully directed at countering the social construction of gender. Consequently, gender role stereotypes, misperceptions of “masculinity” and “femininity” and ideologies of women’s domestic role have been perpetuated. (37)

Therefore, notwithstanding the social, economic and political changes impacting upon the family, the basic nationalist template of understanding the concept of the family and gender hierarchies and power relations within it remains more or less unaltered even within expatriate Sri Lankan communities.

Exchanging the nation with the family in the novel: Continuities and ruptures

Although the family is identified as the foundation of the nation, the family is also the space within which counter-discourses to the nation and nationalism are often encountered. The nation-state has been most frequently imagined through the novel, both in Europe where the form originated, and also in its colonies, where the form was adapted, both by vernacular and English language writers, to remarkable success. Sudipta Kaviraj raises a few questions which modern literature – particularly, the novel – in South Asia addressed:

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What was the nature of the self – did modernity alter this nature? What was the character of power under conditions of modern history? How is the power of the modern state felt by the individuals? How does the modern political movement, so central to politics in modern times, affect the nature of personality of a sensitive individual who responds to a revolutionary call? [...] How do individuals cope with the transience of affections, the fragility of social ties? (2014: 4)

These questions could be best answered by locating the novelistic narratives within the modern family, whereby the ‘most powerful incentives for the moral persuasion of modernity’ (Kaviraj 2014: 7) were produced. The Sinhalese novel arrived a little late compared to its Indian counterparts – *Meena* (1905) by Simon Silva, an intense love story, is considered to be the first Sinhalese novel to be published. Focusing on the individual, a woman’s passion, this novel was a product and producer of modernity. Like several other South Asian vernacular novels of this time, *Meena* ‘produced a shadow world of romantic love which affected actual lives of intimacy in an immensely powerful fashion, providing to real people a powerful sentimental education, breaching the immovable authority of traditional conventions’ (Kaviraj 2014: 8). The Sinhala novel came of age with Martin Wickramasinghe, in particular with his trilogy – *Gamperaliya* (The Uprooted, 1944),

Yuganthaya (The End of the Era, 1949) and *Kaliyugaya* (Age of Destruction, 1957). Wickramasinghe, narrating the changing nature of intimate relationships, owing to the transition from a feudal agrarian economy to a modern capitalist one, chose the family as the site of action. The intergenerational family saga dramatises the gradual disenchantment with the extended family and the village and embracing of more individualistic lives facilitated by modern capitalism. Wickramasinghe's epic saga in the form of the novel fictionalised the evolution of the (Sinhalese) nation, dwindling of traditional values, and underlined, albeit ruefully, the inevitability of modernity replacing older ways of life. Anupama Mohan (2012), pitting Wickramasinghe's trilogy against the novels of Leonard Woolf and Michael Ondaatje, shows how his novels were both products and producers of Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalist discourses. Talking about *Gamperaliya*, Mohan observes:

In the novel, the metonymic focus on the lives of a Sinhala-speaking Buddhist rural population allows for a powerful evocation of a cultural identity buttressed by tradition and history, that even under the yoke of colonial rule remains resilient; what such assembling leaves out are those minorities (ethnic/linguistic/religious) whose lack of visibility in the nationalist narrative was to have serious repercussions for Sri Lankan polity from the 1970s onwards. (27)

The Tamil novel, *Nilakkilli* (1973) by A. Balamanoharan, on the other hand, imagined an idyllic village, untarnished by colonial modernity, where the economy thrives on the villagers' working in harmony on the land. Influenced deeply by the Gandhian ideologies of celebrating the village as the locus of real Indianness, *Nilakkilli* ends with the inevitability of the loss of this pre-colonial paradise to colonial modernity and the city. Just like Wickramasinghe, Balamanoharan critiques the rapid westernisation to which traditional lives were forced to yield. Sudipta Kaviraj summarises the social function fulfilled by these novels:

They present an aesthetic representation of what a modern life is, usually in an idealized form. And they help constitute a moral ideal, contributing to people's conversion to that ideal almost surreptitiously through the silent persuasion of aesthetic enjoyment. (2014: 36)

In this manner in the novels written in the colonial period the modern family, markedly different from its local pre-colonial forms, has often been symbolically linked with the nation. Interestingly, Benedict Anderson, (1983) in his famous analogy of how the novel imagines the nation, also deploys the trope of the family: 'Take, for illustrative purposes, a segment of a simple novel-plot, in which a man (A) has a wife (B) and a mistress (C), who in turn has a lover (D)' (1983: 25). The family he imagines is a crumbling one, with the husband engaged in an extra-marital liaison with his mistress, of which the wife is oblivious. It is further complicated by the mistress having a second lover. In this little fiction, which Anderson conceives to explain the function of the novel, what stands out conspicuously is the fragile nature of monogamy in marriage, often upheld as mandatory for the survival of the nation. While elucidating how the novel imagines the nation, Anderson, actually, shows how the novel also has the potential to provide a counter-discourse to the idea of the nation, nationalism, and obedience to the state, by bringing to the fore individual lives and emotional histories which have an extraordinary power to dismantle the monopoly of hegemonic narratives. This is particularly achieved by the novel's emphasis on the agency of the individual located within a network of several social relations. These social relations, on the other hand, involve emotional investment on part of the individual. As historian Rajat K. Ray (2001), in his attempt to make sense of how emotional histories have been constructed in the Bengali novel of the 19th and early 20th century, notes:

The emotions of men and women flow on their own course below the process of outward change. The public annals are of little assistance to the historian in opening a

window into their souls. The flow of emotions leaves its clearest imprint in literature, confidential diaries, and personal letters. (37)

Postcolonial Sri Lankan expatriate writers have also extensively used the novel as a vehicle to express their discontents with the nation, and by default, the family. In many of the expatriate Sri Lankan novels, aggressive hetero-patriarchal nationalism triumphs over the various forces resisting it. For that is the local reality. But the sympathy, in tune with global intellectual discourses of non-conformist minority politics, remains with those who resist, despite their failure. The hetero-normative structure of the family, the primary site of action in the expatriate novel, remains unaltered, but the critique advanced by those who defy it, unveil its mechanisms of oppression which from a global perspective needs to change. The dialogic space of the novel composed of the voices of individuals also highlights the unfeasibility of symbolically substituting the nation with the family at all times. For, families constituted of real people, connected to each other by emotional ties, have the agency to dissociate themselves from the domineering discourses of the nation, in favour of a less constricting transnational space. The expatriate novel's situatedness within a less rigid transnational space, effectuating a rupture between the nation and the family, is best exemplified by queer characters having no legitimate place within nationalist registers in Sri Lanka or within Sri Lankan ghettos abroad. While the nation and the hegemonic narrations of the nation constantly deny the existence of homosexuals or identify them as abominable criminals, the family narratives give queer characters access to national discourses, disrupting their thrust on compulsory heteronormativity. At least at one instance, this had a far-reaching political impact – Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994) was read by the Sri Lankan President, which in turn inaugurated a national debate on the need to repeal the anti-sodomy law in the country. This draconian law, as mentioned earlier, was a colonial imposition, which has been

retained and read up⁹ years after homosexuality was decriminalised in England. The State and the queer citizen-subject are constantly at war, the latter often living in the fear of persecution. The State's intractable resistance to accepting homosexuality as 'normal' is a classic case of 'postcolonial anxiety' as Krishna (1999) elucidates:

The story of what once happened in Europe constitutes the knowledge that empowers state elites as they attempt to fashion their nations in the image of what are considered successful nation-states. Both the past and the future become an imitative and thankless quest to prove that supremely unworthy maxim: "We are as good as" Premised on this narrative of what once happened "out there," postcolonial elites attempt to remake the recalcitrant clay of plural civilizations into lean, uniform, hypermasculine, and disciplined nation-states. I consider postcolonial anxiety to be this attempt at replicating historical originals that are ersatz to begin with. (ix)

It would be interesting to note what the Sri Lankan queer activist Sherman de Rose, the Executive Director of Companions on a Journey, says in a recent speech about this pathological homophobia in Sri Lanka. He seems to articulate an extremely disturbing 'postcolonial anxiety':

At this juncture, Sri Lankans condemn foreign powers exerting undue influence in our country's affairs. Likewise, we, as people of alternative sexualities, strongly oppose suppressive laws imposed on us during the colonial era. These laws should go as they were never part of the Sri Lankan culture or morality. Before the colonizers, ours was a more accepting, fluid and open society which accepted differences. *We are*

⁹ In a momentous verdict in 1995, the Sri Lankan court read up article 365 of the penal code to include female-on-female sex as punishable offence within the already existing colonial law criminalizing only male-on-male sex. This incident till date remains unprecedented in the history of South Asia.

striving to be a modern society with culturally deep rooted values. For such a society, these archaic laws imposed on us by the colonizers, such as Section 365 of the Sri Lankan Penal Code, will be a hindrance. (2012: n. pag; emphasis added)

This speech is particularly intriguing: what modernity is the queer rights activist striving to achieve by deleting the colonial law which itself was a product of modernity? It is certainly a modernity different from the one brought in by the colonialists. In the aspiration for achieving this modernity, the nation itself is not to be negated, as evidenced by De Rose's proud assertion of his culture's 'deep-rooted values'. His aim is to officially include within those values respect and recognition for homosexuality. At the same time, he condemns neo-colonial interferences, and calls for an urgency to preserve one's national identity in the face of such 'undue influence'. So, what form of modernity is De Rose advocating? This is, again, similar to Bauman's (2011) concept of 'liquid modernity' – a nation-state cannot hope to be modern enough unless it participates in global discourses of progress, human rights and identity politics. Yet, it cannot afford to lose its indigenous uniqueness at the expense of merging itself with the global. De Rose's speech is aligned with a current trend in the global debates surrounding homosexuality –

[T]he current debates around changing form of homosexuality is presenting a choice between political economy, which argues for universalist trends, and anthropology, which argues for cultural specificities. (Altman 2001: 31)

This often gives rise to a 'nationalist version of homosexuality' which makes 'romantic claims to a precolonial heritage which is seen as differentiating them from Western homosexuals' (Altman 2001: 35). The expatriate queer novels from Sri Lanka I shall be

analysing in this thesis are all situated within the cross-currents of cultural transmission between the global and the local, between mobile lives and identities fixed to a region. While acknowledging, albeit not uncritically, the queer-positivity of America or Canada, these expatriate novels do not necessarily claim their legitimacy from western cultures. At the first opportunity, these novels refer back to a precolonial heritage of sexual fluidity and androgyny, thereby establishing the authenticity of a queer nation, which underwent a heteronormative transfiguration under colonial rule. In Selvadurai's *Swimming in the MonsoonSea* (2005), for example, the protagonist's coming to terms with his sexuality is enabled by a chance encounter with an androgynous statue of the Buddha, also a site of cultural amalgamation where two apparently very different styles converged:

One from Greece, which came through Afghanistan [...] represented in the classical folds of the Buddha's robes. The other style was borrowed from Kushan dynasty of Mathura, from which came the rounded – even slightly female – body of the Buddha, derived from a tradition of male fertility spirits. (Selvadurai 187-188)

In the construction of national identities, some myths are privileged over others. The myth of the male fertility spirits is one such myth which has been carefully obliterated. Selvadurai revives it to reinforce his culture's traditional, even timeless, queer positivity, which does not need the sanction of comparatively more recent Euro-American discourses of sexualities to ascertain its authenticity. Just like, De Rose's speech, these novels, despite their engagement with current global libretto of sexual identity politics, cast a nostalgic glance at a local past, untarnished by colonial rule. They aim at re-making the modern nation, by turning the searchlights on lost or suppressed myths, histories and folklores, drawn from the repertoire of local cultural histories. In so doing, these novels make a strong case for a homosexual

nationality to (re)emerge. Although most of these novels do not always end with a triumphant inclusion of queer members within the fold of the family, the interstices of sexual fluidity within the family the novels reveal in the process, work towards deconstructing the heteronormative nation. And it goes without saying that the ‘queer’ in these novels becomes the analogical category for hybridity of identities which the post-war Sri Lankan novel constantly celebrates in order to counter the arrogant nationalistic thrust on homogeneity. Therefore, the Sri Lankan queer novel, by advocating what Balibar calls ‘equaliberty’ (2010/2013), further problematises the deployment of the novel form and its reliance on family narratives for constructing nationalist imaginaries. In other words, the queer novel, which also *queers* the Sri Lankan family, occupies a higher rung in the evolutionary process of the novel which entered the Sri Lankan cultural scene as a vehicle of imagining the emergent nation under the auspices of colonial rule. The focus of this thesis is not only on queer novels, though. I have used the example of the queer novel to highlight the spatio-temporal dynamism of the nation, the family and the novel – all interconnected with each other in intricate ways in the politics of representation of the modern Sri Lankan nation. The predominantly queer feminist position I have taken in my analysis in this thesis, I believe, would bring out the disruptive potential of the novels in their questioning of constructions of masculinities, femininities and ageing within the family. This in turn would reveal the flaws in imagining the postcolonial Sri Lankan nation-state which might possibly open up a new way of rethinking the nation in the aftermath of the civil war, accelerating the process of peace-building.

Chapter 2

Fathers, Husbands and Sons: Politics of Masculinity and the Family

Militarization and the centralization of authority in a country automatically entail a resurgence of the authority of the father.

– Fanon¹⁰

Sri Lankan Masculinities: Theoretical Frameworks, Historical Contexts

In South Asian families power equations between husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters often go unnoticed: the wife is often expected to be unquestioningly subservient to the husband, an ideal son is never expected to question the father, and a sister is often expected to accept her less privileged status than her brother without demur. In other words, in most cases, fathers, husbands, brothers and sons enjoy a more privileged status within the family, compared to the female members, as if by some natural law. However with the changing political and economic scenarios in recent times, men's position as 'head of the household' has been sufficiently challenged, most strongly by the growing opportunities of women's paid employment outside the home, and the rapidly dissolving gender-based boundary between the home and the world. The increasing visibility of queer men and women and single mothers, the escalating plurality of gender identities, laws protecting the rights of women, a steady growth in the number of women choosing to stay single, advanced reproductive technologies enabling queer couples to reproduce offspring, and the social media's recurring emphasis on emotions and empathy as superior traits compared to rationalism and competitiveness, have further destabilised the foundation of hegemonic masculinity.

Consequently, a new spectrum of masculine identities has emerged, beyond those subsumed under the notion of patriarchy. 'The rule of the father', as patriarchy literally translates into, is perhaps no longer inviolable, or so it seems. In fact, many social and cultural theorists have begun seeing this as a 'crisis-in-masculinity', which is, however, still very elusive, ill-

¹⁰ *Black Skin, White Masks*, 141-142.

defined, and sometimes dismissed as totally unfounded (see Baddiel 1999). The question which is often raised is whether this crisis is actual or discursive. A recent survey entitled, 'Broadening Gender: Why Masculinities Matter' (2014), conducted by CARE International, Sri Lanka, across four districts of the island, discloses an alarming reality. Sexual violence against women, child abuse, domestic violence, and homophobic brutality perpetrated by men are on the rise in the country, and the Foreword to the report advocates the importance of counselling men, especially younger men, in order to educate them in re-imagining masculinity through an alternative lens:

The study highlights the need to transform harmful social norms that perpetuate male sexual entitlement or the belief of some men that they have the right to control women and their bodies. We need to work with young people to nurture healthy attitudes, practices and relationships for a future without violence and discrimination. We need to change the idea that manhood is defined by being tough. Alternative versions of manhood that are non-violent, gender equitable and encourage empathy and respect can become the norm. Finally, we need to protect children from violence and nurture healthy childhoods by working with parents and caretakers. (de Mel, Peiris & Gomez 2014: iv)

One may ask whether this perceived 'crisis-in-masculinity' is manifested in the increasing aggression men show against whatever or whoever threatens to confront what is understood as 'male honour'. In other words, this perceived crisis, real or discursive, does not necessarily dis-empower or *soften* men, leading to a more equitable reformulation of gender relationships within the family or the nation at large; rather, the fear of disempowerment it generates, might conversely lead to a re-emergence of a vengeful and an even more destructive masculinity. Especially, in a militant state that Sri Lanka has been for decades, reinforcement of patriarchal authority, despite changing socio-economic conditions, is indisputable. Therefore, the question Anthony Clare raised at the onset of the new millennium is a crucial one:

At the beginning of the twenty-first century it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that men are in serious trouble ... It is true that patriarchy has not been overthrown, but its justification is in disarray...In the world of equal opportunity for the sexes, can men renegotiate the relationship with themselves and with women? (2000: 3, 4, 8)

The CARE report suggests that renegotiation might not be easy. However, it is also undeniable that currently, ‘Family relationships are less obviously organised around gender; there is talk of “partners” rather than “spouses” and of “parents” rather than of mothers and fathers’ (Morgan 2001: 230). Although Morgan is talking about contemporary American families, these changes are being gradually noticed in global South Asia or within South Asian diasporas, particularly within the urban middle class. Fathers, husbands, brothers and sons still wield more power within the family; but, it appears that it is not as authoritative as it used to be. However, it is important to note that such power is enjoyed only when they also perform according to certain normative templates, in a given time and place, of *being men*. In other words, apparently powerful men are also caught in the trap of performance and the necessity of repeating such performance all through their lives, always in the exigency not to let their perceived manliness to be questioned.¹¹ Feminist and queer critiques of dominant masculinities, on the other hand, are opening up opportunities for men to free themselves of the fetters of such compulsive performance.

Morgan, in his article, ‘Family, Gender and Masculinities’ (2001), proposes ‘a series of sociological models through which historical change is often constructed or understood’ (224) in order to chart the changing dimensions of masculinities within the American family from ancient to postmodern times— ‘traditional’, ‘early modern’, ‘late modern’ and ‘postmodern’. These models are not water-tight compartments, but often overlap, one carrying within it residues of the previous models. These models are useful in delineating changing dimensions of masculinities within the Ceylonese/Sri Lankan family as well. In case of Ceylon/Sri Lanka, however, these could be renamed as ‘pre-colonial’, ‘colonial’, ‘postcolonial’ and ‘neo-colonial’, each model roughly corresponding with the time-frame of the models proposed by Morgan. These models, contingent on particular historical times, reveal that ‘crisis-in-masculinity’ is nothing really new, not simply a product of neo-

¹¹ As an instance, one may cite a report by CALM (or Campaign Against Living Miserably), a mental health charity. Alarmed by the increasing propensity among men to commit suicide, CALM conducted a survey across Britain in 2014. Interestingly, 42 per cent of the respondents held the pressure to remain strong and invulnerable in the times of crisis as one of the major reasons behind their feeling miserable and suicidal. The Telegraph, UK, quoted the chief executive of CALM as claiming: “The research underlines that so often their own worst enemies, men need new rules for survival. Outmoded, incorrect and misplaced male self-beliefs are proving lethal and the traditional strong, silent response to adversity is increasingly failing to protect men from themselves.... So far, Government and society has failed to act on this self-inflicted yet preventable slaughter of our husbands, partners, brothers and sons.” (n.pag.) See, “‘A crisis of masculinity’: men are struggling to cope with life’, *The Telegraph*, 19 November 2014, Web, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/11238596/A-crisis-of-masculinity-men-are-struggling-to-cope-with-life.html>

capitalism, although it might be most discernible now. In fact, these models are indicative of the fact that each generation of men has experienced this so-called crisis, albeit in disparate ways. Beynon (2000) quotes Mangan (1997), who holds:

Crisis is...a condition of masculinity itself. Masculine gender identity is never stable; its terms are continually been redefined and re-negotiated, and the gender performance continually re-staged. Certain themes and tropes inevitably re-appear with regularity, but each era experiences itself in different ways. (Benyon 90)

While a pre-colonial patriarchal Ceylonese society underwent a remarkable transition through a long period of European colonialism, its notions of masculinities and crises, which were bound up with religious discourses, Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic, also changed dramatically. In postcolonial Sri Lanka, the history of which is dominated by a long civil war, gory ethnic riots and unprecedented militarisation, notions of masculinities underwent further changes, aligning themselves with belligerent models. One cannot but wonder whether in a country such as Sri Lanka which has barely seen respite from violent ethnic strife for over fifty years or so is it more difficult to perceive masculinity as performance, given that the capacity of perpetrating violence is applauded as desirable with increasing militarisation? It is quite evident that such political unrest that has separated family members, collapsed emotional ties and instigated in people a vengeful spirit would breed a more aggressive form of masculinity; how difficult, then, is it for other less privileged forms of masculinities to survive? Or conversely, one is also tempted to ask whether in a war torn nation-state in which political violence and militant worldviews have shaped quotidian life for years, the need to privilege emotions over the capacity for violence among men is being felt now.

It is also important to note that continuous warfare has drained the country of its economic resources, leading to impoverishment of the citizens and fierce competition in the job market. After the liberalisation of the economy in 1977, which took place six years before the bloodiest ethnic riot Sri Lanka had ever experienced, the situation did not improve or in fact, could not improve. The majority was not benefitted by the open economy, and, unequal distribution of wealth further reinforced class differences (See Hettige 1997). In fact, one of the primary reasons behind the civil war in postcolonial Sri Lanka, is rooted in the controversy over availability of jobs to a more privileged English-educated middle class, as against the non-English speaking youth. This lack of access to the job market, further

shrunk by the civil war and pogroms, rendered the sense of masculinity of those at the receiving end of it even more problematical. The urgency to safeguard ethnicity and territory converged with that, leading to catastrophic political strife. Migration to India, Australia, New Zealand, and the Middle Eastern and Western countries to escape the turbulent political situation and in search of career opportunities is rampant among the Sri Lankan youth, especially men, for the past four decades. In these new locations, sometimes in the presence of the family or in the absence of it, do newer crises of masculinity lead to the necessity to rethink masculinities as they were understood at home? In this chapter, I shall try to delve into these queries in the analysis of the novels that cut across a complex matrix of masculinist identities within Ceylonese/Sri Lankan families, expatriate as well as local, each shaped by specific historical contingent circumstances. Investigations into the formulation of masculinist ideals might open up a different way of approaching the peace-building project.

Men: A Gendered Category

During the last three decades masculinities, crisis-in-masculinity, and the changing roles of men within the modern family have entered the arena of gender and sexuality studies in South Asia, so far dominated by discourses of feminist and queer politics. For a very long time, men were not even looked upon as ‘gendered’ subjects: ‘Strange it may sound, men are the “invisible” gender’, says Kimmel (2005: 5). Therefore, men’s entry into the discursive field of gender and sexuality studies was almost infinitely deferred. Drawing on a Chinese proverb, Kimmel wittily describes this late entry as – ‘[T]he fish are the last to discover the ocean’ (2005: 5). In fact, he holds this late entry responsible for the perpetuation of gender inequalities in society:

That men remain unaware of the centrality of gender in their lives perpetuates the inequalities based on gender in our society, and keeps in place the power of men over women, and the power some men hold over other men, which are among the central mechanisms of power in society. (2005: 6)

It was in the 1970s that European, American and Australian academia began looking critically at men and masculinities¹²; however, as mentioned in the introduction, it wasn't before 1981 that one of the most influential works that inaugurated a critical discourse on normative organisation of male sex role was eventually published: Joseph Pleck's *The Myth of Masculinity*. However, in South Asia men as a 'gendered' category began to be analysed only very recently, although the first important work in this field can be traced back to 1980. Ashis Nandy's *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture* (1980) and 'The Psychology of Colonialism: Sex, Age and Ideology in British India' (1982) are two seminal works which opened up discussions on construction of South Asian masculinities under colonial rule; Mrinalini Sinha's *Colonial Masculinity: the 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the late Nineteenth Century* (1995) which came after a gap of thirteen years was another seminal work in this field. H. Kanitkar's essay, 'Real True Boys: Moulding the Cadets of Imperialism' (1994) also contributed significantly to the newly emerging discourses of colonial masculinities. However, interesting ethnographic, cultural and historical research on men and masculinities that address changing definitions of manhood vis-à-vis a politically violent era of civil wars and communal riots, ethno-nationalist fundamentalism, and cross-border terrorism that have characterised South Asian histories since the high period of colonial rule to the present day, have begun to appear only very recently. These research projects locate discourses of masculinities within local histories of South Asia: rapid changes in economic and social organisation of life, the impact of open economy on family and society, new consumerist cultures involving both gay and straight men, powerful presence of women in public domains so far reserved exclusively for men, changing nature of the family and apparently changing power equations between men and women within it, frequent transnational relocations, growing momentum of the LGBTQ movement, and emergence of cinema and cricket as major forms of entertainment generating new cultures of hero worship.

However, most researches on South Asian masculinities focus specifically on India, within which Sri Lanka features only marginally. In this chapter I hope to address this lacuna to

¹² In *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia*, Kimmel and Arosen (2004) identify Marc Fiegen-Fasteau's *The Male Machine* (1974) and Warren Farrell's *The Liberated Man* (1975), Deborah David and Robert Brannon's *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* (1976) and Joseph Pleck and Jack Sawyer's *Men and Masculinity* (1974) as the first few serious investigations into men, masculinity, and gender roles. The last two books 'presented panoramic views of men's lives from within a framework that accepted the feminist critique of traditional gender arrangements' (xxi).

some extent, but without pretending to take anthropological or sociological perspectives, although heavily drawing upon these disciplines (Obeyesekere 1984; Jeganathan 2000; De Silva 1999 & 2004) for the purpose of literary analysis. Examining select literary texts that were produced within the Sri Lankan diaspora in the recent past, I shall make an endeavour to make sense of how masculinities are constructed, perpetuated and performed within the affective space of the modern Sri Lankan family. Although the main title of the chapter indicates that I would be solely focusing on the male members of the family, I shall also locate women within the force-field of masculinity studies to explore how South Asian women are often co-opted by hetero-patriarchal discourses, and end up replicating similar forms of violence, often identified with aggressive masculinities, when in power. To quote Kimmel:

The historical construction of gender is a process through which various forms of power are reproduced and power becomes indelibly inscribed onto everyday life. It is impossible to speak of the historical construction of gender without speaking about power. In fact, power is so central to the historical construction of masculinities that it has been invisible to most social scientists who have studied it. Thus social theory and social science have done exactly what cannot be done: analyze masculinity without discussing power. (2005: 6)

To make sense of Sri Lankan modern families and masculinities, hegemonic or marginalised, it is important to review western models and theories of masculinities and manhood and verify their usability in specific Sri Lankan contexts, without losing sight of what Victor J Seidler flags as a caution. Talking about the inadequacies of the theory of hegemonic masculinities, Seidler writes:

So the theory of hegemonic masculinity had become hegemonic. It became a universalist theory that could be imported into different regional contexts. According to such a theory you simply have to 'fill in' the cultural differences and rethink the relations of gender power within a specific culture. This renders cultural differences less significant and threatens to make them invisible as masculinities are identified exclusively as relationships of power and as the tensions between men's lived experience and prevailing masculinities are dislocated. Rather, it is easy for men's experience to be reduced to exemplars of particular masculinities. (2006: 9)

It would be reductive to align the experiences of different Sri Lankan men as ‘exemplars of particular masculinities’, for the experiences are so varied, and the contexts so disparate, that it is impossible to equate certain models of masculinities with these individual experiences unproblematically. While pre-set models would be conducive in understanding the psychology and behavioural dispositions of these individual men, each of them, as would be seen in the analysis, would also exceed the limitations of these interpretive models.

It would be useful to mention here that it has been often observed that a ‘basic template’ of *being a man* remains unchanged over long swathes of history, and through cultures across the globe, cultures which have come in close contact with each other. Although South Asian theorists, such as Sanjay Srivastava, feel it is undesirable to promote these culturalist ‘deep structures’, Caroline and Filippo Osella believe such these ‘deep structures’ cannot be completely discarded (see Osellas et. al 2004). The diasporic Sri Lankan English novels – *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998), *Funny Boy* (1994), *The Hungry Ghosts* (2013), *When Memory Dies* (1997), *Love Marriage* (2008), *If the Moon Smiled* (2000), and *The Match* (2006) – I would analyse in this chapter, although set in different time periods, within different social spaces, and written from different ethnic and class positions, *do* reveal certain ‘deep structures’ that facilitate the understanding of gender and sexuality within the Ceylonese/Sri Lankan families, sharing a common history, despite their diverse experiences.

Masculinity and Victimhood in Sri Lanka

In 1993, in an article published in *Theory and Society*, R. W. Connell wrote:

The fact that conferences about “masculinities” are being held is significant in its own right. Twenty-five years ago no one would have thought of doing so. Both the men-and-masculinity literature that has bubbled up in the interval and the debates at conferences and seminars, testify that in some part of the Western intelligentsia, masculinity has become problematic in a way it never was before. (597)

Connell’s journalist friend had an interesting observation to make, when in 1989, the former authored a short article on the ‘new man’ for a Sydney based daily: ‘[M]asculinity seemed to be the flavor of the year in journalism, with stories about men at childbirth, fathering, the

“new sensitive man”, men doing housework, and so on’ (qtd. in Connell 1993: 598). It was the time when very significant works on masculinities began to emerge, when men could no longer afford to remain invisible as gendered subjects and in various instances enjoy the privilege of such invisibility.

Carrying forward the line of argument inaugurated by Brod, Kimmel, Hearn, and Connell himself in the late 1980s, *Masculinities: The Science of Masculinity* published in 1995 proved to be one of the most influential investigations into the construction of masculinities. When, in the 1980s, Connell, Kimmel and others had begun serious enquiry into masculinities and manhood, there were not too many works to reckon with. Connell writes in the Preface to the second edition of the book (2005):

...there was already a genre of “books about men” that had become hugely popular. This was a mixture of pop psychology, amateur history and ill-tempered mythmaking, and I hated it. Backward-looking, self-centred stereotypes of masculinity were the last things we needed. I didn’t want to reinforce the imaginary identity of “men” that was created by the very existence of this genre of books. (xiii)

Connell organised his book around intriguing enquiries into psychological analysis of men’s behaviour, their relationships with women and other men, the prescribed roles they play in society, the inescapable male ‘body’ and social constructions of masculinities by locating them within certain preset structure of gender relations and culture of living. However, Connell’s work focusing majorly on hegemonic masculinities takes off from the hypothesis that men are always in control, enjoy power and privileges, often denied to women. That tends to show masculinity or masculinities as a ‘problem’; but, what is more important is to examine how men live out different kinds of masculinities, in different historical contexts. In a given time and space, there could be several co-existing models of masculinity, one privileged over the other, one honoured more than the other.

To begin with it was important to dispel the populist way of looking at masculinity: characteristics or qualities typical to the biological male. Kimmel (1994) writes:

Manhood is neither static nor timeless; it is historical. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble

up to consciousness from our biological makeup; it is created in culture. Manhood means different things at different times to different people. We come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of “others”—racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women. (120)

As evident, Masculinity Studies, just like Feminist and Queer theories, took off from this point: collapsing the biologically determinist view of masculinity. As Sanjay Srivasatava (2013) puts it:

The notions of “making” and “producing” are crucial to the study of masculine identities, for they point to their historical and social nature. The various discourses of “proper” masculine behaviour — in novels, films, advertisements, for example — would be unnecessary if it was a naturally endowed characteristic. The very fact that masculinity must consistently be reinforced — “if you buy this motorcycle you’ll be a real man” — says something about the tenuous and fragile nature of gender identities. It also suggests the possibility of foregrounding alternative models of masculinity. (n.pag)

Simultaneously, the essentialist notion of all men as perpetrators of hetero-patriarchal hegemony and violence has been widely challenged. To quote Lynne Segal (1999):

Many men have little or no purchase on the power that is supposed to be the prerogative of their sex while a significant minority of women have access to considerable power and privilege. Gender binaries never exist in the contexts of race, class, age, sexual orientation and multiple other belongings—each with their deeply entrenched connections to power and authority, or the lack of it. (42)

In other words, some men might have no agency at all. The primary line of argument that inaugurated post-structuralist Masculinity Studies was, therefore, the idea that men too are ‘gendered’ beings and are no less victimised by hetero-patriarchy and masculinity/masculinities is/are socially, culturally and historically constructed. Judith Keagan Gardiner (2011) observes:

Although dominant or hegemonic forms of masculinity work constantly to maintain an appearance of permanence, stability, and naturalness, the numerous masculinities in every society are contingent, fluid, socially and historically constructed, changeable and constantly changing, variously institutionalized, and recreated through media representations and individual and collective performances. (11)

Men are often expected to perform according to certain codes identified as *appropriate* to their sex, departure from which is severely castigated. The oft-used reprimand ‘be a man’ used against those who fail to live up to certain preset codes of masculinity carries in it the threat to perform in accordance with those codes, bringing to light the burden of victimhood men carry as well. The problem is this victimhood is more often than not overlooked. As an instance it may be mentioned that hundreds of queer men destroy their lives under the pressure of conforming to this demand of *being a man* and remain in self-denial or immured within unhappy heterosexual marriages in order not to be labelled unmanly. Although mostly women, children and the aged are easily identified as particularly deprived within the material space of the family, all men, it should be noted, are not equally privileged either. It is quite commonplace in South Asian middle class joint families that the highest earning male member enjoys luxuries and access to everyday resources much more than those male members who do not earn as much. Again, while feminists have often focused on hegemonic masculinities within the family, men’s role as care-givers for ageing parents or siblings or children has been largely ignored. Radhika Chopra points out the necessity to explore these roles as well, which many men loyally observe:

In south Asia, for example, there is a cultural expectation that sons need to extend support to older parents, particularly widowed mothers, an aspect that the men-as-supportive partners programmes overlook... it is... important to be self-conscious that “gendered interventions” that focus only on men as husbands mute whole sets of practices that define the roles and subject positions of men as sons, fathers and brothers. Taking these other roles into account enables an expansion of the idea of men-as-partners and is conducive to working with men in households. (2003: 1652).

Chopra seems to echo what Seidler (2006) advocates as crucial to challenge reading masculinities as hegemonic only. Pointing out the necessity of discarding a radical feminist position in theorising masculinities, Seidler writes:

By identifying masculinities exclusively in terms of power, Connell's socialist feminism vision tends to share with radical feminisms a limited sense of male transformation, of how men can change. It also fails to engage critically with feminist discourses around men when necessary. In treating men as always having the power and privileges that are denied to women, it has no sense that men also have hurts, insecurities and sufferings that need to be listened too. We have to recognise diverse pro-feminist positions in relation to men and masculinities, rather than assume that anti-sexist positions that think of masculinity as power remain the only profeminist positions. (11)

This is exactly what analysis of 'family' narratives allows one to do: by locating masculinities within the realm of the 'personal' and the 'emotional', one may engage in a deconstructive analysis of how masculinities are generally perceived.

While interpreting masculinity as a discursive construction that takes its cue primarily from Foucauldian post-structuralism, performativity theory of Butler, queer theorists and discursive psychology has proved widely influential, Caroline Osella, Filippo Osella and Radhika Chopra (2004) warn against the drawback of over-emphasizing the non-natural nature of the subject, the central precept of poststructuralist gender and sexuality discourses:

...such inquiries sometimes fail to pay adequate attention to the issues of power, inequality and social structure, giving an impression of relative freedom in adopting subject position and identity. They also perhaps fail to account sufficiently for the ethnographic facts of regularity: the continual recurrence of normative notions of gender based on two-gender systems; the marginalisation or non-tolerance of "third gender" or aberrant gender positions; and the common ideological insistence on male superiority and the naturalised right to control women and children. (11)

Sanjay Srivastava, evoking Blackwood and Weiringa (1999), also points out the limitations of overdependence on performance theory in the field of masculinity studies. Srivastava writes:

[W]hile performance theory offers significant correctives to biologism and heteronormativity, it may be far too general a framework to offer insights into the specificities of identity and behavior. So, for example, if gender identities are fluid—

as performance theory would imply—then how do we explain the fact that “butch women” in Jakarta base themselves on mythical idealized *male* figures? ... And, further, why is it that a *biologically female* transgendered person from Sri Lanka—who wishes to be recognized as male—bases his idea of manliness around notions of physical strength and aggression...? In other words, gender identities on the ground must account for the social and historical contexts within which performing subjects are nurtured, and this requires more nuanced understanding of what makes the everyday. (2014: 30)

Therefore, a productive way of approaching the question of masculinities within the Ceylonese/Sri Lankan family is to address the ‘everyday’ reality of the subjects in question while addressing gender as performance. However, overdependence on performativity theories might end up generating other forms of essentialisms. Therefore, I feel it is more conducive to approach the subject with a keen ‘sense of selves, persons, as embodied and thereby semi-concretised: as coded into posture, gesture and self-presentation’ (Osella, et al. 2004: 13).

While it is delimiting to elucidate masculinities within Sri Lankan families, local or expatriate, through the lens of European, American and Australian theorists, a purely ethnocentric perspective, centring on local constructions of masculinities also has its drawbacks. It is impossible to imagine any culture to be pure and immune from influences of other cultures; therefore, the ‘dimension of *global history* must now be a part of every ethnography’, since, ‘European imperialism, global capitalism under U.S. hegemony, and modern communications have brought all cultures into contact, obliterated many, and marginalized most’ (Connell 1993: 601; emphasis in the original). In Sri Lanka, as in South Asia as a whole, masculinities are to be understood in relation to its arrival as a modern nation through its continuous encounters with European cultures and its remarkably long history as a colonial state. As Srivastava notes: ‘It has been suggested that the binarism and essentialism of modern thought that characterized diverse fields of activity also had a strong influence upon ideas of gender identity’ (2014: 30).

In his talk ‘Our Modernity’, Partha Chatterjee observes: ‘The same historical process that has taught us the value of modernity has also made us the victims of modernity’ (1997: 20). This idea is conspicuous in nationalist discourses of masculinity which adapted the European

model with certain amendments, drawing from pre-colonial histories of masculine cultures. For instance, in order to dispel the European image of the colonised bourgeoisie as ‘effeminate’ races,¹³ the newly enlightened sensitive minds of India, ‘sought a hyper-masculinity or hyper-Ksatriyahood that would make sense to their fellow countrymen (specially to those exposed to the majesty of the Raj) and to the colonizers’ (Nandy 1983: 52). Besides, rapid Europeanization of indigenous cultures and an enthusiastic embracement of the same by the colonial bourgeoisie met with strident censure from the nationalists in South Asia. In Ceylon, the Anagarika Dharmapala, the most influential Buddhist Sinhalese ideologues, vociferously castigated the propensity to discard nationalist outfits in favour of the fashion originating in London and Paris, a practice that was most conspicuous in the Ceylonese low country. Dharmapala held the Evangelists responsible for decimating the culture of the noble Sinhalese, leading to a complete loss of their virility and moral integrity (See De Alwis 1999: 183). In other words, a race of men which was previously characterised by a more vigorous manhood was being feminised by their fascination for the new lifestyle offered by colonial modernity. Even before Dharmapala came to dominate the Sinhalese nationalist scene, in the nationalist writings of Arumugam Navalar, one of the iconic Tamil nationalists, men’s authority was assumed as sacrosanct and women’s liberation as detrimental to the preservation of national culture (See Silva 2004: 100-101). Although much of the criticism was directed towards the adoption of western clothes and a westernised lifestyle by the new woman educated at missionary schools, men too were not spared. Whatever it was, the thrust was on the construction of a hyper-masculine selfhood, either to oppose the colonial feminisation of Ceylonese males or to resist swift Europeanization that threatened to lure men away from their indigenous cultures.¹⁴

¹³ However, it must be noted that ‘effeminate’ was not the blanket adjective used by the colonialists to describe all Indians. For example, the Pathans, the Sikhs, the Gurkhas, etc. were identified as martial races, and were recruited in the imperial army for their loyalty, bravery and physical prowess. See, Streets, H. *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.

¹⁴ It’s intriguing how recently, in 2002, a handbill entitled, “Let Us Preserve the Cultural Identity of Tamil Women!” published by the women’s wing of the LTTE, called for a prescribed dress-code for women in accordance with the traditional Tamil culture. The point in mentioning this is to underpin the continuous subjugation of women within nationalist discourses, the methods of subjugation being so remarkably similar, whether in the early twentieth century or in the new millennium. See, Tambiah, Y. ‘Turncoat Bodies: Sexuality and Sex Work under Militarization in Sri Lanka’. *Gender and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Gender-Sexuality-State-Nation: Transnational Feminist Analysis (Apr., 2005): 243-261. I shall develop this point further in the next chapter.

Interestingly, the new definition of unmanliness that emerged in the nationalist discourses in Ceylon, involved the inability to control women, who, under the influence of modern ideas of freedom imported from the West, were abandoning traditional roles within the domestic space and making a foray into a domain hitherto demarcated as exclusively male (See, De Alwis 1999). In Ceylon, where Sinhalese nationalist theatre played a significant part in constructing the role of the ideal Sinhalese woman, playwrights such as John de Silva (1857-1922) repeatedly portrayed women as bearers of children, preservers of tradition, mostly confined to home, in service of their husbands. These plays, by default, sermonised about what ideal men should be like, while proposing an ideal model for women to follow. One interesting example to cite here could be de Silva's play *Sinhala Parābhava Nātakaya*. The play caustically reprimands women who dare to step beyond the boundaries of the home to embrace a westernised lifestyle. The play advances a moralistic judgement of such a sin by punishing the men related to these women: they are made to pay a heavy price for having failed to control the women obsessed with materialistic gains, western fashion and English education. The men go broke and end up in prison (See, De Mel 2001: 82).

As anti-colonial sentiments began to rise in the early twentieth century, ideas of masculinities began to be reconfigured. The colonial notion of masculinities was not abandoned altogether; but became more nuanced and complicated, as nationalist leaders constantly drew inspiration from pre-colonial models, betraying what McClintock calls, 'the temporal anomaly of nationalism – veering between nostalgia for the past and the impatient, progressive sloughing off of the past' (1995: 358-359). Jani de Silva, one of the pioneer anthropologists to have contributed to understanding changing notions of Sinhalese and Tamil masculinities in postcolonial Sri Lanka, writes:

...the colonies were not a blank page, but terrain already strewn with the debris of former social, cultural and institutional forms and practices. Thus, imported versions of masculinity were confronted everywhere with local notions of selfhood and subjectivity. (2009: 87)

In post-independence Ceylon/Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese urgency to establish their 'legitimate' claim over the island (to which all Tamils, according to them, were outsiders) led to a fierce ethnic cleansing, to which the Tamil minority retaliated violently, unable to put up with the despair of being ousted from a land they never thought was not their own. Etienne Balibar,

delineating the politics of nation-building, writes: ‘Ultimately the nation must align itself, spiritually as well as physically or carnally, with the “race”, the *patrimony to be protected from all degradation*’ (qtd. in McClintock 1995: 353; emphasis added). The Sinhalese nation-building in post-independence Ceylon/Sri Lanka operated more or less on the same logic, in which Sinhalese maleness was constructed against a Tamil Other. However, despite the claims of the Anagarika Dharmapala that the Sinhalese were a hyper-virile race prior to the arrival of the European colonisers, it appears difficult for many to imagine how the Sinhalese and Tamils managed to wield such terrible violence against each other, a violence which was uncharacteristic of either race, particularly those of the upper castes. Analysing the emergence of militant Sinhalese nationalism, the Tamil demand for a separate state, and the aggressive violence of the LTTE assuming total control of the Tamil nationalist movement, Jani De Silva writes:

But most of all, against the vigorous, athletic physique of the Victorian gentleman, feudal Sinhala masculinity was marked by a composed body and sedate bearing. Consequently, in Sinhala discourse, the warrior practice of risking the body – so integral to the gentlemanly code – remained the idiom of minions and underlings who bloodied their hands ... Such a disparagement of the vigorous body as unseemly or undignified is even more manifest in Tamil discourse. Thus, while the confident demeanour of the Victorian gentlemen was admired and emulated, the *modus operandi* of risking the body spawned deep ambiguities. (2009: 88)

De Silva’s ethnographic research makes an attempt to review the processes in which a comparatively sedate race of Sinhalese men and the ‘desk-bound’ figures of the Tamil school teachers or civil servants underwent an unprecedented transformation in the face of territorialist nationalist feuds that began gathering momentum after the official decolonisation of Ceylon.

Hegemonic and underprivileged masculinities: the Sri Lankan Context

In discourses of nation and nationalism in South Asia, the delineation of the nation as a gendered entity is more often than not the entry point. Because the nation is symbolically imagined in terms of domestic genealogies, the same gender and power hierarchies around

which the modern family is organised could be directly imposed on to the nation, without much departure. Anne McClintock (1995) writes:

Since the subordination of woman to man and child to adult was deemed a natural fact, hierarchies within the nation could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social difference as a category of nature. (357-358)

In a comprehensive research on the evolution of the idea of the modern family under colonial rule in South Asia, Mytheli Sreenivas (2009) observes that imposition of colonial law as regards to property rights and its absolute support of male rights over land, overemphasis on monogamy by Christian missionaries, the abjuration of non-blood-related kin as household members, etc. strengthened men's power within the new family, bounded by territoriality and biological ties alone. This led to devaluation of women within the colonial economy and their severe marginalisation within the family. The colonial 'masculinization of economy' to use a phrase by Veena Oldenberg (Sreenivas 2009: 27) brought about sharp gender divisions within the family, within which the absolute power of the male head began to be taken for granted. In nationalist discourses, the woman began to be pushed more into the privacy of the 'home', and was represented as the signifier of its spirituality and tradition, as against the public domain of politics, the 'world' in which men fought a political battle with the European colonisers who had subjugated them. (See Chatterjee 1986; Sarkar 2001)

Elleke Boehmer wrote 'in its iconographies of power, nationalism may be characterised as a male drama' (1992: 233). Partha Chatterjee (1993) echoes him in his claim that,

The figure of the woman often acts as a sign in discursive formations, standing for concepts or entities that have little to do with actuality. Each signification of this kind also implies a corresponding sign in which *the figure of the man is made to stand for concepts and entities*. (68; emphasis added)

While most theorists have significantly contributed to the understanding of the interpellation of women as mothers or dutiful daughters in nationalist discourses in South Asia, sustained critical attention has not been paid to the construction of masculinist identities vis-à-vis the imagined identity of the nation as female. Neluka Silva (2004), the Sri Lankan feminist scholar, writes:

The image of the nation as female body or mother earth functions in one of two ways – either as a “pure” (and synonymously maternal) body, spiritual inviolable and intact, or, as bruised, ravaged, raped and violated by invaders. Both these representations are contingent upon *the input of a male actor, who defines, defends and rescues them*. (23; emphasis added)

While the woman is projected as a metaphor of the nation, in need of protection by male subjects, the brave, dutiful sons of the motherland too are simultaneously burdened with the responsibility of performing and living up to the image of the dauntless protector, rescuer and defender of community honour. George Santayana’s famous declaration – ‘Our nationalism is like our relationship to women: too implicated in our moral nature to be changed honourably and too accidental to be worth changing’ – could have never been uttered by a woman, for national agency is essentially imagined as male (See McClintock 353). And this is true of all nationalisms across the globe. Silva writes:

Élite patriarchal discourse lifts women as symbolic configurations in the Nation’s representational economy. It is the hegemonic, élite male power brokers who draw these contours. They allocate women and men with signs and iconographies of the Nation. Those who, either voluntarily or involuntarily, do not conform to them are invalidated by demonising, feminising and marginalising them. Hence *the non-hero, the revolutionary, the pacifist and the “shell-shocked” soldier, who is emotionally incapacitated by armed conflict, fall outside the parameters of the dominant discourse...* (2004: 25; emphasis added)

In Ceylon the nationalist movement was not as politically intense as it was in the Indian subcontinent; but the idea of the nation which began taking shape within the island since the late nineteenth century was very much rooted in the imagination of the woman-as-nation, to be safeguarded by the heroic sons of the soil. Even the Tamil separatist movement which grew stronger with each passing year in postcolonial Sri Lanka, had the woman as the signifier of the separate state, the Eelam, they were fighting to achieve (Silva 2004: 97). What more, within the nationalist discourses, to which the hetero-patriarchal family is a central trope, men are expected to perpetuate the family/nation through a bloodline, and therefore, reproductive sexuality becomes central to the discourses of the nation. While the reproductively challenged woman or the woman who voluntarily chooses to stay single or the

queer woman automatically become the Other to the nation, queer men are disparagingly written off or tortured as unmanly or diseased, and are either criminalised or elided in the national register as non-existent.

In Europe, the 'homosexual' emerged as a dangerous countertype to normative masculinities towards the end of the nineteenth century, after the term was coined by Karl Kertbeny in 1848; the *fin de siècle* brought several homosexuals out of the closet and a homosexual counterculture began to make its presence felt powerfully, which began to upset the hetero-patriarchal family and traditional ideas of romance, conjugality, coupledness (see Mosse 1998). Consequently, in Ceylon, which was fast modernising under the aegis of the British colonisers, the notion of the 'homosexual' emerged as a discomfiting category of diseased individuals which had to be eliminated. Among the Ceylonese bourgeoisie (members of the Sinhalese *goyigama*, *karava*, *salagama* castes, and Tamil *vellala/vallalar* caste), those who had easy access to a western lifestyle and frequently travelled to Britain to obtain degrees in higher education, the homosexual man (homosexual women were less visible) became a potential threat to the family, and in turn to the nation. I shall elaborate on this political and cultural Othering of non-heteronormative citizen subjects in Ceylon/Sri Lanka in Chapter 3.

Talking of countertypes, it is interesting to note how masculine stereotypes, within the family and the nation at large, has been time and again constructed vis-à-vis a set of countertypes, which by contrast, facilitated reinforcing those stereotypes as inviolable. George L. Mosse (1998) in his historical investigation into the construction of modern masculinities observes: 'Manliness was supposed to safeguard the existing order against the perils of modernity, but it was also regarded as an indispensable attribute of those who wanted change' (3).¹⁵ By 'perils of modernity', Mosse means the counter-discourses to hetero-patriarchy that began to threaten its edifice, counter-discourses which appallingly challenged normative patterns of life. In order to thwart these counter-discourses, countertypes to conventional signs of masculinity began to be generated and constructed as immoral, vicious, or even monstrous. In Western Europe, these countertypes, the Jew or the black man, the effeminate or the queer man, the new woman demanding her rights, served to reinforce masculine stereotypes as the norm, and any departure from them as deplorable. In Sri Lanka/Ceylon, as in the other

¹⁵ This was the foundation of modern discourses of masculinity which were disseminated by Europe, and embraced by the colonial bourgeoisie to a large extent (Nandy 1982; Fanon 1986; Sinha 1995).

colonies, the very same masculine stereotypes and their countertypes began to take root¹⁶, and the colonised (mainly the colonial bourgeoisie) embraced them as the only possible means to improve their lot, emasculated by the colonial master, the model of manliness, who had proved his virility by enslaving an incredibly huge mass of people across the globe.

However, with changing times and need of the hour, the masculinist stereotype undergoes transformations; so do its countertypes. Some of these countertypes often aspire to replicate the characteristics of those masculine stereotypes which tend to ‘otherise’ them; examples could be homosexual men promoting machismo to obliterate their pansy or dandy image, or the male colonial subject’s endeavour to imitate the colonial master, in order ‘to occupy the master’s place’ (Fanon 1986: 46). However, as Mosse observes:

Modern masculinity needed the countertype, and those stigmatized as countertypes either attempted to imitate the ideal type or defined themselves in opposition to the dominant stereotype. Either way, escape was difficult. (13)

Although some men, for example Gandhi, put forward a different model of masculinity, which emphasised on androgyny, such models did not have much impact on the popular imagination of *being a man* (Nandy 1983).

In Ceylon while there was a keen predilection to imitate colonial masculinities among the English educated bourgeoisie, with the strengthening of the nationalist spirit, both Sinhalese and Tamil nationalist leaders compounded the male colonial subject’s masculine identity by evoking a more virile past, mythical or real. Later, when the animosity between the Sinhalese and Tamil nationalists degenerated into bitter political enmity, newer models of masculinity began to be circulated. It is interesting to note how the Sinhalese celebrated their victory against the LTTE under the Rajapakse government, by equating the head of the state with King Duthagamini, the Buddhist ruler of the second century BCE, who had supposedly killed King Elara of Dravidian ancestry, thereby establishing Sinhalese dominance on the island. On the other hand, the most celebrated as well as dreaded LTTE leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran (1954-2009) has gained a mythical status as a hero, especially within the Tamil diaspora (See DeVotta 2007: 7-9). Within the Tamil diaspora, hyper-virile male deities, Ayappan, an ‘exemplar of selflessness and continence’ and Murukan ‘a virile protector of his two wives

¹⁶ Masculinity began facing challenges hitherto unknown in Ceylon/Sri Lanka, namely the liberated woman demanding her rights (a concrete face of which was the Women’s Franchise Union formed in 1927) followed by the queer folk in more recent times.

and a fierce warrior', are two celebrated sources of masculinist inspiration (Gross 2009: 4). Interestingly, these figures, mytho-historical or contemporary, are celebrated predominantly for their capacity for violence, underlined by the extreme methods adopted by them to establish ethnic homogeneity or a separatist state or to protect their homes and communities from foreign assaults.

With the increasing militarisation of the Sri Lankan nation-state, a hyper-aggressive masculinity began to hegemonise all other dimensions of masculinity, within both the ethnic communities engaged in constant warfare. The Sri Lankan national flag, depicting the lion, alludes to the totemic animal, who supposedly fathered Sinhabahu, the mythical forefather of the Sinhala (literally translating into lion's blood) race. The centrality of the sword-wielding lion in the national flag is not only an allusion to this myth, but is also symptomatic of a hypermasculinist culture, capable of resorting to violence, as symbolised by the erect *kastane* sword, whenever necessary. In Sri Lanka, while the state-backed Sinhalese army has deployed its own terrorist tactics now and then to wipe out the Tamils, rigorous combat training into which young Tamil boys have been thrust for decades, has worked towards *hardening* them into participating in armed conflict without demur. War becoming an everyday reality, it is not surprising that countertypes of normative masculinity in post-independence Sri Lanka would be those who fail to endorse the practice of perpetrating violence for the sake of establishing territorial sovereignty. Neloufer De Mel, in her analysis of cultural representations of such widespread militarisation shows how, across Sri Lanka, the popular media, advertisement, theatre, film, literature and memorialisation have been instrumental in promoting the warrior image as normative: they represent 'war and martial virtue as valour, heroism and masculine pride, and categorize their opposites as cowardice, treason and feminization in the context of war'; it does not only 'limit martial virtue to combatants, but encourages it in the populace as a whole' (De Mel 2007: 13).

Gananath Obeyesekere's seminal anthropological thesis, *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini* (1984) underscores how *lajja-baya* (*lajja* meaning 'shame', and *baya* meaning 'fear' and also 'fear of being shamed') has always been central to the socialisation of Sinhalese men and women. While women are tutored into abiding by certain behavioural codes of modesty and sexual propriety, men are brought up on the notion that nothing is perhaps more humiliating than being ridiculed or shamed on the grounds of impropriety. Obeyesekere points out that since Sri Lankan men have a greater visibility in the public domain, they are, automatically,

more vulnerable to public scrutiny. In fact, the higher the social rung to which men belong, the urgency of being socially proper is greater. The fear of being shamed or ridiculed is paramount, for it does not involve the individual alone, but the family to which he belongs. Obeyesekere's thesis is significant for it highlights various aspects of being a man within the Sinhalese culture. First, it is not just women who are the bearers of tradition, men too cannot take liberty with tradition or culture or social behaviour considered apposite to their gender. Second, a certain kind of performance is considered appropriate for men, and any digression from it is held up for ridicule. Third, 'male honour' and family name are inextricably associated with each other, subordinating the individual to the family. In times of ethnic riots, therefore, it is not hard to deduce from this thesis that individual male honour and community prestige would also be upheld as synonymous, thereby interpellating men into taking up arms, for the sake of performing according to the code of honour. The countertypes would evidently be those who fail to live up to this expected performance, namely, the 'non-hero', as Silva puts it (2004:25), and are inexorably shamed. With Sri Lanka speedily degenerating into a militant state, the practice of fearlessness (*baya nethi kama*) has become a very important determinant of one's masculinity closely associated with war, aggression and militancy (Jeganathan 2000: 51).

As mentioned earlier, within higher Tamil and Sinhalese castes (namely *Vallalar* and *Goyigama* respectively, people of these castes having held important positions in the political scene of the island for many years), hegemonic masculinity is defined by 'bodily dignity' and a 'sedateness of bearing', as against bodily aggression or perpetrating violence, which was seen as undignified and low caste attributes (De Silva 2009: 88; 2014: 445). This was before the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic rivalry degenerated into violent political enmity, culminating in mass slaughter of innocent citizens of both communities. Although the Tamil *Vallalar* caste, which dominated the Federal Party (FP) and later the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) initially resorted to a Gandhian mode of protest (namely *hartals* and *satyagrahas*) against the Sinhala Only act that debarred the Tamils from entering the Civil Service, the Tamil youth, exasperated with these nonviolent forms of retaliation, were compelled to adopt more aggressive means when they began to feel *emasculated* in the face of repeated acts of violence perpetrated by the Sinhalese state on its Tamil citizens. The state sponsored pogrom of 1983 was the climax of such growing acts of violence, to which the Tamils reacted in a destructive manner never anticipated before. There's certainly some truth in the belief that:

‘Sri Lankan Tamils are not a violent people; they are people who have had violence imposed upon them’ (Ganeshanathan 2008: 157).

Drawing inspiration from Cuban, Vietnamese and Palestinian struggles, Tamil youths had already begun *remaking* themselves in terms of martial virtues and bodily aggression since the mid-1970s. In fact, Indian Tamil films¹⁷ and Bruce Lee movies popularised by Hollywood were also important resources of combat training for these boys. The terrorising impact of organised combat training was seen in the unprecedented violence carried in the name of Tamil Eelam post-1983. De Silva writes:

Armed struggle or guerrilla warfare then attempted to stand on its head conventional European norms of martial valour. It rejected the validity of ‘fair play’, while retaining the martial idiom of risking-the-body. But more problematically, it also incorporated the notion of bodily violence against unarmed populations, defined as ‘reactionaries’ or ‘comprador elements’. This left many grey areas that individual revolutionaries had to negotiate as best as they could. Armed struggle as a practice retained specific elements of a hegemonic code such as the kinesthetic appeal of its choreographed combat sequences (risking-the-body), while rejecting other elements such as notions of fair play and honour. It is this kinesthetic appeal that seemed to resonate among men and boys at the local level. (2014: 446)

In modern Sri Lanka, therefore, hegemonic masculinity is synonymous with having a martial disposition, fearlessness in perpetrating violence, and a preparedness to risk the body for the sake of preserving community honour. Under such circumstances, an effective way of looking at fathers, husbands, brothers and sons within Sri Lankan families, would be to locate them vis-à-vis the dominant image of masculinity in the political sphere, fragmented across ethnic, class, and caste lines. The novels, which I shall be looking at, address the politics of

¹⁷ Films of M G Ramachandran (or MGR) and Sivaji Ganeshan (Bollywood star Rekha’s father) had acquired iconic status within the low caste Tamil communities. Especially MGR, in essaying roles of the hyper-masculinist liberator of the oppressed in film after film, acquired a massive fan following among the marginal castes in a predominantly Brahminical Tamil society. Jani De Silva observes: ‘In the process, MGR succeeded in introducing the cult of the body into Tamil cinema. In a Tamil society built on status, exemplified by the composed body, he validated the use of bodily violence in the pursuit of justice for the poor and the oppressed, by combining bodily dignity with action-sequences at key moments’ (2014: 446). MGR’s heroic image and his on-screen dedication to championing the cause of the oppressed resonated well with the Tamil youth in Sri Lanka, oppressed by the Sinhalese nationalist state. Also see, Subramaniam, Narendra. *Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization: Political Parties, Citizens and Democracy in South India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.

the personal, the effect of the larger politics of gender and sexuality within the affective space of the family. Theories of masculinity in a militant state often tend to overlook the emotional dimensions of it; novels, on the other hand, centring on family narratives, by locating masculinities within a network of personal relationships, dominated by love, concern, and care, serve to reveal micro-realities which might challenge the discourses of hegemonic masculinity organised around violence, aggression and militancy, while also reconfirming the same.

Sri Lankan Masculinities in the Diaspora: Transformations and Continuities

[From] the moment we arrived in Australia, my husband started having problems with his image. Before we came to Australia, I had no idea he had an image, apart from his reflection in the bedroom mirror or his shadow on the grass. But now it seemed he acquired one, and with it he had acquired problems: problems connected as far as I could make out, with the various aspects in which, he felt, he appeared to the Australians around us.

—Yasmine Gooneratne, *A Change of Skies*¹⁸

Within the diaspora, men who have enjoyed a certain privilege in the homeland left behind, suddenly feel disempowered, vis-à-vis other hegemonic masculinities, predominantly associated with race and ethnicity. The *image* of the Other, the immigrant man *acquires*, is a complex one, suspended between the home and the world outside: initially, within the domestic space, he might still be occupying the same privileged position as the revered patriarchal head of the family; but, in the public domain, he feels sufficiently *decentred*. With the passing of time, his dominant position within the family, which begins to show signs of change, remains no longer absolute, whereby he begins to feel emasculated even further. What begins to plague him is this new gendered *image*, compounded by his awareness of his racial subalternity. Having never perceived himself as a gendered subject, he begins to *acquire problems*, hitherto unknown to him. In other words, he is faced with a ‘crisis-in-masculinity’ which is unintelligible to him at the outset; but, as he begins to make sense of this newly acquired *problem*, the possibility is that he may turn into a ruthless, control-freak patriarch at home, or may end up performing an exaggerated masculinity involved in promoting long-distance nationalism, with the urgency to preserve his indigenous identity, or,

¹⁸ Yasmine Gooneratne, *A Change of Skies*, Picador: 2000, pg. 45.

in rare cases, he may learn to accept his disempowerment. For some men, particularly queer men, the diasporic space might appear more liberating and even utopian, at least apparently, wherein he gains an agency and freedom completely denied to him at home. (I shall develop this idea in Chapter 4.)

The novels I shall be looking at are all written over the last three decades and are products of postcolonial Sri Lankan Diasporas in predominantly ‘white’ cultures, namely, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, where gender equity within families is steadily rising, men and women are allowed greater freedom in expressing their sexual choices and selection of partners, divorce laws are less stringent and divorced men and women are less stigmatised by society, queer sexualities are legitimised or are at least socially recognised, and queer couples are encouraged to marry, or at least granted domestic partnership benefits and civil unions. However, such a delineation of the diaspora might give an impression of the diaspora as a Utopian space, which is, far from the truth. The harsh reality of presumptuous racism, which most South Asian men and women have to encounter, cannot be overlooked. R W Connell (1995, 2005) writes:

The movement of populations and the interaction of cultures under colonialism and post-colonial globalization have linked the making of masculinity with the construction of racial and ethnic hierarchies. It seems that ethnic and racial conflict has been growing in importance in recent years in many parts of the world [...] this is a fruitful context for producing masculinities oriented towards domination and violence. (xxii)

The practice of reviving strategic stereotypes of masculinity in the face of racial derision in the diaspora is quite common, which in turn often leads to further subordination of women and other dependants at home in most cases. But the ‘crisis-in-masculinity’ encountered in the diasporic space is often so overwhelming that men might resort to staging indigenous masculinist performance in order to assert their selfhood, as distinct from men of the host country. An interesting example would be the enthusiastic performance of *kāvati* and *viratam* by Tamil Sri Lankan men in Montreal. A spectacular staging of these performances gives the expatriate men a sense of wielding power, and helps reproduce traditional notions of masculinity which are perceived to be under erasure. Victoria Gross in an interesting dissertation submitted to McGill University writes:

Through their performances of *kāvati* and *viratam* Sri Lankan Tamil men embody what they understand as traditional Tamil masculinity ... Although a singular, static conception of Tamil masculinity does not historically exist, many contemporary Sri Lankan Tamil men posit particular masculine traits as emblematic of Tamil masculinity. In their conceptions of the traditional Tamil man, they point to a number of moments in Tamil cultural history during which paradigms of masculinity are somewhat consistent. Characteristics such as martial courage, heroic power, and protective self-sacrifice, which are exhibited by male figures in ancient and medieval Tamil literature and contemporary Tamil mythology, are understood to define Tamil masculine identity. Men point to the paradigmatic warrior of Cankam literature and the self-sacrificing saints of the *bhakti* period as heroes who best embody the essence of Tamil masculinity and role models they hope to emulate. Murukan and Ayyappan, two popular male deities, personify similar masculine ideals that are also mirrored in devotees' ritual performances. Murukan is considered a virile protector of his two wives and a fierce warrior; Ayyappan is considered an exemplar of selflessness and continence. (2009: 4)

This performance, reviving paradigms of pre-colonial or even mythological masculinity, is reminiscent of the nationalist discourses of masculinity in colonial Ceylon that sought to reclaim a hyper-virile past to contest colonial modernity and its reformulation of gender relationships. However, within the diaspora, dominated by scientific progress and technological advancement, modern Sri Lankan Tamil men, in order not to be stamped credulous, couch the justification of performing these rituals in scientific terms, projecting both *kāvati* and *viratam* as healthy practices which are conducive in developing a sense of 'whole being'. This might be one useful model for making sense of how indigenous masculinities are reconstructed within the diaspora.

The revival of these cultural practices, namely, *kāvati* and *viratam*, is indisputably linked with a sense of a fractured masculinity imposed on Tamil men, who have fled from the ethnic hostilities in Sri Lanka in search of greener pastures. They have come to represent a countertype to aggressive Tamil masculinity at home, the escapist, the cowards who 'abandoned "their brethren" in selfish pursuit of a better life' (Gross 2008: 5). One way of recuperating this lost masculinity is perhaps manifested in the Tamil diaspora's zealous participation in secessionist politics, dominated by the LTTE. (The diaspora, it may be noted,

has been endorsing the Tamil demand for a separate state, even before the LTTE rose in political significance.) To quote Sriskandarajah (2005):

Like many modern diasporas, the Sri Lankan Tamil community has developed multidimensional linkages that strengthen the nexus between the diaspora and erstwhile homeland, as well as between different diaspora settlements across the world. One of the most notable of these linkages has been the diaspora's "translocal" political practice [...] The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora has been instrumental in shaping the Sri Lankan political landscape, particularly through its support for and sponsorship of the Tamil nationalist project. (493)

This long distance nationalistic spirit is not displayed by Canadian Tamils alone, but also by those dispersed across other locations, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Switzerland, Norway, etc. However, one must note, that a greater crisis was effectuated by the global denigration of the LTTE as a terrorist group, whereby the diasporic Tamil men came to inhabit a contested site between the patriotic and the terrorist. The label of the terrorist once attached to a particular ethnic group within the diaspora engenders further marginalisation of that group, under stringent state vigilance. Once the line between patriotism and terrorism is blurred, what has been so far perceived as a noble mission suddenly transmutes into a heinous act, breeding a tremendous 'crisis-in-masculinity': for, what was viewed as heroism so far, suddenly acquires the dimension of criminality. Sriskandarajah (2005) writes:

In the case of the Canadian Tamil community, the interest and involvement it has shown in Sri Lankan affairs has come under close scrutiny by the media and authorities in Canada. The community has repeatedly expressed its dismay at being "vilified" for its political stance... The Tamil community, along with several other diasporas, has also complained about laws brought in to control illegal or undesirable activities in host countries. (499)

However, it would be reductive to represent the Tamil diaspora as participating only in promoting the liberation movement at home; there are several instances of protest from sections of the diaspora against LTTE activities. The diaspora has also played a positive role in peaceful settlement of the ethnic conflict at home. But the homogenisation of the Tamil

diaspora as a politically active community willingly taking part in terrorist activities has led to strict state monitoring of the Sri Lankan Tamils abroad (see Fuglerud 1999).

While a terrible masculinist crisis might be experienced within the diaspora, in some cases, the diaspora is celebrated for providing a liberal space allowing queer and feminised masculinities to flourish, without having to encounter social humiliation. As Howard Wettstein (2002) observes:

‘Diaspora’ is a political notion; it suggests geopolitical dispersion. It may further suggest ...involuntary dispersion from a center, typically a homeland. With changes in circumstances ..., a diasporic population may come to see virtue in diasporic life. And so ‘Diaspora’—as opposed to *galut*—may acquire a positive charge, as today it has for some. (47)

This ‘positive charge’ of the diaspora is usually appreciated more by queer men and women (or even straight women) who are mercilessly subjugated at home, than heterosexual men who barely realise that they too are trapped within certain performative codes of masculinity. For instance, the notions of *lajja-baya* into which Sinhalese men are socialised, lose their rigidity within the diasporic space, and men need not be bothered of social humiliation, if they fail to live up to normative patterns of behaviour. The ‘positive charge’ of the diaspora might also be realised in not having to deal with the masculinist ideologies of a militant state operating on revenge, genocide, rape and ethnic cleansing.

However, the feeling of loss is predominant in the heterosexual male diasporic subject. The crisis, which they often experience, is similar to what Gardiner calls, falsification of history, ‘implying there was once a golden time of unproblematic, stable gender, when men were men, women were women, and everyone was happy with their social roles’ (2002: 14). This crisis has its roots, not only in the experience of racial discrimination, but also in the necessity of reordering the mechanisms of household economy. Many South Asian women are compelled to join the workforce, for men’s wages, in most cases, are not sufficient to make both ends meet. In addition to that several men are forced to take up low-paying and unfulfilling jobs, although at home they might have been respectable white collar professionals. In case of forced migration, the fear of losing one’s social status is paramount among the immigrants. For instance, in *Funny Boy*, Arjie’s father shudders at the idea of

migrating – “...what would I do there? The only job I’d be fit for would be a taxi driver or a petrol station man” (FB 196). Having to compromise on one’s class position breeds a profound sense of discomfiture amongst men. Besides, having been socialised into perceiving themselves as the provider for the family, they feel disempowered and even ashamed for their inability to shoulder the responsibility of running the household solely on their own. Unemployed men suffer from a deeper sense of crisis. As Brah (1996) in her study of Asian migrants in Britain observes:

In the case of the Asian male, the obligation to ‘provide’ extends beyond spouse and children to include a range of designated kin in the extended family. Consequently, both married and single men, particularly if they are eldest sons, feel under pressure to shoulder this responsibility. Hence, many male respondents spoke of feeling a sense of failure at not being able to contribute to the family income. (56)

In many cases, due to lack of domestic help, men who had never considered sharing household work with their mothers or wives in the old homeland, are forced to take part in domestic chores and taking care of children. Participation in household chores is often perceived as shameful, a sort of feminisation, which many South Asian men find difficult to accept.

Men, immersed in the traditions of their original homeland, might feel disempowered vis-à-vis not only their wives, but also their children, raised in comparatively liberal cultures, when they challenge rules and customs considered inviolable in the native country. For men who remain interpellated in anti-colonial discourses at home, everything ‘western’ might still appear evil and morally debilitating against which women and children need to be protected. Rebellious children are often considered the worst failure by the father who begins to doubt his potential of fathering and inculcating in his children values he has, all his life, looked upon as sacrosanct and unchangeable. A typical reaction to a rebellious son is seen in *If the Moon Smiled*: When Devake announces that he wants to live apart from his parents, both of them are devastated – ‘Mahendra would say that this was the result of mixing with a culture that cared nothing for one’s parents’ (IMS 111). While within the family, men might be plagued by insecurities unknown back home, in the world outside, their racial subalternity adds to their discontents even further. Long before Diaspora Studies entered literature departments, sociologists studying migration had proposed the concept of the ‘marginal

man'. The term was introduced by Robert E. Park in 1928, and then, it was picked up by several others. Milton M Gordon (1964) defines the marginal man as someone, standing on the borders of two cultural worlds, but unable to accept either, he 'develops, according to the classic conception, personality traits of insecurity, moodiness, hypersensitivity, excessive self-consciousness and nervous strain' (57). While 'man' refers generally to mankind and not specifically to the male sex, the concept seems to adequately fit into the delineation of South Asian men in the diaspora, as charted above.

In his thought-provoking essay, 'Diasporas and the Art of Impossible Mourning' (2001), Vijay Mishra writes: 'In the imaginary of diasporas both mourning and melancholia find place, sometimes mutually exclusively but often they intertwine and co-exist in the same individual.' (35) Drawing on Freud's reflections on mourning and melancholia, Mishra makes an interesting claim:

In diasporas both mourning and melancholy persist, sometimes in intensely contradictory ways at the level of the social [...] There is no immediate cure for the condition because the loss [which is mourned and induces melancholy] remains abstract; it is not compensated for by happiness in the new nation-state and is therefore internalized as the emptiness of the ego itself. It leads to retreat into essentialist diasporic instrumentalities such as places of worship (temple, mosque) or into social collectivities from which both the nation-state's dominant racial group as well as other diasporas are excluded. (2001: 36-37)

I believe that this theory is applicable to diasporic South Asian men's sense of loss, a loss which is never made complete sense of; for, as Mishra holds, 'In melancholia the object lost is of "a more ideal kind", it is much more difficult to pinpoint as unlike the loved object of mourning it remains unrepresentable' (2001: 36). But, it plunges the heterosexual diasporic male subject into continuous mourning, which is manifested in his developing contempt for the dominant cultures of the host-land, his mal-treatment of women and other dependants, the irrational demands he often makes of his children, his homophobia, and his participation in elaborate performance of masculinity, understood through some home-grown templates as exemplified by the Sri Lankan diasporic men's passionate revival of indigenous practices such as *kāvati* and *viratam*. The intensity of the mourning and the melancholic feeling associated with the loss is higher among the first generation diasporic men, which, however, might diminish with passing generations whose memories of the original homeland are either

second hand (passed on to them by older family members and coloured by the subjective experiences of the latter) or too obscure to thrust them into perennial mourning or melancholia (see Jayasuriya 2012: 156)

In the next segment, with these overlapping theoretical frameworks in mind, I shall be looking at seven novels: Shyam Selvadurai's *Cinnamon Gardens*, *Funny Boy* and *The Hungry Ghosts*, A. Sivanandan's, *When Memory Dies*, Romesh Gunsekara's *The Match*, V. V. Ganeshanathan's *Love Marriage* and Chandani Lokuge's *If the Moon Smiled*.

Cinnamon Gardens: Colonial Bourgeois Masculinity and its Countertypes

Shyam Selvadurai's *Cinnamon Gardens* painstakingly charts the role of the Tamil colonial bourgeoisie in Ceylonese politics in the 1920s and critiques forms and practices of colonial masculinities mimicked by this class (the Mudaliyar in this case) that assumed tremendous power during British rule. Kumari Jayawardena (2000) writes that the Mudaliyars 'emerged as leading members of the bourgeoisie' during the high period of colonialism. 'Their social and political roles, and those of their children... [were] to figure with great significance in society and politics of colonial and postcolonial Sri Lanka', adds Jayawardena (195). The upper class/caste Mudaliyars rose in power, supported by the policies of Arthur Gordon, Governor of Ceylon (1883-1890). Gordon believed that the 'White Man's Burden' could only be reliably shared by the colonial bourgeoisie. Jayawardena quotes his instructions to a Government Agent on this matter:

I have over and over laid down the rule, that native gentlemen are to be treated precisely as English gentlemen would be in similar circumstances...[I]t is...the only way in which native government can be trained to be the self-reliant and high-minded officials we wish to make them. (197)

In *Cinnamon Gardens*, which is a reworking of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Selvadurai sets his story in a posh neighbourhood of 1920s Colombo, and weaves an intense social drama around two related families, the Navaratnams, headed by a domineering patriarch, the Mudaliyar, and the Kandiahs, headed by Louisa, single mother to three marriageable daughters. The setting itself, around Victoria Park, underwrites an emergent metropolitan culture, engendered by colonial rule; the Mudaliyar's family, his house and his dealings with his wards, on the other hand, reveal a contested site in which discourses of tradition and modernity concur to produce irreconcilable contradictions. The same is true of

Lotus Cottage, the home of the Kandiahs. But in this chapter I would focus primarily on the Mudaliyar, the autocratic father figure, whose overbearing disposition within the family gathers a symbolic dimension with respect to the Ceylonese bourgeois class's complete interpellation in colonial discourses. The twilight of a feudal past and an emergent capitalist future is best captured in Selvadurai's acrid critique of the Mudaliyar's unquestioning imitation of imperial masculinity, which he seems to appreciate as "natural" and therefore, inviolable. While being firmly rooted in the Great Tradition of English literature, Selvadurai establishes an objective distance from the same, to drive home his critique of colonial masculinity, images and ideas of which were widely disseminated through the novel, one of the primary vehicles of cultural imperialism in the colonies.

The Mudaliyar class was one created by the Portuguese in the 17th century, a class of high caste propertied natives who acted as the mediator between the colonial administration and the local populous. The Dutch too were heavily dependent on them, and during the British rule, the Mudaliyars gained unprecedented significance. The Mudaliyars were colonial stooges, local aristocrats, who increasingly modelled their lives on the colonial master, aspiring to approximate quintessential Englishness in manners and morals. In *Cinnamon Gardens*, Mudaliyar Navaratnam, in his high-handedness, caste and class consciousness, and worldview, appears to be the male counterpart of Lady Catherine in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Mudaliyar Navaratnam is an exemplary mimic man, whose rise to power in Colombo's political scene is contingent upon his proclivity to become more British than the British themselves. Selvadurai resorts to an Austenian mockery of the Mudaliyar, but makes a significant departure in the end, by attributing to the Mudaliyar's protégés an agency which was impossible for Austen to grant in the late 18th or early 19th century. Selvadurai unravels the Mudaliyar's consistent endeavour to reinstate hetero-patriarchal power structures, through his emulation of certain stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity circulated by colonial discourses. In such emulation, the Mudaliyar begins to look like a fascist, intolerant towards any sign of departure from normative behaviour.

In *Cinnamon Gardens*, Selvadurai pits the Mudaliyar against three people in particular, all three, products of modernity, as it were. All three challenge in their own ways the hegemony of the Mudaliyar, by their individuality and ideas of freedom, made available to them by modernist ways of life. On the one hand, there's Balendran, the Mudaliyar's younger son, who makes a serious compromise with his emotions by giving up on his lover Richard

Howland, to please his father; on the other, there's Arul, the Mudaliyar's elder son, who antagonises his father, by marrying below his class/caste. The third person, who is not directly under the Mudaliyar's control, but is certainly a protégé by virtue of blood-relation, is Annalukshmi Kandiah, an English educated woman exposed to the new ideas of liberalism, who refuses to yield to her family's consistent pressure to settle down with an eligible suitor. What unfolds is a conflict ridden family drama, that at a symbolic level, exposes the irreconcilable discord between tradition and modernity, the impossibility of wiping out feudal worldviews at the onset and proliferation of a capitalist economy.

Elaborating on the ideas of *lajja-baya*, Jani de Silva (2009) notes that Sri Lankan men and women are usually expected to be deferential to their seniors, parents and other authoritative figures, and any departure from this deferential stance is treated as shameful behaviour:

While deference is to a code of seniority, senior members will also defer endlessly to others defined as somehow more senior, even as they receive the deference of those construed as junior. (87-88)

All three protégés of the Mudaliyar dare to challenge his authority, thereby transgressing a code of social behaviour considered inviolable. Bala's excessive fear (*baya*) of being shamed (*lajja*) makes him more of a conformist, initially; but, once he realises how he has been used by his father to further his own interests and how the latter has always managed to have his way, he retaliates. But the other two, especially Arul, defies his father's authority at the very outset, and falls from grace in his eyes to lead a sordid life in exile.

Balendran (or Bala), the Mudaliyar's younger son, is completely co-opted by his father's ideas about love and coupledness. Unable to confront the wrath of a despotic father, Bala abandons Richard, his lover, and gives in to his demand to settle down with Sonia, a cousin, he barely knows. The Mudaliyar's treatment of Bala and his homoerotic relationship with Richard, presents a classic case of hetero-patriarchal violence towards deviant forms of romantic coupling, interpreted as threatening to the family and the nation-state at large. In Europe, especially in the nineteenth century, historians, anthropologists, psychologists, physicians and experts in other disciplines, worked in tandem to establish any form of queerness as unnatural, for they disrupted not only the progress of capitalist economy, but also shook the base of hetero-patriarchal power structures. As Ashis Nandy observes, Britain

was trying everything in its power to establish ‘the presence of femininity in man as virtually the negation of all humaneness’ (1983: 43), not only to safeguard its self-image as a community of well-defined and virile men, but also to suppress disruptive voices from within their own culture.

The increasing visibility of queer men and women towards the end of the 19th century in public spaces and in art and literature began to worry the custodians of hetero-patriarchal society. The extent of homophobia can be gauged from what Engels wrote in response when Marx sent him a call for homosexual rights published in Germany in 1869:

‘The Pederasts are starting to take stock and to find they constitute a power in the state. As yet, an organization is missing, even though it secretly exists already... [I]t is lucky that we ourselves are too old to witness the victory of their cause and to pay the price with our own bodies’ (qtd. in Mosse, 86-87).

Putting Oscar Wilde through a humiliating trial and imprisoning him were staged rather tactfully to set an example of the extent to which the British could go to eliminate any sign of sexual dissidence. However, it was difficult to suppress a queer subculture which became *alarmingly* strong at the turn of the century. In fact, Bala’s coming to terms with his sexuality and his understanding of his homoerotic desires was facilitated by his exposure to this subculture, during his stay in England and his familiarity with Edward Carpenter, the queer English poet who had a deep emotional connection with Ceylon, and a huge contribution in bringing into the public domain hidden homosexual cultures. The Mudaliyar’s anxiety for his son is deeply rooted in this colonial homophobia. His urgency to reinstate him in polite society and project his masculinity is motivated by the need to preserve his self-image as vanguard of propriety and colonial registers of morality. This is necessary for he has to disprove the colonial perception of the native as ‘effeminate’, and therefore, inferior and in need of control. (See, Chapter 3)

The Mudaliyar disowns his elder son Arul for shaming him in his choice of life partner. Arul, unlike Bala, chooses to abandon the comforts of an affluent life at Cinnamon Gardens, for the sake of his love, and migrates to Bombay. However, till the moment Arul’s affair with Pakkiam, the maid servant’s daughter, becomes known, he enjoys his ‘father’s favour’ (CG

232). In fact, the Mudaliyar sees in Arul a worthy heir to this throne, his hypermasculine disposition and leadership qualities being a matter of joy to him:

While Balendran spent his leisure time reading or looking after his stamp collection, Arul and his father shared a love of the outdoors ... [Balendran] had stood little chance against his brother's forceful personality. Arul's voice, gestures, actions were all passionate. He could take over a room, a conversation, a holiday. (CG 232)

In fact, Arul displays an unambiguous condescension for Balendran's love of reading and his habit of keeping to himself. He is quite a bully in mocking Balendran for his 'effeminate' ways, his incompetency in sports and other conventional 'male' activities (CG 232-233). In this Arul seems to have inherited the Mudaliyar's disgust for the 'difference' in Bala, much to the latter's discomfiture in a family dominated by two patriarchal despots. But, what Arul fails to understand is that in order to enjoy the position of importance in his father's household, he also needs to adhere to propriety in matters of falling in love. Arul dares to transgress an inviolable social code, and goes against his father to express his love for a servant girl. He brings shame upon the family name, in his failure to stick to the codes of *lajja-baya*, incurring his father's wrath. For the Mudaliyar, a dominant political figure in Colombo, maintaining his image as the custodian of propriety and social norms is more important than prioritising his emotions for a favourite son. A disobedient son is thereof disowned, so as not to bring upon himself social criticism. But, Arul's final decision to marry a low caste girl at the expense of losing out on a promising future under the wings of an influential father shows the liberalising aspect of modernity, which enables individuals to articulate their own desires and defy authority. The Mudaliyar consequently realises that in order to hang on to traditions, he needs to adopt stricter measures. As Mosse points out:

Masculinity stood for the image society liked to have of itself, but it also ... symbolized the moral universe of the middle classes with its emphasis upon chastity, earnestness, and self-control. The practice of vice was much more readily understood than the scientific medical ideas used to describe it. Those who were loose-living, without the proper moral standards, cut at the roots of society, threatening to destroy its tender fabric. (79-80).

This is also applicable to the colonial bourgeoisie in Ceylon which was appalled by the possibility of a complete collapse of the social fabric, when low caste people became upwardly mobile, owing to the changing economic scene. 'Loose-living' and lack of moral standards began to be readily associated with free mixing and denial of caste hierarchy. One of the attributes of conventional masculinity is the ability to ensure that propriety¹⁹ is followed and adhered to, and significant departures from it are reprimanded. The Mudaliyar displays a strong feudal ethic of sticking to caste/class hierarchies, despite his endorsement of the new capitalist economy. It would be useful to mention here that in South Asian popular culture, specially cinema, the 'feudal-cum-bourgeois world's patriarchal order' is repeatedly challenged by young romantic lovers, who dare to collapse class hierarchies (See Viridi 2003: 181-192). Sometimes they succeed, at other times they fail to convert despotic patriarchs to their 'modern' worldview.

In an intense emotional drama, *Selvadurai* challenges masculinist notions of rationality, propriety, and moral codes towards the end of the novel. Devastated by Arul's death, Bala confronts his father for the first time. Although the Mudaliyar does not relent, he is taken aback by Bala's audacity. Bala is flabbergasted how tyrannical a father could afford to thrust his favourite son into a life of misery, so as not to fall in the eyes of society. The confrontation takes place within closed doors, and Bala does not make any dramatic attempt to unmask his father; but the confrontation is as power-packed as Elizabeth's bold retort to a brazenly class conscious Lady Catherine that 'He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal'.

Annalukshmi's story is counterpointed with that of Balendran, both, posing an alarming threat to the patriarch, one by her newly acquired ideas of liberty and the other, as we have seen, by his queer inclinations. Annalukshmi, brought up on English literature like Balendran, and exposed to possibilities of leading an alternative life away from family and marriage, is a model New Woman of colonial Ceylon. Annalukshmi represents those women of elite Colombo society who were allowed to demand their rights, participate in political conferences and run women's organisations, as long as they did not become too threatening to patriarchy.

¹⁹ It is the same kind of propriety which is celebrated in the novels of Jane Austen, despite their outright criticism of patriarchal hegemony. *Selvadurai* speaks back to this Austenian discourse of English propriety, unravelling its hypocrisy.

Neloufer De Mel (2001) writing about the gendering of national narratives in Sri Lanka notes that like many colonial societies, in Sri Lanka too, women's emancipation was supported by the colonial elite as an integral part of the modernising process. The New Woman became a part of the anti-imperialist struggle, an essential element to jettison colonial bondage. (5) But Annalukshmi turns out to be a threat for her radical sense of freedom; very early in the novel, Annalukshmi while bathing in the sea, notices married women sitting passively on the sand, looking on at their husbands and children, as if chained to the spot: "She glanced back up the beach at the other women and it came to her that if she did marry she would end up like them, forced to sit in the shade, only a spectator" (CG 93). She shudders at the very idea, and in the end, gives up on marriage in pursuit of a career.

She turns out to be another "peril of modernity" for the Mudaliyar, another disruptive force difficult to harness. Unlike Bala, Annalukshmi does not yield; modelled on Austen's Elizabeth Bennet, Annalukshmi displays a remarkable strength in thwarting all forces that unite to contain her within approved structures of female modernity. Given her social background, she could afford to give up her search for Mr. Darcy, and settle for a more challenging life. Annalukshmi poses a serious threat to the masculinist ideals of the colonial bourgeoisie, which allowed women liberty as long as they did not decry men's authority. (See Chapter 3)

Selvadurai, writing from a diasporic space, away from the country, brings to the narrative the pains of being in exile: both Bala and Arul, the two sons of the Mudaliyar, never really belong to his household. While Arul is literally ostracised, Bala, as we shall see in Chapter 4, lives a precarious life within the Navaratnam family, under the stern vigilance of a tyrannical father who does not approve of his homosexuality. *Cinnamon Gardens* turns out to be a sensitive investigation into bourgeois discourses of masculinity in colonial Ceylon, within which dissident voices are often silenced ruthlessly.

***Funny Boy*: Hyper-masculinity, Racial Puritanism and a Queer Critique**

Selvadurai's contemporary queer classic *Funny Boy* is perhaps one of the most commented upon queer novels of South Asia, although the novelist never once uses 'queer' or any other term marking out dissident sexual identities in the novel. Rather Selvadurai chooses an

elusive term ‘funny’ which gathers a political dimension as the novel progresses. Arjun (or Arjie as the protagonist is usually called) reflects:

The word ‘funny’ as I understood it meant either humorous or strange, as in the expression, ‘that’s funny.’ Neither of these fitted the sense in which my father had used the word, for there had been a hint of disgust in his tone. (FB 16–17)

Jayawickrama (2005) writes:

Choosing “funny”, Selvadurai refuses to constrain Arjie’s identity within a requisite essentialist notion of gender identity and instead instates the development of an understated and sensitive political expression as Arjie’s sexuality becomes a space of liminality that offers valuable potential for the author’s sense of identity, home and community. (125)

Ever since Raj Rao presented “‘Because Most People Marry Their Own Kind’: A Reading of Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy*” at the ACLALS conference of 1995, a year after *Funny Boy* appeared (the article was published two years later in *Ariel*), there have been countless articles on this novel. A chapter that proposes to look at politics of masculinities within the Sri Lankan family would remain incomplete without an analysis of Selvadurai’s classic, although an absolutely fresh intervention would be difficult, given that there has been sustained gendered reading of this novel for the past twenty years. The novel had a major social impact in Sri Lanka: the President read the novel and his response to it opened up a national debate on the necessity to repeal anti-sodomy law in the country (Salgado 2004: 7). I shall engage with the novel’s queer politics in Chapter 4; in this segment I would focus on how masculinity is thrust upon the biological male with a frantic urgency to eliminate his queerness, and the queer protagonist’s identification with other less privileged masculinities, none of which strictly abide by hypermasculinist codes. As Jazeel (2005) writes:

...*Funny Boy* is not concerned with ‘homosexuality’ or ‘gay’ identities; indeed, neither of these words are used in the novel. Arjie, is not ‘gay’, because in these early stages of his life, as far as he is aware he is not possessed of sexual orientations transferable and generalisable to others of his disposition... Rather, the novel highlights how Arjie is made to feel ‘funny’, odd and increasingly marginal as the narrative proceeds, because of his emergent same sex desire. (233)

Whether at home or in school, certain performative codes are imposed on Arjie so that his ‘funny’ predilections of cross-dressing as a bride, his fascination with the process of wearing a sari, his interest in Radha Aunty’s dressing table populated with a magnificent range of makeup items, his abhorrence for cricket, and his liking for *Little Women*, “a book for girls” (FB 104), are *cured*. Although not overtly violent, Arjie’s repression is not uncommon. As William Spurlin (2000) observes:

The nation-state’s fantasy of itself as masculine similarly points to and extends the ambivalence at the site of authority. . . . [T]he nation-state . . . both projects and masks difference through strategies of repetition and displacement, asserting mastery of the Other through its discourse. (197)

Arjie’s heteronormative family functions as repressive state apparatus in ensuring that his ‘difference’ is erased, hoping that it is a childhood phase that will eventually pass. Arjie’s father’s decision to get him admitted to the Victoria Academy, which will force Arjie ‘to become a man’ (FB 210), maybe interpreted as putting Arjie into a correctional cell. Rahul K Gairola (2015) writes:

In attempting to produce manhood, the school institutes a punitive regime administered by Principal Abeysinghe, who the boys contemptuously dub ‘Black Tie’. Black Tie’s preferred method of disciplinary punishment echoes the violence played out in the gendered spaces of the house and the bloody spaces of the riots and war zones. Indeed, the Academy’s objective in producing ‘docile’ bodies ‘that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved’ is violently enforced through severe physical punishments that range from hard slaps to canings. Notably, a boy is marked ‘an ill and burdens student’ when transgressions of masculinity appear in the form of long hair, winking, and licking the lips. (74-75)

While considerable attention has been paid to the process of masculinization in which Arjie is thrust by his father in the Victoria Academy (Jayawickrama 2005; Jazeel 2005; Lesk 2006; Murtaza 2010; Hawley 2011; Gairola 2015), much has not been said about Arjie’s identification with two male characters in the novel, Daryl Uncle and Jegan. In this segment I

would like to focus on these two men who challenge hegemonic masculinities, represented by Arjie's father, Chelva. Arjie's sympathies for both of them come out strongly in his reflections on their predicament, which in turn, opens up for him a fundamental truth. In a momentous self-reflection, Arjie wonders, 'How was it that some people got to decide what was correct or not, just or unjust?' He soon finds an answer to his own question - "It had to do with who was in charge; everything had to do with who held power and who didn't" (FB 267). As I have mentioned above, in certain moments in history, within certain political realities, some forms of masculinity are privileged over the others. Oftentimes, those who fail to abide by the codes of hegemonic masculinities are eliminated. If the whole family conspires to eradicate Arjie's queerness which threatens the very edifice of hetero-patriarchy, Daryl and Jegan, one Burgher and the other Tamil, are strategically eliminated for their non-conformist dispositions, their critique of the Sinhalese state's militant nationalism. In comparison to both, Arjie's hypermasculine father and his tactical compromise with Sinhalese hegemony appear more and more in poor light to Arjie.

Daryl Uncle, Arjie's mother's erstwhile boyfriend, arrives one fine morning, occasioning young Arjie's introduction into the sordid political state of Sri Lanka. The story entitled, 'See No Evil, Hear No Evil' is an important episode in *Funny Boy*, at the end of which Arjie loses his boyish innocence on being exposed to the shady workings of the militant state, the hypocrisy of the police force, and the necessity to pretend ignorance despite having full knowledge of the atrocities perpetrated by the state on the minorities.

Daryl's arrival in the absence of Arjie's father generates tension in the family of which Arjie fails to make sense initially. However, with the passage of time, it becomes clear to him that Aunt Neliya and his mother Nalini are particularly concerned about what people would say if they came to know of Nalini's pre-marital affair with him: "I hope he stops visiting us like this. It's most improper with no man in the house", warns Neliya (FB 111). Soon, Arjie discovers how animated his mother has become in Daryl's presence, a completely different person: 'She seemed very different these days, happy but strangely nervous' (FB 113). Meanwhile Arjie falls sick and is recommended a change of environment. Nalini takes him to the hills, where, much to his surprise Arjie finds Daryl joining them. Arjie is initially agitated, but comes to accept Daryl. But thinking of the consequences of his mother's being found out, Arjie is alarmed: 'I thought of my father and felt my dread deepen. What would happen if he found out?' (FB 118) As an 'unwitting accomplice' to Nalini's plan to spend

time with Daryl away from the gaze of family members and curious neighbours fills Arjie with a sense of foreboding. This episode while exposing Arjie to a secret his mother has kept from everyone for long, also reinforces the bond between them. Henceforth, Arjie refuses to let Nalini go anywhere alone, once Daryl goes missing in Jaffna. Perhaps, Arjie, despite his immaturity, learns to align his predicament as a queer son to the possible consequences of his mother's adulterous liaison with Daryl, seeing both himself and his mother as enfeathered to the patriarchal dictates of a despotic father.

It is interesting how in Arjie's imagination Daryl seems to represent everything his father is not. In looks and manners, his father is not even a patch on him:

I found myself observing his high cheekbones and glints of gold in his brown beard, his thighs and the way they change colour at the edge of his shorts, and his gentle courteous manner, which seemed to ease something inside Amma, softening her sharp edges. I couldn't help comparing him to my father, who, with his balding head, thin legs, slight paunch, and abrupt way of talking to Amma, cut a poor figure next to him. (FB 116)

In this comparison, Daryl appears far more masculine than Arjie's father, as underpinned by the latter's 'thin legs' and 'slight paunch'. But, more importantly, what impresses Arjie is Daryl's courteousness, either towards him or Nalini, a quality he has never seen in his father. The contrast is emphasised upon all through the episode, whereby Daryl appears more and more desirable as a father to Arjie.

The story, 'See No Evil, Hear No Evil' begins with Chelva, Arjie's father leaving for a business tour in Europe. Arjie, who is an ardent admirer of *Little Women*, wonders whether he could ask Chelva to get him the sequels he has been looking for. But finds it difficult to make the request –

He had found me reading *Little Women* and declared it to be a book for girls, a book that boys should not be reading, especially a boy of twelve. After some hesitation, I wrote down the three sequels to *Little Women* as the fifth item. (FB 104)

But, interestingly, the bond between Arjie and Daryl is forged over their love for *Little Women*, a book which his father had frowned upon as un-masculine. When Daryl finds Arjie with his copy of the novel, he tells him: “*Little Women*...Used to be one of my favourite books” (FB 109). A day or two later Daryl presents him with the three sequels to the book taking Arjie by surprise: ‘I wanted to reach out and hug him...’ (FB 112). There is not a single moment in the text where Arjie feels the same emotions for his father. The bond between them strengthens, as Arjie finds himself laughing a lot in Daryl’s presence; but what makes him happier is the change that comes over Nalini – ‘...Amma was happier than I ever remembered her being and this made her even more kind and loving towards me’ (FB 117). One of the everlasting impressions of Daryl in Arjie’s mind is how he read out to him while he lay on bed, sick with fever. Arjie has never witnessed his father in the role of a care-giver in times of sickness –

The friendly smile and the look of concern in his face reminded me of the day he had brought me those books, of how he read to me while I was sick and had sat by my bed, holding a cold compress on my forehead. (FB 115)

For Arjie, what appears most comforting is that he does not need to put up a performance or strategically hide his queerness in Daryl’s presence. Daryl seems to offer a counterpoint to all that Arjie dreads in his father. Daryl’s soberness is repeatedly contrasted with Chelva’s hyper-aggressiveness, making the latter even less desirable. The ‘temporal’ family Arjie, Nalini and Daryl form is happy together, as Arjie increasingly realises, but with the nagging awareness that it would never be legitimised. By contrast, within the space of his biological family, Arjie feels like inhabiting a panopticon, with his father, his accomplice Diggy, his uncles and aunts keeping a vigil on him. Even his mother has been violent to him on certain occasions.

Daryl, a Sydney based journalist, soon goes missing after his visit to Jaffna to investigate into the rumours ‘of torture and disappearances by the police’ (FB 129). Nalini and Arjie are devastated, apprehensive of Daryl’s falling victim to the atrocity of the state which is particularly proactive in silencing any dissident voice. Daryl’s body is found in no time, but, Nalini finds it impossible to get to the truth. She knows Daryl has been murdered, but there is no evidence to prove it. Even a powerful civil rights lawyer tells her to pretend nothing has happened: “These days one must be like the three monkeys. See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” (FB 141). In a militant state, devoted to extreme methods of violence, men like Daryl

can never survive. The model of alternative masculinity that Daryl seems to represent has no place in it. Daryl's death and the state's impetuous nonchalance towards it is an unambiguous sign of caution which Arjie must learn to decipher. As a sensitive, questioning, queer Tamil boy, his chances of survival are far less.

However, Arjie's father has a strategy to work his way around the tyranny of the Sinhalese state: playing down one's ethnic identity and maintaining a low profile –

But we are a minority, and that's a fact of life...As a Tamil you have to learn how to play the game. Play it right and you can do very well for yourself. The trick is not to make yourself conspicuous. Go around quietly, make your money, and don't step on anyone's toes. (FB 173).

This is a piece of advice Chelva gives Jegan, the son of his school friend, who Chelva takes under his wings on the request of his widowed mother. Jegan's arrival in the family allows a certain degree of freedom to Arjie, who also develops an erotic feeling for him –

The muscles of his arms and neck, which would have been visible in a fairer person, were hidden by the darkness of his skin. It was only when I was close to him that I had noticed them. Now I admired how well built he was, the way his thighs pressed against his trousers. (FB 161)

Jegan too develops a liking for Arjie, and he shares his past life with him, the stories of his association with the Gandhiyam organisation, as they go for jogging together. Arjie finds it easy talking to Jegan, taken in by his politeness. Chelva is pleased with this 'growing connection' between the two, and believes Jegan might be able to wean Arjie away from his girlish preoccupations and make a man of him: "From the time he was small he has shown certain tendencies...he used to play with dolls, always reading." (FB 166). Arjie who overhears the conversation feels humiliated; but Jegan comes to his defence, saying "I don't think there's anything wrong with him" (FB 166). Arjie from this moment grows 'even more devoted to him' (FB 166).

In fact, the ending of the novel reveals that both Daryl and Jegan leave an everlasting impression on Arjie who stands up to his humiliation in school, jeopardising his father's scheme of making a man of him, and deploying strategically whatever little agency he has in protesting against the wrongs done to him and his friend Shehan in the Victoria Academy. It

is not his father's advice of playing it safe that Arjie heeds; rather, in his actions, he seems to replicate Daryl's concern for state atrocities against innocent victims or Jegan's vociferous protest against injustice and undemocratic stance of the government.

Jegan's nerve is proven to the family on an eventful morning when he beats up a party worker when the latter forcibly tries to put up a poster campaigning in favour of the ruling government on the wall of the house. Chelva is alarmed, and warns Jegan to be cautious henceforth – “One must be careful not to antagonize the wrong people” (FB 169). In Arjie's eyes, his father begins to appear in even poorer light, in contrast to Jegan's firm stand against the state's autocracy. Later, as Jegan's connection with the Tamil Tigers is revealed, and it appears increasingly difficult to retain him as a hotel staff or as lodger in the family home, Chelva abandons him, cutting a very sorry picture in Arjie's eyes (FB 204). Jegan's predicament becomes a learning experience for Arjie, as he learns to see the flip side to his father's character – his cowardice, his failure to keep his promise of taking care of Jegan, his compromise with the Sinhalese state. In a masterstroke, Selvadurai unravels Chelva's perceived masculinity as a sham. The episode brings out that deceit, hypocrisy and unscrupulousness often underwrite unremitting compromise and conformism. Conversely, it projects queerness (not just sexual queerness, but also the courage to go against the normative grain) as more desirable, and perhaps, a thing to celebrate. Therefore it is quite logical how in ‘The Best School of All’, Arjie turns around and protests against injustice, fearless of consequences. If Chelva allows himself to be colonised by the Sinhalese state, by playing it safe, and maintaining a low profile, and sending his sons to a Sinhalese class, Arjie opposes his father's compromising stance by asserting his minority status, turning to his own advantage his perceived weakness – a ‘girly boy’ who is rather funny. By positing both Daryl and Jegan vis-à-vis the authoritative and tyrannical Chelva, Selvadurai offers a nuanced counter-discourse to hegemonic masculinities. Arjie's awakening into the reality of his sexual difference and his gradual acceptance of it, in my reading, is to a great extent made possible by his admiration for these two men who stand up to injustice. Many commentators have noticed that *Funny Boy* is particularly sympathetic to the Tamil cause, Selvadurai's own exile from Sri Lanka in the wake of the anti-Tamil pogrom in 1983 being one of the reasons. In this sense, Selvadurai's celebration of non-normative masculinities in a way functions as a mockery of the hyper-aggressive militancy of the Sinhalese state and its violent means of attaining territorial sovereignty by obliterating minorities.

The Hungry Ghosts: Female Masculinity and Homophobia

Judith Halberstam in her thought-provoking book *Female Masculinities* (1998) claims, ‘Masculinity...becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle class bodies’ (2). She proposes that ‘shapes and forms of modern masculinity are best showcased within female masculinity’ (3). Treating male masculinity figures as ‘a hermeneutic, and as a counterexample to the kinds of masculinity that seem most informative about gender relations and most generative of social change’ (3), Halberstam examines masculinities as mapped on to the bodies of butch lesbians and female-to-male transsexuals. Following Halberstam’s model, I would make an attempt to examine how masculinity, as a concept, as a discourse of power, legitimacy and privilege, is not necessarily aligned with maleness: In *The Hungry Ghosts*, Selvadurai dissociates masculinity and maleness in his portrayal of a despotic matriarch, Mrs. Daya Ariyasinghe (or Aachi, meaning grandmother) positing her vis-à-vis her queer grandson, Shivan, who provides an interesting counterpoint to her elaborate masculinist performance. Aachi’s masculinity is manifested in brazen exhibition of power and domination; her inability to transfer, as if by the law of inheritance, her masculinity to Shivan, her grandson and the sole heir to her empire, occasions the primary conflict in the novel. Aachi appears a lot like the female counterpart of the Mudaliyar in *Cinnamon Gardens*, though located far apart in history – if the Mudaliyar represents a bourgeois colonial masculinity in the final days of the Empire, Aachi is more contemporary, a Sinhalese Buddhist, with a keen awareness of occupying a privileged ethnic as well as class status in war-torn Sri Lanka of the 1980s and 1990s. While Aachi’s portrayal reinstates certain ‘deep structures’ of masculinity which remain unaltered over long swathes of history, it also underpins the constructive nature of masculinity, and its non-relatedness with the male body.

The novel begins with Shivan’s recollection of his induction into how to run an empire. Aachi takes him along to familiarise him with her various properties scattered across Colombo, assuring him: “When I die, this house and all my other properties are going to come to you.” (HG 4). The satisfaction of having a male heir to her vast property gives Aachi a deep sense of pride, and she shows off Shivan to those (for instance her henchman Chandralal) who matter to her. She is extraordinarily pampering towards Shivan, and the latter soon develops a sense of self-importance, knowing he has full support of her grandmother, the matriarch, who has the ultimate say in family affairs: “The problem is that you are being spoilt by that woman. You need some discipline. You are turning into a selfish,

arrogant child,” reprimands Shivan’s mother, Hema, when Renu, Shivan’s sister is severely insulted by Aachi, for she dares to touch Shivan’s scooter (HG 36).

As Shivan gradually grows into his grandmother’s favourite, he recalls a troubled childhood, spent with relentlessly bickering parents. He remembers his dead father, a failure both as a husband and a parent, and how his mother used to chastise him: ‘[S]he would yell at my father, calling him a *poonaya*, a faggot, railing at his weakness and incompetence’ (HG 19). Early on Shivan learns that an unsuccessful man is not man enough, underpinned by his mother’s dismissal of him as *poonaya*, a derogatory term which roughly translates into ‘sissy’ or even ‘gay’, as it is understood today. In young Shivan’s mind, *poonaya* and ‘unmanly’ become synonymous, and it takes him long to dissociate the two. His self-realisation that he is sexually attracted to men (HG 55-56), his migration to Canada, and his increasing suspicion towards Aachi’s way of looking at life open up for him newer ways of interpreting hegemonic masculinities which, in postcolonial Sri Lanka, are associated with hunger for political and territorial sovereignty, promotion of ethnic Puritanism, and marginalisation of women and queer folks and all those who uphold a syncretic view of nationalism.

Shivan’s struggle begins within the family itself, long before he is exposed to the realities of the world outside: Aachi wishes her grandson to take over once she is gone, and all her energy is directed at making a man of him. On the other hand, in her treatment of her subordinates within the family and outside, Aachi replicates the ruthless aggressiveness of the Sinhala state, intolerant towards ethnic minorities and the economically underprivileged. Aachi’s hegemonic masculinity comes across most conspicuously in her unremitting abhorrence for the ethnic Other, the sexual minority and the underclass. When Renu asks Hema about their grandmother, before the children come to stay with her following their father’s untimely death, Hema tells her: “[S]he hates you...Because you are half Tamil. Your grandmother did not want me to marry your father because he was Tamil. And now that you are half Tamil, she hates you” (HG 20). Long before Shivan and Renu experience the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic war, they are made aware of the ethnic othering, the most alarming political reality of the Sri Lankan nation, of which their grandmother is an orthodox sponsor, at least in spirit.

What perplexes Shivan all through his life is Aachi’s fascination with Buddhism and Buddhist tales, yet, her complete negation of the basic principles of Buddhism that promotes love, charity, renunciation, and universal brotherhood. Aachi’s ‘girlish love of Buddhist

stories' (HG 18) is in sharp contradistinction to her ruthless handling of her poor tenants who fail to pay the rent, her disowning of her own daughter for having chosen a husband from the Tamil community, her favouritism towards her grandson and her general nonchalance towards her granddaughter Renu, and her obdurate opposition to same-sex love²⁰. It is not difficult to see that Aachi's love for Buddhism is aligned with extremist Buddhist monks who have played significant roles in ethnic cleansing and increasing militarisation of the Sri Lankan nation-state. It is interesting to note monk Walpola Rahula's (1907-1997) reply to the question whether war against the minorities was justifiable in terms of *dhamma*: "Why not? Take King Kosala a disciple of the Buddha. He did fearlessly fight terrorism in his Empire. The solution has to be a solution of the majority of the people" (qtd. in DeVotta 2007: 23). This is a dangerous declaration, for it unthinkingly eliminates all minorities. Aachi, who never tires of Buddhist tales, also has no tolerance for ethnic or sexual minorities, nor is she tolerant of her daughter, and later her beloved grandson, both of whom dare to break rules: one by marrying a Tamil, and the other by loving a man.

An eventful episode in the novel, in terms of understanding how Selvadurai exposes the dangers of hypermasculine aggression, is the one in which Shivan is sent by Aachi to extract rent from a tenant, a low class, burly, broad-chested man, who has been a defaulter for months (HG 180-189). When Shivan reaches his house and demands the rent, the man is unfazed, and brusquely dismisses him with: "Tell your grandmother I don't have the money. I can't pay her" (HG 181). When Shivan keeps pressing him to pay the rent without any further delay, the man, rather than being apologetic, flirts indulgently with him: "You're a fine boy. From Cinnamon's Gardens, aren't you? Beautiful face like a girl's, soft hands like a girl's" (HG 181). Shivan is flabbergasted at the man's audacity, but the man goes on making fun at his feminine features, eventually making an offer, which Shivan had not anticipated coming: "I'll fuck you good for the rent" (HG 181). The man's hypermasculinity is underpinned by his appearance (his "enormous" hands with "tufts of hair on knuckles", his grease-stained shorts, his "stale sweat" and "leafy breath"; see HG, 181) which sharply contrasts Shivan's "pretty" demeanour. The man's abrasive dismissal of Shivan is based on his condescension for "girlish" men of the elite class, protected from harsh realities; his confidence in his masculinity is so towering that it attributes to him stupendous power to threaten his landlord who is visibly "less" masculine than him. In this complex matrix of class and sexuality is

²⁰ Buddhism has not dealt with same-sex love too explicitly. But, as gleaned from the *Vinaya* or monastic law and *Abhidharma* or metaphysics of both Pali and Sanskrit traditions are not too well-disposed towards same-sex love or the hermaphrodite or *Pandaka*. See Introduction.

manifest in this episode, the advantage of being conventionally masculine outdoes one's class disadvantage, and gives him a power with which the extremely sober and well-mannered Shivan fails to put up a fight. Feeling powerless in the face of such unrelenting sarcasm, he retreats with a threat, with the man calling him a *poonaya* behind him.

But what happens next is even more intriguing. Unable to take the insult, Shivan visits Chandralal. By this time, he is already aware of Chandralal's power, and, although not too approving of his grandmother's overdependence on him, Shivan goes to him. His manhood has been affronted by a man much below his stature, and Shivan finds it difficult to forgive him: "Poonaya" was used frequently as an insult and I did not think the man thought I was actually gay. He had just wanted to emasculate me" (HG 182). Shivan, who would soon be questioning his grandmother for all the wrongs she has done to people through Chandralal, finds it impossible to digest an insult directed at his manhood. If the tenant uses his power of being 'more' masculine to abuse Shivan, Shivan puts to use his class advantage to take revenge on the man. This is a telling moment in the novel, where two forms of masculinity, determined by class status, come in conflict with each other. A little scene follows with Chandralal informing Aachi of the incident and Shivan's command that the impudent tenant be sufficiently punished. Aachi is immensely pleased on discovering that her grandson was reliably *manly*, and rewards him with the gift the tenant had robbed him of: "Look at him Chandralal, *truly a man, truly a man*" (HG 184; emphasis added). Shivan is not pleased, although his *lost* manhood is returned to him ceremoniously. Rather, he begins to feel ill-at-ease, for he has by then begun to question whether he has done the right thing (HG 184). It would not take long for Shivan to realise that this much exalted manliness, of which his grandmother is strongly appreciative of, is not desirable at all. When Shivan's affair with his boyfriend Mili is exposed to Aachi, ironically with the help of Chandralal and his men, all hell breaks loose, leaving Shivan with no choice but to return to Canada. Mili is killed by Chandralal's *golayas*, although Aachi refuses to take responsibility for it. Mili's death also marks a triumph of Aachi's bigotry and homophobia. Mili had worked all his life with NGOs that uphold syncretism and promote peace-building in Sri Lanka. (See Chapter 3 for more details) Even before Mili's murder, the novel reveals a grimmer reality of Chandralal rising to political power. Shivan is astonished to discover Chandralal's (always dressed in the national Sinhalese outfit) hauteur as a future leader of the country: "Our Chandralal is trying to be a politician, that's why the national costume. The next time there is an election he is going to run for Kotahena," informs Aachi (HG 160). The message is unambiguous: in the

Sri Lankan nation-state there is no place for sensitive, imaginative and liberal men, such as Shivan or Mili, one forced to migrate to Canada and the other murdered ruthlessly. They will be eliminated in favour of destructive, violent, hypermasculine men having no qualms or moral scruples.

The Hungry Ghosts reveals that masculinity has nothing to do with the male body per se; nor does it have anything to do with heterosexuality alone. Hegemonic masculinity is a performance, a set of codes one needs to abide by in order to stay in power. Shivan's doubly marginal status as a gay man and a half Tamil in Sri Lanka throws into relief the hegemonic power structures (here metaphorically represented by a Sinhalese matriarch and to some extent the hit-man Chandralal) of the nation-state confronting which is horribly risky; for it means sacrificing innocent lives, or exile to unknown lands.

When Memory Dies: Socialist Masculinities and Unbendable Notions of Male Honour

When Memory Dies is a re-narrativisation of the history of the working class in Sri Lanka, interlaced with the narratives of ethnic antagonism, from the colonial period to the recent past. A. Sivanandan locates his saga in a peasant family in Jaffna, three generations of which get voluntarily or involuntarily involved in the various important political movements: from the rise of the working class movement in the late colonial period to the emergence of the LTTE and its transformation into a mercilessly militant force during the last few decades. Although most critics, in their discussions of the novel, have dealt largely with the question of historicisation, the function of memory, and the alternative pedagogy of remembering the past in the novel (Rao 1999; Perara 2000; Ismail 2005; Salgado 2007; Jayasuriya 2012), there has not been any gendered reading, apart from fleeting mentions that women in the novel are non-actants, and the narrative turns mostly on the dynamics of male-bonding: 'Sivanandan's novel focuses on the primacy of male friendships in which women stand as sexualised outsiders' (Salgado 2007: 116). However, it is interesting to note that the novel, with its socialist leanings, seems to advance a notion of underclass masculinity, which is posited vis-à-vis a critique of bourgeois masculinity. As mentioned earlier, masculinity, especially among the bourgeoisie and aspirant social climbers, is often associated with material success, of having attained a certain class status and power. For instance, in *Cinnamon Gardens*, the Mudaliyar's masculinity, to a certain extent, is defined in terms of his social standing, his access to those in power, his expanding plantation business. Sivanandan, in my reading, privileges a form of masculinity devoted to socialist ideologies, the discursive reach of which

also includes women. But in Sivanandan's historicisation of the past men are projected as primary actors, women in this novel are mostly passive bystanders, bereaved mothers or neglected wives, perhaps with the exceptions of one or two (see chapter 3). Qadri Ismail (2005) writes that the novel tells men's 'stories in great detail', while, women's stories are 'told in summary' (200). He goes on to claim: 'The text's particular failure to produce its women as not much more than objects, then, situates the novel firmly on one side of the sexist or phallogocentric divide' (200). The novel is populated with male characters, and each of them is given sufficient narrative time; but none of them are viewed as gendered subjects. In this chapter, I shall focus on Rajan, a member of the Jaffna peasant family, who narrates the first two books of the novel to highlight Sivanandan's notions of masculinity: Rajan, torn between strong left-leaning friends who think nothing less than a revolution could bring about change and his filial duties as the eldest son of a not-so-well-to-do family, in my opinion, provides an excellent example of how men too feel helpless in the compulsion to preserve what is perceived as *manly* at a certain moment in history. Although Sivanandan does not reflect on this helplessness as a crisis of masculinity as such, it comes out in Rajan's story, more so because it is narrated in the first person. At the same time, through Rajan's story, Sivanandan also reaffirms certain hegemonic forms of masculinity.

The generational saga of the Jaffna Tamil family is drawn through a male bloodline: Sahadevan, Rajan and Vijay.²¹ The socialist and anti-colonialist ideals which pass on from one generation to the next are transmitted primarily through male members of the family. In case of Rajan, apart from his father Saha and Uncle Para, his maternal uncle Gnanam turns out to be a huge influence. Gnanam, a 'family failure' (WMD 123), exposes Rajan to the realities of the underclass, and develops in him the ability to critique bourgeois ways of life. The 'miserable clerk' (WMD 123), as Gnanam's mother calls him, has shamed their highly placed family, by failing to achieve material success like his brothers. A nationalist, as Gnanam calls himself, (WMD 137), has often embarrassed the family by his anti-colonial rhetoric and public protests, so much so that he is dubbed a lunatic and sent to an asylum by his mother (WMD 174). From a very young age, Rajan, whose father harbours deep sympathies for Gnanam, comes under the influence of the latter: 'And yet, despite such mad talk, I could not help feeling that he made a sort of sense, somewhere, somewhere beyond my reaching as yet...' (WMD 174).

²¹ It must be noted that Vijay is Lali's illegitimate child. Rajan *rescues* Lali from social humiliation and marries her and gives Vijay his name. I shall reflect on this later in this segment.

By the time Rajan gets into university, Ceylon had achieved freedom from the British Raj. His university days coincide with a turbulent period in the political history of the country (the first half of the 1950s). In the university, he gets introduced to Lal Perera, his sister Lali, their mother and a whole lot of young people, all members of the socialist Lanka Sama Samaja Party. Rajan's introduction to his leftist friends takes place in the backdrop of the historical *hartal* of 1953,²² organised by the LSSP, in protest against the hike in the price of rice from 25 cent to 70 cent per measure by the UNP government.

Rajan is gradually ushered into the murky world of politics by Lal and Kanniah, who make him see the reality behind the 'intellectual' leftists who champion the cause of the proletariat in their ornate lectures: "...theory is more important for them than bread. And it is true; they are all rich people" (WMD 167). Rajan, brought up on Gnanam's ideals, is taken in the simplicity of the Perera family and their political ideals: 'I felt I belonged here...' (WMD 168). While Rajan's socialist ideals, under the influence of the Pereras, grow stronger, he is faced with a situation at home that thrusts him into a terrible dilemma. His father Saha, who he has always known to be sympathetic to the people's cause, enters into a fierce altercation with Gnanam, who is surprised that Saha shows no interest in the *hartal*. Gnanam accuses that he is "sold out" and Saha, for the first time ever, comes down hard on him, much to Rajan's astonishment: "It is easy for you to talk, you have no job, no responsibilities, no one to support, no family, no relatives, no one...And now you want to live off other people's bravery!" (WMD 169) Rajan, who has never heard his father talk in these lines, finds it difficult to understand this change. His mother too warns him about the "*hartal* nonsense" and asks him to stay away, and concentrate on his exams (WMD 170-171). Rajan finds it difficult to reconcile the two polarities between which he is caught: one the one hand, he is reminded time and again that as the eldest son of the family he has huge responsibilities on him; he needs a good job – '...getting me a good job would help to improve Leela's prospects of marriage, help even to provide for the younger girl's dowry' (WMD 175). On the other hand, Rajan's middle class ambitions bring him down in the eyes of Lali, who considers abandoning socialistic ideals in pursuit of bourgeois comforts as cowardly. She urges him to take up a teacher's job in the provinces, which would allow him to bring about some change by influencing young minds, rather than pleading with "rich bloody relatives" to get him a decent position and enter into their circle (WMD 178-179). Rajan, who has by that time

²² Prior to 1953 *hartal* was a relatively unknown concept in Ceylon. The leaders of the LSSP who had been in exile in India during the war, having witnessed the immense impact of *hartals* during the Quit India Movement, resorted to one for the first time.

begun to admire Lali, feels emasculated when charged thus by her. Should he follow Lali's ideals or prove a 'good' eldest son of a middle class family by fulfilling all their desires? What it means to be a man then?

Rajan is rescued from this dilemma when his father finds him a job with a secondary catholic school in the hill province, for all his other attempts to find him a high paying job in the city fails. But Rajan hardly anticipates then that he has to pass a greater test in order to establish his masculinity. Away in the hills, Rajan, despite his occasional flings with an 'errant wife' or a 'thwarted girlfriend' (WMD 192), finds it difficult to erase Lali from his mind, although Lali has rejected him. Back in Colombo, he discovers the reason behind Lali's rejection: Lali is mother to Sena's child, her boyfriend who had lost his life during the *hartal*. Rajan is devastated; his first reflections on learning the truth would make him feel ashamed of himself later: 'But they were not married...o God...no...How could she? The whore...no wonder she had turned me down' (WMD 197). This brings about the real moment of crisis, when Lal, aware of his liking for Lali, throws the gauntlet at him: "If he is not man enough to marry you, he can go to hell" (WMD 197). Rajan takes a moment to mull over Lal's reprimand, which carries in it the assumption that Rajan isn't man enough to marry Lali, no longer a virgin. He realises his mistake of thinking unkindly of her, and proposes to her immediately. Lali protests but gradually relents. While Rajan's masculinity is reinstated in Lali's eyes, it is also a moment of Lali's failure: she allows herself to be *rescued* by a man, although till this moment, she has had an agency of her own. Although not mentioned in the novel, Rajan's sentimental outburst to Lali- "I am sick of fair. Fair to me, fair to my parents, fair to your...Just answer me one simple question. Do you love me?" (WMD 197) - brings out a sense of triumph. It seems there has not been any other moment in his life when he felt so complete a man. He is performing the real man's duty, eventually: restoring a 'fallen' woman to 'mainstream' life by giving her love child a father's security. The tone of the episode, however, encourages the reader to see how Rajan, the socialist man, throws to the winds bourgeois hypocrisies about pre-marital chastity and marries Lali. But it is not hard to see Sivanandan's assumption that one of the most abiding tests of one's manliness lies in his ability to rescue distressed women. Lali, sometimes, sardonically challenges Rajan's "manly prejudices" by deliberately telling people that Vijay is not his child, especially when Rajan is within earshot. Rajan feels terribly vulnerable every time she mentions it - 'I did not like to be reminded that Vijay was not my child' (WMD 214). Lali could see through Rajan's

performance of the heroic rescuer; she mocks him saying ‘men were more conservative than women, more keen to uphold tradition for its own sake, to be safe in...’ (WMD 214).

However, the most challenging affront to Rajan’s masculinity is yet to come. While Rajan and Lali get married and settle down, the Sri Lankan state, now headed by the S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike’s Sri Lankan Freedom Party, steadily moves towards a fascist regime that would lead to unprecedented ‘communal war’ (WMD 221). The Sinhala Only Act passed in 1956 is an unambiguous signal that Tamils are not Sri Lankans. Interestingly, Rajan’s (a Tamil) marriage to Lali, a Sinhalese woman with a love-child, generates a queer family of sorts in a country where professing of communal harmony is seen as betrayal by one’s community. In this sense, Rajan and Lali automatically become exiles in their own land, upholding togetherness, as the nation-state splits into fiercely warring sub-national communities. Even Rajan’s family ostracizes them initially, shamed by their eldest son’s audacity to marry a defiled woman. The penalty Rajan and Lali pay eventually is devastating, but not surprising. The tragic predicament of the couple is reminiscent of how women have always been worst victims of communal animosity. Brutality against women – rape, molestation, mutilation – has always been the commonest means of shaming the enemy in times of war or communal riot. The violence perpetrated on women is tantamount to an admission of public defeat for the community whose women have been despoiled (See Bahri 1999). Book II of *When Memory Dies* closes with a similar incident.

Rajan, Lali and their son Vijay are confronted by a few Sinhalese thugs, while the family is on an outing in a remote place. The thugs who develop a sexual interest in Lali instigate a quarrel with Rajan which takes a communal dimension when they challenge Rajan to prove that he is a Sinhalese. It doesn’t take long for them to find out that Rajan is actually a Tamil, as Lali calls out his name. The thugs punish him by raping and finally murdering Lali: “We will show you what we do to Tamil cunts” (WMD 234). The thugs put to shame Rajan’s masculinity by assaulting the woman he is supposed to protect. Rajan loses consciousness, and unable to deal with the trauma leaves the country seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. His trauma is so deep that he even abandons Vijay, leaving him in the care of his grandparents; the mourning of his loss, Lali’s death and his figurative emasculation by the Sinhalese men, continues indefinitely as evidenced by the tone of the letters he writes to Vijay from time to time. Rajan’s relocation may be seen as self-retribution, for his failure to perform the man he should have been. It also underpins the increasing depletion of a

community of people who could make a difference in the nation-state fast degenerating into militancy and terrorism.

Love Marriage: Emotional Fathers, Revolutionary Uncles and Communal Discord

V. V. Ganeshanathan's *Love Marriage*, while relating the saga of two Jaffna families, which function as a metaphor of the social history of the Sri Lankan nation, dwells mostly on the story of Kumaran, a former Tamil Tiger. If *Cinnamon Gardens* narrates the story of the early days of Ceylon's encounter with modernity, *Love Marriage* takes the story further to contemporary times, examining the bane of modernity that partitioned the nation into two equally jingoistic sub-national communities. If *Cinnamon Gardens* charts the native patriarch's anxiety to establish his equality with the colonial master through unflinching adherence to certain masculinist ideals, *Love Marriage* critiques the celebration of a militant masculinity directed towards obtaining territorialist exclusivity and ethnic purity. Narrated by Yalini, a young Tamil woman, with a cosmopolitan worldview, *Love Marriage* pits war for the cause of Eelam, against familial relationships, love and friendship, in the fashion of traditional war literature of the modern period. While making an attempt to sympathise with the cause of the Tamil Tigers, Yalini, who listens to her dying uncle, Kumaran, also questions the violence and fanaticism associated with the cause.

Hypermasculinity, war, patriotism and terrorism are inextricably linked with each other; in *Love Marriage* this nexus is more than apparent, in Ganeshanathan's portrayal of Kumaran, who, like many others, has failed to toe the thin line between patriotism and terrorism. The history of the emergence of the LTTE, and its rise as a militant force, underlines how belligerent patriotic fervour often degenerates into mindless terrorism. Yalini, the narrator, caught between deep admirations of this patriotic zeal yet disapproving of the terrorist activities that destroy countless lives, draws an interestingly ambivalent picture of the Tamil Tigers, represented here by Kumaran:

They would blow themselves up to take others with them, targeting symbols and representatives of the state; they would attack civilians and eat cyanide to avoid imprisonment. They would kill other Tamils who did not agree with them – other rebels, politicians, and even civilians. They would fight against a government that

shelled, starved and tortured its own citizens. They would renounce their families and bring children and women to their ranks. They would be called terrorists. They would enter into a world in which nobody was right. (LM 17)

The willing participants in patriotic warfare need to model themselves on a certain preset model of masculinity. As Jani de Silva (2009) observes in her ethnographic investigation into the camp life of the Tamil revolutionists:

Learning to risk the body often scarred and marked their torsos, but these became markers of achievement. At that point in their lives, anything and everything seemed possible, they appeared to have felt they were very much in control of their bodies and their destiny. (90)

Kumaran, ushered into the world of the LTTE, through his interaction with fellow Sri Lankans in England and his exposure to socialist ideologies, returns home to dedicate himself to the cause of the Eelam. What follows is a rigorous training, which requires of him to steel himself against anything that might weaken the cause; he renounces his family and leads a life of anonymity, almost to the point when his family begins to consider him dead. Kumaran, deeply rooted in the single-minded pursuit of obtaining freedom from the hegemony of the Sinhalese, follows in the footsteps of Victor Rajadurai, who helps shape their ideological stance, and Nandarajan, the 'military tactician' who motivates them to extreme self-destruction for the cause of freedom. Yalini, unable to make sense of the fanatic model of retaliation proposed by the motivator, takes a satirical view of Nandarajan's ideologies:

Someone who was going to fight, anyway. Someone who gathered the most promising people around him without any kind of discrimination, even the kinds that are considered moral. Women. Children. People are the only real weapons. You tied yourself to a dynamite, you swallowed cyanide, you hurled yourself into buildings and onto cars. *These were honours.* (LM 165; emphasis added)

The relationship dynamics between those in power and those who are at the receiving end of that power have been always defined in gendered terms – a powerful masculine race controlling a feminine one. And, the commonest reaction to this from the feminised group is a fanatic espousal of conventional images of hypermasculinity to dispel their 'feminised'

image, and developing an unwavering faith in those images as the legitimate means to achieve freedom from the repressive forces. The Tamil reaction to Sinhalese subjugation is no different, and the extremist militant position they take is guided by their penchant to prove to the world that they too are a community of well-defined men. In the case of the LTTE, as Ganeshananthan also observes, it would be erroneous to link this hypermasculinity to men alone; for, its ideological reach includes women, who are also steeled into accepting violence, self-destructive or directed towards anyone who comes in between them and their mission. (See Chapter 3)

Just like modern masculinity's several countertypes which are generated to preserve its sanctity, the LTTE sympathisers also generate a new set of countertypes, of which the most degenerate is perhaps the escapist, as mentioned above. The escapist is imagined and reprimanded as effeminate, who refuses to participate in the patriotic cause and makes a quick exit selfishly. In *Love Marriage*, such an escapist, according to Kumaran is Yalini's father Murali, who migrates abroad, as the Tamil nationalist struggle begins to gather steam in Sri Lanka. Kumaran is infuriated that her sister Vani marries such an escapist and never returns to her homeland. He even threatens to kill Murali, for seducing his sister away from her cause. On his deathbed, he tells Yalini:

“Your father had exited the place where we grew up, and your father meant that the exit would be permanent. [Vani] was supposed to come back to Sri Lanka. I wanted her to come back. I wanted to think we had all a future here.” (49)

While reflecting on what's right and what's not, Yalini realises that her father is not an escapist, an *unmanly man*, who renounces a national cause for personal well-being. Rather, she sees his father, as offering to her a counter-discourse to her uncle's violent rhetoric of patriotism. Murali's love for his motherland is established in recreating a Tamil home in foreign lands, and in the very naming of his daughter. Yalini, “a name that means, in part, Jaffna, Sri Lanka” (LM 19). Quoting Deleuze and Parnet, Grant Hamilton in an interesting essay on *Love Marriage*, writes:

This kind of (re)naming is a very good example of the way in which the Tamil community reterritorializes within the movement of the diaspora itself. It is an often unrecognized creative moment of flight and escape, but one that nonetheless adds

weight to the claim that “to flee is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than a flight”. (2012: 159)

Rather this form of re-territorialization which is without aggression provides a counter-narrative to the upholding of violence as the only means of achieving freedom. Although this might appear far too romantic in the face of terrorising hegemonic forces at home trying to obliterate the Tamil community, it, in a way, tries to show another possible way out, literally as well as symbolically. In her sympathetic portrayal of Murali, the family man, a loving father and a caring husband, Yalini calls into question the disparaging stance fanatic nationalists take against those who refuse to participate directly in the war for Tamil Eelam. The populist countertype of the escapist is interpreted from a completely different perspective, whereby Yalini succeeds in toppling the binary of the hypermasculine revolutionary and the compassionate family man. Interestingly, Murali’s profession as a caring doctor is pitted against Kumaran’s career as a vengeful nationalist, who has killed, has been taught to kill and take pride in killing. Yalini, talking about her father’s compassion for his patients, writes:

My father’s patients die. They die, and he has not lost the ability to be moved by this, as some doctors do...If one of his patients dies, his father would go to the funeral and transform himself from a doctor to a mourner...This is a body he has tended to as though his own, a body he has known, not in a sexual way, but in a paternally intimate way. (LM 222)

This passage immediately precedes the one in which she wonders whether Kumaran can be considered a martyr:

Martyrdom is something crusaders secretly dream of: to fall, with honor, with a name. Anonymous martyrdom is something very different. Kumaran died without a name, without choosing the manner in which he would die. Just a man, no longer a soldier. Whether he is a martyr or not: I cannot say. (LM 222)

The juxtaposition of these two passages tellingly brings out the contrast between Murali and Kumaran, whereby the countertype of the escapist is reclaimed, as its ‘humaneness’ is counterpointed against Kumaran’s confession: “I trained to kill people. Sometimes I even

liked it.” (LM 267) The alarming confession of Kumaran that he sometimes even loved to kill is offset by Murali’s extraordinary ability to mourn his patients, unknown people, but made his very own by his nurturing. Narratives of Murali’s love, care, and nurturance are interwoven with Kumaran’s tales of murder, suicide bombers, and hatred. Despite her deep sympathies with the dying Kumaran, Yalini cannot help but seeing her father in a new light altogether, her father who is a healer, ‘everyone’s doctor’ (LM 37).

But the death of Kumaran does not mark the end of violence. What appears worrisome is its continuation: it is carried on through a bloodline, as it were – the responsibility of keeping the ‘Tamil cause’ alive bequeathed on a younger member. Yalini is deeply perturbed when Janani, Kumaran’s daughter, agrees to an arranged marriage with Suthan, a Toronto based bachelor, with unambiguous links with the Tigers. But soon a realisation dawns on her: ‘She was doing it for him [Kumaran], because she thought he would want to see tradition preserved, if not in the form of a Tamil country, then in the form of a Tamil daughter’ (LM 270-271). Janani’s marriage is most purposefully *arranged*: it is not love for Suthan that propels Janani to agree to the match; but, this is a *love* marriage, nonetheless. For, it is motivated by a deep love for a political cause. The ending of *Love Marriage* is, therefore, clouded with this disturbing feeling, although a silver lining is seen in the possibility of embracing a more cosmopolitan outlook, when narrow nationalist sentiment could be totally abandoned.

If the Moon Smiled: Tyrannical husbands, despotic fathers, and non-conformist sons

If the Moon Smiled, Chandani Lokugé’s first novel, draws hegemonic masculinity in the most conventional terms imaginable. Away from home in Australia, and faced with two rebelling children, Mahendra experiences a terrible crisis, unable to hold together the family and preserve his authority as the head of the household. His children, the second generation diaspora, Devake and Nelum, by refusing to abide by his expectations from them, breed in him a complete sense of failure. The novel dramatises the family’s continuous struggle to free itself from the authoritative patriarch who zealously holds on to traditions and age-old beliefs. For each of them, Manthri (his wife), Devake and Neelum, challenging and collapsing his authoritarianism would be the final triumphant moment of moving beyond restrictive boundaries. It is most difficult for Manthri, having to unlearn a whole canon of rules on what makes a happy home. Her increasing detachment from the family is to a large extent self-justified by her abiding faith in Buddhism and its emphasis on renunciation.

Mahendra's notions of masculinity are, at least initially, reinforced by Manthri's docility and unquestioning submission to his dictates. Manthri's lessons in subservience begins from an early childhood— "...like a floral offering to a deity, you will blossom for your husband and derive value from him" (IMS 7). The implication of sexual purity, monogamy and complete servility to the husband is unequivocal in this note of advice, a moral drawn from the tale of Yasodhara, the devoted wife of the Buddha. Manthri is too young to question these dictates, and imagines how she would be married one day, but at the same time, wishes to cling on to these moments of childhood, 'reluctant to let [them] go' (IMS 15). The end of childhood and stepping into adolescence is marked by a rite of passage performed in isolation, once she begins to menstruate: "You must not be seen these days", her mother passes the injunction (IMS 17). Manthri's easy-going relationship with her father ends on that day, even before she realises; once out of isolation, she is deterred from any more physical closeness with him:

She makes to run to him, in the old familiar way, but her mother holds her back with a slight frown and whispers to her. Made suddenly self-conscious, she shyly bows low at his feet, with her palms clasped. (IMS 19)

As Manthri crosses the boundary between girlhood and womanhood, her father celebrates the moment by 'clasp[ing] a gold chain round her neck' (IMS 19) and 'slid[ing] two gold bangles on to her arms' (IMS 20). The gold jewellery, which Manthri is supposed to cherish, becomes loaded with meaning – Manthri's imprisonment into womanhood is complete and sealed by the patriarch. Her incarceration, after marriage to Mahendra, however, would be more literal than symbolic.

Lokugé, in her classic feminist mockery²³ of man's fear of woman's sexuality, unfurls Mahendra's sense of betrayal when Manthri does not bleed on their wedding night – "You have been with another man?" he asks (IMS 35). The moment sets the tone of their lifelong relationship. Although Manthri denies having slept with another man, Mahendra flings 'the denial aside' (IMS 35). He has been betrayed by his mother as well, for she had convinced him that Manthri coming from "a good conventional family," will be "a pure, innocent wife" (IMS 35). On the first night of their wedding, Mahendra knowing that he can never claim absolute authority over his wife's body, 'empties his mind of the dream of her' (IMS 35), and

²³ However, since the novel is narrated primarily by Manthri, who initially does not question her subservient status as a woman either in her father's house or in Mahendra's after marriage, the mockery does not come through in the narrative. The mockery is implicit in Lokugé's representation of Mahendra, and can be fully appreciated when the incident of the wedding night is seen in hindsight at the end of the novel.

what is left of the marriage is a routine living together. Romance and the body are so inextricably interconnected in Mahendra's mind, brought up on bourgeois fascination with bodily purity and chastity, that once the body is found 'defiled', he can never bring himself up to love his wife. Even before this discovery, he is devastated at the orgasmic pleasure she expresses while love-making – 'He will remember it always with shame. Had she no self-respect? No decency? She seemed a woman of endless wiles' (IMS 34). Sinhalese men and women, as Obeyesekere (1984) has shown in his research, are socialised into *lajja-baya*, which demands of them maintenance of sexual propriety so as not to shame the family. But what is interesting in Mahendra's reaction to Manthri's expression of pleasure in sex is how, in the case of women, the observance of *lajja-baya* is also mandatory in the most private of spaces, in this case, the nuptial bed. Mahendra's shame (or *lajja*) at his wife's transgression of a behavioural code underpins not only his conservatism, but also his fear (or *baya*) at her agency in sexual intercourse. She is not a passive body to be possessed – 'Darkness spreads like her hair across his face' (IMS 35). Mahendra's masculinist crisis sets in on the wedding night, a crisis he never gets over: much later, when their children have grown up, Manthri reveals that Mahendra has decreed that, during sexual intercourse, 'I do not move, that I lie passive' (IMS 59).

However, the political edge of the episode of the wedding night is somewhat allayed when Manthri denies having been with another man. It remains unexplained why she refrains from revealing the truth, although there are unambiguous suggestions of her having lost her virginity to the male servant who worked in their house in the village (IMS 29). But later, when Mahendra accuses her of seducing a visitor and reminds her of her pre-marital 'sin', Manthri dreams of him – "'Come with me to the river,'" Thilakasiri whispers to me. His face is closing in on me, like a face held too close to a camera, or to the truth' (IMS 59). Pavithra Tantrigoda (2011) makes an attempt to explain Manthri's denial of the sexual act:

Rather than positing this as a moment of subversion and self-actualization for Manthri, it is rendered in nuanced and ambivalent terms as succumbing to a primary impulse and as something that is outside the control of the conscious self. This is implicit in Manthri's denial of it. (66)

Perhaps, Manthri, who is steeped in Buddhist tales of faithful wives and her mother's endless moralising on sexual purity, refuses to concede to the act in order not to degrade herself in the eyes of her husband. In fact, Manthri's interpellation in patriarchal discourses is so complete

that the shame of having been touched by a man, other than her husband, thrusts her into a profound sense of guilt. One may make sense of the extent of her unquestioning trust in patriarchal construction of womanhood, when she considers herself ‘fulfilled’ in marriage, if not happy – ‘How else could a woman be fulfilled in marriage but with a son who could continue his father’s name?’ (IMS 60) The greater part of Manthri’s life is wasted in proving to Mahendra her devoutness as a wife. But, Mahendra, who is anyway unconvinced by her denial, continues to shame her at the slightest opportunity – ‘He reminds me of the past. His voice rasps terribly. Flushed and ashamed, I look away’ (IMS 59).

Mahendra’s decision to migrate to Adelaide, Australia is his own; he announces that he has made up his mind, and does not consider consulting Manthri. He tells her that Adelaide would offer their children a freer world – “Aren’t you sick of living in this country like frogs in a well? No, I will open up the world for my son” (IMS 43). This statement assumes an ironical overtone in retrospection, when both his children, Devake and Nelum, confront his authority as a father, which Mahendra never anticipates being challenged. In Adelaide, he becomes the quintessential ‘marginal man’, caught between two worlds, two cultures, unable to accept any, and engaging in frantic preservation of a Sinhalese home (‘We have to preserve something of our culture, don’t you think?’ insists Mahendra, [IMS 67]), not just to retain his ethnic identity in a foreign land, but also, to keep his masculinity intact, as he understands masculinity to be – wielding inviolable authority as a husband and a father. With Devake and Nelum coming of age, Mahendra’s failure begins to haunt him as irredeemable.

Desperate to keep his children away from evil influences of white friends, Mahendra assumes a tyrannical disposition. Devake overhears his friends making fun of Mahendra – “A real Hitler, he hears them say.” (IMS 79) While Mahendra is infuriated at Devake’s fascination with music and his determination to pursue a career in it, he fails to debar Nelum from asserting her love for David. Manthri senses disaster – ‘...Mahendra believes in duty and caste and religion. Race: he believes in race. Not in people nor in relationships’ (IMS 103). Mahendra, a Sinhalese father, located in Adelaide, invariably reminds of the Tamil Mudaliyar in Selvadurai’s *Cinnamon Gardens*: strangely, though separated by decades and by ethnicities, both of them display similar despotism in their treatment of non-conformist children. When Nelum runs away from her wedding, Mahendra goes mad with anger – ‘It is frightening, yes, and tragic, to see’ (IMS 173). Nelam’s final betrayal becomes unbearable to him. An interesting passage follows in which Manthri reveals how Mahendra has always wanted that Nelum ‘was his son and Devake his daughter’ (IMS 173). In his imagination,

Nelum, ambitious, determined, and successful is more of a man than Devake, who, as child, always hung on to his mother – ‘Devake had never been very promising anyway. Always hanging on to Manthri’s sari’ (IMS 67). But Mahendra could not afford to let Nelum fulfil all her ambitions – ‘...because she was his daughter, he decided to marry her off’ (IMS 173). This is a telling observation, though not reflected upon by the narrator. Mahendra’s rigid notions of gender and his expectations that his children would perform according to the codes considered appropriate to their gender, become the primary cause behind the destruction of the family.

Although *If the Moon Smiled* has been often read as a conservative migrant woman’s agonising journey to find a real home, and her anagnorisis that she does not belong anywhere, in my reading, Lokugé’s novel offers an interesting study in South Asian masculinity and its crisis in a diasporic locale, which reveals the sustenance of some cultural deep structures of how masculinity is perceived and appreciated by some men. The novel is revelatory of how stringent adherence to certain codes of hegemonic masculinity is damaging not only to personal relationships and the family, but it also destroys those who refuse to change their perspective – Mahendra is eventually withdrawn, having lost power over his family. Manthri detaches herself from the family, finding a life of her own beyond its boundaries; so do the children. Mahendra’s defeat is complete and he retires into a largely apathetic life. Perhaps, what he does not realise even till the end is that ‘His passivity and his defeat are his own’ (IMS 199).

The Match: Fatherly Love, Cricket and Nostalgia for a Lost Home

Romesh Gunesequera’s novel *The Match* deploys cricket as a central trope in its male protagonist’s imagination of Ceylon/Sri Lanka, and in reconfiguring his own sense of identity in his current diasporic home in England. The novel dramatises Philippines-born Sunny Fernando’s emotional quest to connect with his past, amid the drifting relationships of the present. This novel, like *If the Moon Smiled*, has at its centre a ‘marginal man’, who desperately seeks his root, but not at the expense of oppressing others at home. In fact, Sunny is highly emotional, in comparison to which, his wife Clara and son Mikey appear detached and nonchalant. Sunny, unlike Mahendra, is a romantic, and his desperation to connect to his past has none of Mahendra’s aggressiveness. In his treatment of Mikey, Sunny is no strict disciplinarian; rather he comes across as loving and compassionate, barely interfering in his private space. His growing distance with Clara, due to her relentless pursuit of a career in art,

distresses him, but unlike Mahendra, he never imposes his will on his wife. Sunny, in other words, is not the conventional oppressive patriarch, but rather an emotionally vulnerable, brooding father, who wistfully seeks an anchor. However, as I shall try to show, *The Match* offers an interesting study of masculinity in that it locates cricket, a masculinist game, in the emotional paradigm of father-son relationship, deploying the game as a medium between a lost past, which Sunny keeps on mourning and his present, on which he seems to be losing his grip.

The American journalist, Mike Marqusee (2006), who has an important oeuvre of work on cricket, writes about the symbolic import of the game in *The Match*:

[In literature] the game is usually treated as a social rite, sometimes a rite of passage. The first of Gunesequera's matches harks back to this tradition... In general, cricket in south Asian fiction assumes a more mature guise. In novels by Salman Rushdie, R K Narayan, Vikram Seth, Shyam Selvadurai and Mukul Kesevan, cricket is public property. It bristles with potent associations: national identity, modernity, social aspiration, political intrigue. Gunesequera's second match belongs to this family. (n. pag.)

In South Asia, cricket and fervent patriotism have become inseparable (See Wagg 2005); with the growing communal rivalry between India and Pakistan, for example, cricket matches between these two countries occasion an alarming exhibition of bigoted national sentiments. As Ashis Nandy (2000) writes:

Cricket is a religion in South Asia and India's matches with Pakistan have acquired the appeal of an annual Ramlila, with Pakistani cricket team having the right touch of the demonic. (xvi)

Cricket and discourses on colonial masculinity are closely linked, cricket being the most prominent game in English public schools, factories in which boys were moulded into men. Abby Hayton (2015) writes:

The masculine ideal of the gentleman cricketer was disseminated throughout the colonies by educational establishments such as Aligarh College in India and Harrison College in Barbados, which were modelled on English public schools; at Harrison College, cricket and classics were taught alongside one another in an effort to produce young men who embodied the Victorian ideal of masculinity. Cricket was no mere

diversion, but a vital part of the moral education of those who would go on to become barons of Empire. Henry John Newbolt's celebrated poem *Vitae Lampada* illustrates this poignantly. Based on the poet's experiences of playing at his school, Clifton College, the poem draws parallels between the schoolboy cricketers and the soldiers and imperialists many of them were to become. The dual applicability of the chilling refrain "play up, play up and play the game" to both cricket and military service is an apt example of how the Victorians taught an ethic of masculinity through sport which served to prepare their sons for success in battle and colonial conquest. (n. pag)

In fact, in Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy*, the poem *Vitae Lampada* is held up for ridicule by the two queer boys, Arjie and Shehan, who are unable to relate to the ideals the poem celebrates. In postcolonial South Asia, cricket, masculinity and nationalism are interconnected in a complex gendered understanding of the game. But, the colonial ideal of masculinity that went into the making and celebration of cricketers has been replaced by an aggressive, violent masculinity:

The good cricketer was masculine because he had control over his impulsive self and symbolized the superiority of form over substance, mind over body, culture over nature. Above all, cricket was masculine because it symbolised serenity in the face of the vagaries of fate and it incorporated the feminine within the game's version of the masculine. The new masculinity of cricket is built on raw performance and the superiority of substance over style and the physical over the mental. It further integrates cricket in the nationalist frame and in the entertainment business. (Nandy 2000: xx)

It is interesting to note how bad performance on the cricket field readily invites threats of emasculation as apparent in the verbal abuses hurled at cricketers or in the manner cricketers of rival teams are humiliated in placards brandished in the stadium gallery. The placard 'Maxwell is a fag (*poonaya*)' which a Sri Lankan fan flourished at the quarter finals of the 2015 World Cup in which Sri Lanka played Australia in a bid to insult Glen Maxwell went viral, inviting severe criticism from cricket fans and LGBT activists alike. As explained above, in the section on *The Hungry Ghosts*, *poonaya* which roughly translates into fag or gay is a common term of abuse in Sri Lanka, used often to shame men and mark them out as unmanly. This placard, which drew flak from all over the world, in its attempt to emasculate the Australian cricketer, also, unwittingly, ended up projecting queerness as an Other to

cricket, a predominantly ‘masculine game’. The online LGBT magazine *PinkNews* quoted Aritha Wickramasinghe, a lawyer and Sri Lankan cricket fan, who said:

“Homophobia in sport, especially in Cricket, is something that all cricket loving nations must get together to tackle. Using gay slurs such as this at a World Cup is insensitive and insulting to the millions of young gay men and women that endure discrimination and violence because of who they chose to love.” (2015: n.pag.)

Romesh Gunsekera’s *The Match* written in 2006, by the time Sri Lankan cricket team had steadily rose into global prominence, invests cricket with deep emotions, whereby cricket acquires an affective dimension. As mentioned earlier, watching cricket at Lords, one in which Sri Lanka plays England and in another in which it plays India, gives Sunny a sense of rootedness in his incessantly drifting life, a sense of identity and racial exclusivity within the predominantly ‘white’ culture of England. Cricket is deployed as a vehicle or medium through which the patrilineality of the Fernando family is re-established; it comes to function as a symbolic talisman of sorts, which is handed down from father to son in a bid to preserve the family’s identity in a fast globalising world. In Gunsekera’s novel cricket is not projected as an overtly masculinist game; but, it does come to the rescue of its male protagonist who is faced with a terrible crisis of not having observed the duties of a worthy son on the one hand, and feeling incomplete as a father as emotional distance with his son increases with each passing day, on the other.

The narrative spanning a timeline of 32 years, from 1970 (in Manali, Philippines) to 2002 (London), with a brief sojourn in Sri Lanka in 1994, begins and ends with a cricket match. The first is played in the upper class Sri Lankan ghetto in Philippines, and the last is an international match which Sunny watches with son Mikey in the United Kingdom. Sunny’s father Lester is elated when he expresses his wish to play cricket, and interestingly, cricket essentials are found in the storeroom, brought from the old homeland, as marker of one’s indigenous roots – ‘The box in the storeroom did contain a neglected bat and a barely used red leather ball. With the two essentials in his hand, Sunny agreed he could improvise a wicket’ (M 18). Lester and Sunny bond over cricket; and Sunny is surprised when his father, who is usually ‘sardonic’ about everything, appreciates his wrists – “Good. Use those wrists. You have good wrists” (M 19) – though he is never known to have said any such thing before. Hector, Lester’s friend, who has always taken an avuncular interest in Sunny, also

joins father and son to form cricket teams to play against each other and revive the feel of their Ceylonese homeland. The cricket match turns out to be Sunny's test in proving his masculinity, as his love interest Tina puts up a glorious show in handling the bat. In his urgency to outperform Tina, Sunny hits the ball hard, sending it over the boundary only to smash a glass window of Rudolf's (Tina's father) Mercedes. However, the second match turns out to be disastrous for Sunny who despite a good show loses Tina to Robby who is declared the hero of the day.

Soon afterwards, Sunny accidentally discovers how Lester might have been responsible for his mother's suicide, and although he does not know the whole truth, he develops a profound abhorrence for Lester and moves on. It takes him years to arrive at the truth, by which time his father is already dead, and he cannot help but feel guilty for having drifted away from him. He begins to reconnect with his father in his mind, and is beset by a deep anxiety of losing his son as he had lost his father. The thought that Mikey too might move on hits him hard as he watches children playing cricket –

Some kids were playing with a bat and a ball, but there were no kites flying in the sky. It made him worry not only about his life but also Mikey's childhood. That too was passing...Then nothing of those early days would remain... (M 222)

However, the distance between father and son increases, as Sunny begins to feel alienated by him – Mikey barely discusses his life, and Sunny discovers from other people his growing association with music. He also realises that Mikey and his generation would not bother to mend anything that is broken; they simply move on – 'They are nomads, going from one room to another in search of the momentarily cool' (M 244). This anchorless nomadism which characterises this generation bothers Sunny who clings on to the past, refusing to let it go. As suicide bombers blow up banks in Colombo, the twin towers of the World Trade Center come crashing down, and Mikey's friend Benjy getting involved in a racial fight with Turkish boys, the feeling that the world is disintegrating beyond redemption grow more intense –

When Sunny lay down to sleep that night he couldn't sort images of New York from those of Colombo five years earlier. As for little Benjy...he didn't know what to think. Nothing would be quite the same again in their separate worlds: Mikey's, Benjy's and his. But then, he wondered, was it ever? (M 249)

Soon after the Sri Lankan team arrives to play England in a Test Match Series, and Sunny's memory of the first cricket match which connects him to his father and his roots urges him to head to the stadium – 'He felt he was joining a religion, or something akin to one' (M 261). At the same time, Sunny imagines that the disintegrating world might be unifying over cricket – 'Perhaps even the Tigers' leader in his camouflaged bunker was biting his nails...All watching the same game. Slowly the world, Sunny's world, was rearranging itself' (M 271-272). While this might appear far too romantic a proposition, Sunny is soon dismayed to realise that cricket is no less violent than war between two nation-states, between two races – 'Bawling and baying for blood was not the right way to approach the game' (M 283). What becomes slowly apparent to Sunny is that he is a minority in his imagination of the world, his appreciation of relationships, and his way of looking at cricket – it is impossible to think beyond race and nationalisms. The hyper-masculinist energy of the cricket field and the racist comments dissolve Sunny's romantic imagination of cricket. As Trevor Chesterfield, the cricket writer and journalist and managing editor of a cricket website based in Sri Lanka, Colombo writes:

There is the yobbo element, which inhabit any number of venues in England; obscene racist and abrasive expressions, accompanied by crass guttural noises and punctuated by crude finger gesticulations, are the sort you would expect of the mob mentality found among rugby and soccer followers. (62)

The last match, in which Sri Lanka plays India, the one that closes the novel, however, offers Sunny one last hope of connecting with Mikey, who inspired by a friend, agrees to go for the match – 'They'd be there together if not next to each other. "You don't understand what it means. It's a roots thing"' (M 296). Sri Lanka loses the game, but Sunny is not disappointed – 'Our side might have collapsed, he thought, but we shared the day' he consoles himself (M 305). Sunny's emotional investment in cricket appears romantic in comparison to the ultra-nationalists sentiments associated with it; cricket, in his imagination, functions as a connecting agent, as against the aggressive masculinity, violence, dirty racial and ethnic politics that have bedevilled the game in recent times. It is interesting how Gunesequera apparently depoliticises cricket and locates it within the emotional paradigm of relationships – of fathers and sons, of old and new ways of life. In his vision, cricket, which is no longer a gentlemanly sport, can function as a unifying agent, collapsing ethnic barriers – 'Next to him a bunch of teenagers sporting Sri Lankan cricket shirts were chatting excitedly in Tamil.

Further on another group was singing in Sinhala' (M 305). However, it remains only a dream within the pages of fiction.

This chapter made an attempt to make sense of Sri Lankan masculinities within the family, local or expatriate, which is no less politicised than the world outside. There is no singular model of masculinity, but multiple manifestations of it, each reinforcing itself through a series of countertypes, at a given point in history. The arrival of Ceylon as a modern state under the aegis of colonial rule, the escalating ethnic animosity between the Sinhalese and the Tamils with the official decolonisation of Ceylon, bigoted nationalism and ethnic cleansing that dominated Sinhalese politics after the British left, the violent retaliation of the Tamils to Sinhalese domination for decades, and the emergence of Sri Lanka as a militant nation-state – all of these shaped the notions of masculinities, which in turn, redefined personal relationships within the space of the family. Sri Lankan expatriate authors, removed from the homeland, engage in a critique of hegemonic masculinities, configured around notions of bigoted nationalism, ethnic purity, and preservation of class hierarchy, and manifested in oppression of women and homophobic dismissal of non-normative sexual identities while revealing the other less privileged forms of masculinities which could barely survive within an aggressively militant state. Masculinity which is often imagined in terms of a set of performative codes, is, therefore, a discourse which often ends up victimising men and not just women: men are so interpellated in such discourse that they do not question it and go on performing what is held up as appropriate to their sex; it equally victimises men who challenge the compulsive performance of such codes.

In the novels I have examined in this chapter the public and the private are extremely difficult to separate: in *Cinnamon Gardens*, the Mudaliyar's oppression of his two sons, his desperation to eliminate one's queerness and disowning of the other for having married a low class woman, is stolidly contingent on his social position. In *Love Marriage*, Kumaran's decision to marry off Janani to an LTTE sympathiser may appear unjust to Yalini; but Kumaran's political idealism informs his commitment as a father, and he could not imagine anything better for his daughter. The fear of emasculation is so troubling to men that they often end up destroying their own lives, as evident in Rajan's complete detachment from his family and his self-imposed exile in *When Memory Dies*. Mahendra's failure to love his wife and their failed relationship are conditioned by Mahendra's sense of defeat on discovering that he does not have absolute control over Manthri's body, which has been already 'deflowered' before marriage. On the other hand, those who are perceived as not masculine

enough are either marginalised or eliminated – examples would be Shivan or Arjie, queer men who have to continuously struggle against forces of hegemonic masculinities within the family as well as public spaces. At the same time, notions of masculinity is further questioned in *Funny Boy*, in which Chelva, the oppressive father, is posited vis-à-vis Daryl and Jegan, both of whom inspire Arjie to fight back, although none of them share his father’s hyper-masculine disposition. *The Match*, on the other hand, offers a counterpoint to Mahendra in Sunny, an emotional father, who broods over a disintegrating world and a family falling apart. Far from displaying any sign of aggressive masculinity, Sunny in his emotional excesses fail to keep up with the world that does not wait to fix anything that’s broken. Sunny’s predicament of not being masculine enough is perhaps best realised in his increasing sense of alienation from everything around him. Ramifications of masculinities are, therefore, manifold, and hence, reading masculinities as only hegemonic would be reductive; yet, what becomes manifest in the reading of these novels is that, ‘if men weren’t seeking domination they wouldn’t be so unwell’ (Brown 2015: n. pag).

Chapter 3

Mothers, Wives and Daughters: Narratives of Respectability, Repression and Resistance

[F]undamentalism naturalises and sacralises the family and sexuality and secludes women from the public sphere.

– Jayawardena and De Alwis (1986)

The Family and the Women's Question in Sri Lanka

The journey of Sri Lankan women, particularly Tamil women, from being demure mothers, daughters and wives to self-destructive suicide bombers, dedicated to the cause of the Tamil Eelam is exemplary. Although this journey from isolated secure spaces of the home to a volatile political domain seems to underline a gradual process of liberation, a closer look reveals that in neither of these roles, the woman has any autonomy. Feminist politics in Sri Lanka, the history of which can be traced back to the early decades of the twentieth century, did not acquire a disruptive edge till about the 1980s; and even today, feminists are often told off as an evil influence on tradition and family and a major threat to the *status quo* of the nation-state. As post-independence Sri Lanka got increasingly militarised, communal tensions culminated into a bloody civil war, and glorification of martyrdom and unabashed celebration of ethnic homogeneity entered into Sinhalese and Tamil sub-nationalist discourses, women were increasingly relegated to the periphery and rendered powerless. Although the feminist movement played a significant role in war torn Sri Lanka, the 'symbolic re-production' of women within nationalist imaginaries has continued to deny her agency and freedom.

The image of the mother (the mother-land, the mother-tongue, etc.) which dominated nationalist discourses acquired tremendous political currency in postcolonial Sri Lanka as both Sinhalese and Tamil militant nationalists returned to the iconic figure of the mother in legitimising the civil war. As Serena Tennekoon (1986) writes – ‘Male military heroes and their “supporting” cast of mothers, admiring wives and lovers are invoked to condone the insanity of organised male violence’ (n.pag). The mother image – the patriotic mother willingly sending off her son to war, the grieving mother left destitute with no son living, the social mother demanding peace and advocating the end of war—has been repeatedly deployed for various purposes. Malathi de Alwis (1998) writes – ‘...idealised images as warm tears, blood turned into milk...are harnessed in writings and other forms of public discourses such as war songs and political speeches’ (258). Sitralega Maunaguru (1995), on the other hand, underlines a major contradiction in projecting motherhood in both pro-war and anti-war discourses:

By accepting this responsibility to nurture and preserve life which is valorised by the Sri Lankan state, they reveal the ultimate “transgression” of the state as well: the state that has denied women the opportunities for mothering through a refusal to acknowledge life by restoring to violent repression. (167)

In the multiple discourses on motherhood running parallel to and intersecting with each other at some points, what is extremely discomfoting is the complete elision of female sexuality, agency and power. Within sub-nationalist registers, or even within discourses of feminist protest projecting the image of the grieving mother, women’s legitimacy within the nation-state seems to be sanctioned only by motherhood. This over-valuation and idealisation of the mother figure have generated an unending list of countertypes – the single woman, the married woman without children, the married woman unwilling to embrace motherhood, the divorced woman, the lesbian woman, and so on and so forth.

The centrality of the mother-figure in both pre-colonial and postcolonial nationalist discourses originates from the repressive domestication of Ceylonese women, whose body became a contested site in the cultural encounter between British colonialism and Protestant Christianity on the one hand, and a particular strand of Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil Hindu nationalism on the other. Interestingly, neither was liberating for the woman, constructed as the repository of culture and tradition and increasingly relegated to the precincts of the home and the family. During the high period of colonisation, the home of the native, as several

scholars have noted (see Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997), became the essential focus of the European enterprise of cultural colonisation; realising that the nationalists urgently cordoned off the home, the inner sanctum, from the morally debilitating influences of the West. Echoing Partha Chatterjee (1989) and Tanika Sarkar (2001), Malathi de Alwis (2007) writes:

The home became the ultimate space which the missionaries sought to encroach upon and re-fashion while the nationalists, in turn, sought to close it off...Woman, as the repository of tradition and culture, as the core of the home and exemplar of domesticity, and most importantly, as the reproducer, nurturer and caretaker of future generations, was the terrain upon which such discourses and debates were articulated and fought over. (185)

In postcolonial Sri Lanka, the hyper-nationalist ethnic communities in the process of 'othering' each other, subscribed to the very same discourse, even when women were sent to war. Women's identity, therefore, continued to be tied to motherly care, wifely virtues or daughterly obedience. As Parker *et.al.* (1992) observe, the trope of the nation-as-woman 'depends for its representational efficacy on a particular image of woman as chaste, dutiful, daughterly or maternal' (6).

Although the feminist column, 'Cat's Eye' (an initiative of Kumari Jayawardena) in a popular newspaper, vociferously critiqued militant nationalism, women's marginalisation, and other gender related issues for years, some women's support groups, such as Women in Need (formed in 1987 to address the issue of domestic violence), to name one, urged women to stick to their roles of the responsible mother or the devoted wife and try every possible means to preserve their marriage and family, even when they were tortured beyond forbearance (See Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002: 264). The expatriate novels I shall be analysing in this chapter foreground the hetero-patriarchal hegemonic structures within which Sri Lankan women are inextricably contained, and how these structures find one way or the other to reproduce themselves. The disruptive feminist politics of these novels can be best appreciated when contextualised against a historiography of the 'Women's Question' in Sri Lanka, which, I shall make an attempt to trace in the following segments.

Colonial Modernity, Nationalist Thoughts and the New Ceylonese Woman

Barbara Eherenreich and Deidre English (1978/2005) note, with an unmistakable tone of sarcasm:

Men, men of the “establishment”—physicians, philosophers, scientists—addressed themselves to the Woman Question in a constant stream of books and articles. For, while women were discovering new questions and doubts, men were discovering that women were themselves a question, an anomaly when viewed from the busy world of industry. They couldn’t be included in the men’s world, yet they no longer seemed to fit in their traditional place. From a masculine point of view the Woman Question was a problem of control: Woman had become an issue, a social problem—something to be investigated, analyzed, and solved. (19-20)

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The same question concerned Ceylonese men with the emergence of the New Woman under the aegis of colonial rule. These concerns, one may note, were a replication of those English men and women²⁴ were faced with when women left the precincts of the home to threaten men’s pre-eminence in the public domain (see, Rosenberg 1982). Much to the anxiety of the men (and also traditional women), the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the formation of several women’s organisations in Ceylon. They were engaged in social, religious, and political reforms, contained within the broader rubric of rising nationalist or anti-colonial cultural and political struggles. While most of these organisations were dedicated to social service that critiqued the colonial government’s failure to provide the basic necessities of life to the underprivileged, one of these, the Women’s Franchise Union (WFU), played a significant political role in achieving women’s suffrage in 1931. Jayawardene and de Alwis (1996) write that although the organisation presented ‘relatively conservative proposals to the Donoughmore Commission in 1927’ (247), it pioneered a significant movement for women in claiming their political rights. Owing to the untiring endeavour of this multi-ethnic organisation, comprising mostly of educated bourgeois women, ‘many of them wives of nationalist and labour leaders’, (Jayawardena 1986: 128), Ceylon became one of the first colonies to achieve women’s suffrage. However, inaugurating a discussion on the ‘Women’s Question’ in Ceylon with a recalling of the success of the

²⁴ Women in England were also averse to the idea of women’s liberation. For instance the novelist Mary Augusta Ward, one of many such, protested vociferously against the New Woman, seeing it as detrimental to marriage and motherhood. Ceylonese women too, as I shall show in subsequent sections, also protested against education and liberation of women in the colonial period.

WFU might be partially misleading; the Ceylonese woman's story was not all about progress and success.

The analysis of the novels I propose to look at demands a historiography of women's liberalism, which, began in the late nineteenth century Ceylon; however, the privileges were mostly enjoyed by the educated bourgeois women. Colonial modernity bred a generation of women that laid the foundation for larger feminist struggles in later times, particularly, after the British left and at the onset of the civil war. In fact, it produced a liberal, reformist agenda which worked towards cleansing society of certain taboos and superstitions through education, the first steps to liberating women from complete hetero-patriarchal domination. In fact when the WFU advanced their demands for universal franchise, they emphasised upon the progress that had been made in the field of women's education in the past two decades. As Jayawardena (1986) notes:

...fairly quick progress in female education was made in the first decades of the 20th century...By 1911, literacy rates for women had more than quadrupled from 3 per cent in 1881 to 12 per cent in 1911. (122)

It was a moment of great victory when the Donoughmore Commission agreed to grant universal franchise to Ceylon. This was also the moment that marked a significant triumph of the new woman in the political sphere, so far dominated by men.

This moment of triumph for women triggered off a deep anxiety among men. It was everywhere, especially in the newly emerging print media. Quoting from T. Metthananda's article, 'Votes for Women, 1923-1931' (1981), Malathi de Alwis (1999) notes:

The granting of franchise to women was likened to casting pearls before swine by a respected and senior Ceylonese legislator, who went on to assert that it would defile the 'sacredness of the home' and lead to the destruction of the family. The English press also cast doubts on women's literacy and political experience and went so far as to question whether they had the 'appropriate temperament' to shoulder such a responsibility... While the Sinhala press commented specifically about the WFU, and more generally about women's organizations, such commentaries also wove in and out of a broader debate on whether women should be given the right to vote. This question was framed in terms of whether they had adequately proven themselves to be

responsible and patriotic citizens. Citizenship thus hinged on whether Sinhala women honoured and respected their ‘ancient’ culture and traditions. (183-184)

The ultra-nationalists were terribly disconcerted by the invasion of the inner sanctum of the home by the new policies of the colonial government, which included granting voting rights to women. It was a difficult paradox to resolve. To quote Eherenreich and English (1978/2005) once again: Page | 146

For, in the new world of the nineteenth century, what was a woman to do? Did she build a life, like her aunts and her mother, in the warmth of the family—or did she throw herself into the nervous activism of a world which was already presuming to call itself “modern”? Either way, wouldn’t she be ridiculous, a kind of misfit? Certainly out of place if she tried to fit into the “men’s world” of business, politics, science. But in a historical sense, perhaps even more out of place if she remained in the home, isolated from the grand march of industry and progress. (18)

Similar questions were raised in the colonies, to which there were no simple answers—

Attempts were made to educate women, abolish sati and other evils and discourage female seclusion. But the ultra nationalists resisted legislative and reformist changes as an unwanted intrusion by the colonial government and local reformers into the sacred space of domestic life. (Jayawardena and de Alwis 1996: xi)

The ‘Women’s Question’ was difficult to resolve, but the ultra-nationalists found a way out by designating her to a symbolic function, which continued to influence the cultural imagination of the woman in the following decades. These were the times when the Ceylonese nation began to be imagined, as was the case with almost all colonised nations across the globe, as a hetero-masculinist project, an imagined brotherhood (Anderson 1991:16), within which women were constructed as cultural and biological producers of the nation – ‘[W]omen [are] sedate rather than dynamic...[t]hey [stand] for immutability rather than progress, providing the backdrop against which men determine[d] the fate of the nation’ (Mosse 1985:23). The West and its ideal of material progress were hard to ignore. But, such notions had to be adapted without tarnishing the inner spiritual self. This onus of preserving

the inner sanctum of indigenous (or national) identity fell on the woman, who became the ‘ahistorical’ signifier of interiority –

The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents our inner self, our true identity. The world is the treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world – and woman is its representation. And so we can get an identification of social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*. (Chatterjee 1989: 238-239)

Following Chatterjee’s argument, Malathi de Alwis observes, just as in India, in Ceylon dominated by Buddhist ideologies, “one of the predominant nationalist responses and resistance to British colonialism...took the form of a gendered separation of spheres: a feminized ‘private’ and a masculinized ‘public’” (1995–96:17). This alignment of the woman with the inner sanctum, the spiritual space of the home is enormously problematic, for it forges a repressive resolution of the identity of the nationalist subject faced with Western ideas of progress and the need to preserve what is identified as tradition. R. Radhakrishna writes –

The locus of the true self, the inner/traditional/spiritual sense of place, is exiled from the processes of history while the locus of historical knowledge fails to speak for the true identity of the nationalist subject. The result is a fundamental rupture, a form of basic cognitive dissidence, a radical collapse of representation. Unable to produce its own history in response to its inner sense of identity, nationalist ideology sets up Woman as a victim and goddess simultaneously. Woman becomes the allegorical name for a specific historical failure: the failure to coordinate the political or the ontological with the epistemological within an undivided agency. (1992: 85)

The celebrated Buddhist ideologue from Ceylon, the Anagarika Dharmapala, for instance, severely reprimanded the gradual emergence of a nation of bastards and hybrids, produced through undeterred western influences, and called for a ‘Return to Righteousness’ (see Jayawardena and de Alwis 1996: xi). The new Ceylonese woman exposed to western education and culture became the primary target of reprimand. As discussed in Chapter 2, while the Dharmapala was expressing concern about the debilitating effects of the import of

western culture on Sinhalese traditions, Arumugam Navalar, the Tamil nationalist, established a printing press intended at reviving indigenous Tamil culture and promotion of Shaivism, a Hindu sect, against Christian missionary activity in Ceylon. Interestingly, both the Dharmapala and the Navalar were themselves educated in the western tradition, and the latter is even known to have assisted in the translation of King James' Bible into Tamil. But both were obdurately opposed to the idea of dissemination of western education through missionary schools which targeted the mal-treated native women. Neluka Silva (2004) writes:

Notably, the parameters of Sinhala and Tamil nationalism, though ideologically distinct, converged in their views of gender relations. The pre-Independence nationalists felt that the missionary education system had corrupted indigenous women and the purity of the entire race was at stake, since "alien" values would be transmitted to their progeny. (101)

What becomes evident in such 'concern' is that women were only imagined as mothers, bearing the responsibility of *reproducing* the nation, preferably by giving birth to male offspring. Malathi de Alwis, basing her argument on Gananath Obeyesekere's delineation of the socialisation of Sinhalese men and women through the ideals of *lajja-baya* (discussed earlier) takes this argument a little further in her exploration of how the Sinhalese woman was constructed through a discourse of 'respectability', a parameter which was deployed to ridicule the liberated women, trained in missionary schools. Alluding to George Mosse's *Nationalism and Sexuality*²⁵, de Alwis explicates the term:

George Mosse, who mobilizes the category of "respectability" in his discussion of the relationship between nationalism and sexuality, defines "respectability" as "indicating 'decent and correct' manners and morals, as well as the proper attitude toward sexuality". Such a definition is remarkably similar to Obeyesekere's delineation of *lajja-baya*...It is worth noting how both definitions stress the 'correctness' and 'propriety' of behaviour and "normative" and "moral" attitudes towards sexuality...If *lajja-baya*, or Chatterjee's notion of "spirituality", can be glossed as "respectability", this implies a link to several interconnected regimes of power such as patriarchy, capitalism and imperialism; it is a category with a particular history that enables a

²⁵ G.Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

reading of its play at the micro-level, while simultaneously recalling macro-level global processes of domination and exploitation. (1999: 181)

The practice of ridiculing the newly educated and liberated woman in Ceylon was strikingly similar to the various skits and satires written in England to mock the new woman. Malathi de Alwis quotes from different Ceylonese vernacular journals and newspapers which never tired of chastising the new woman, who was branded as an evil influence on traditional Sinhalese civilisation. A poem published in the local journal, *Dudana Pahara* on 1 June 1931, may be cited as an example:

Declaring it's for the progress of country and race

Wearing short dresses and cutting her hair

Destroying her *vili* like shameless white hussies

Today's noble woman only destroys Lanka. (qtd. in de Alwis 1999: 184-185)

Criticism of women abandoning the precincts of the home and venturing outside into what was so far marked out as a man's world was rampant in the local journals. The idea of not being 'respectable' enough was constructed around certain activities which these women participated in:

Though dancing was perceived to be one of the worst practices introduced by foreigners, it was closely followed by a long list of similar depravities which included reading 'erotic' novels, going to movies and parties, playing the piano, tennis, and cards, pursuing athletics, drinking alcohol, smoking, riding horses and bicycles, driving cars, and so on. Many of these practices were not merely coded as 'unrespectable' and unbecoming but also as un-feminine; they were women's pathetic efforts to ape men, in the same way that they attempted to form their own organizations. (de Alwis 1999: 186)

The motive of forewarning women against these 'liberal' activities was primarily focused on marriage – the impossibility of getting a good husband; for, respectable Sinhalese men would not concede to marry women who did not conform to the model of the ideal Sinhalese woman, the *pancha kalyani*. The idealised image of the *pancha kalyani*, as Jayawardena and de Alwis point out (1996: xi), is that of a woman who possesses 'fair skin, long black hair,

attractive body, youthful appearance and beautiful teeth'. In fact, possessing 'long black hair' seems to be one of the most important criteria to qualify as an ideal woman, for in the local journals, there used to be endless moralising about women who cut their hair short. In fact, a certain Ms. Maniwathi in an outrageous letter to the editor of *Swarajya* (9 September 1928), declared women who chopped their hair unreliable and suspicious. Much in the manner of Hannah More, the late eighteenth century English moralist who insisted that women should abide by conduct books (*Essays on Various Subjects Principally Designed for Young Ladies*, 1778), Ms. Maniwathi raged against the cutting of hair as a dishonorable act, declaring with a flourish – 'a woman's hair is her most precious and noble ornament. How much I love my own hair!' (qtd. in de Alwis 1999: 185).

While the rise of print capitalism had a major role to play in constructing and circulating a nationalist iconography²⁶ within which the image of the ideal Ceylonese woman featured predominantly, it also facilitated women to articulate their point of view. If a certain Ms. Maniwathi was inextricably co-opted in the patriarchal nationalist imagination of the woman, several other voices emerged that opposed rampant slandering of the new woman in the print media. The Sinhalese press, while publishing moral tracts denouncing women's liberation and its debilitating effects on tradition and culture, also gave considerable space to dissident female voices. Throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, a crucial period during which Ceylonese women officially found access to the public sphere, in *Sarasavi Sandaresa*, *Lakmina*, *Sithumina*, *Samagi Balaya*, *Sinhala Handa*, *Sinhala Jatiya* and other journals and newspapers, women protested against the stereotyping of the new woman as morally depraved and spoke tirelessly on the necessity of voting rights for women. On 14 July 1930, in the Sinhalese newspaper *Weeraya*, Rupa Piyaseeli raised an extremely valid question on the sexual exploitation of women implicit in the moral tracts directed at 'harnessing' them –

[I]s it not the young man, who sniggers and lowers his eyes to check the length and width of a young girl's mini dress, who is more dangerous to civilized society? Can we really heed the call for dress reform from smirking young poets and writers like him who obviously harbour ulterior motives? (qtd in de Alwis 1999: 187)

²⁶ See, Anderson, 224.

It is not difficult to see what Piyaseeli is insinuating at: as de Alwis observes, she actually gets to the crux of the matter by underlining the perverse (1999: 187) pleasure men derived while writing about the mini dresses and the necessity to cover certain bodily parts, the exposure of which might be detrimental to women's integrity of character. Such detailed musings on the female body and appropriate dresses to cover it seems to have unwittingly generated a genre of semi-pornographic literature, which, as it can be conjectured from Piyaseeli's argument, was devoured by a lusty male readership.

In Piyaseeli's retort to the endless diktats on women's clothes, this lusty patriarchal gaze on female sexuality is severely countered. It would be interesting to pit Piyaseeli's revelation of the 'ulterior motives' of the moral vanguards of colonial Ceylon against the Dharmapala's promotion of the sari, as against the western mini skirt, as 'respectable' attire for the Ceylonese woman. The Dharmapala prescribed a six yard long sari (also called *hori*, and preferably white), worn in the style of the Kandyan woman, sufficiently covering the legs, teamed with a jacket, as appropriate attire for the 'respectable' Sinhalese woman. He even laid out the specifications of the jacket to be worn with the sari – 'it must not leave the shoulders bared and should "completely cover" the breasts, midriff, navel and back' (de Alwis 1999: 183). In fact, Dharampala's mother was the first to don this apparel while on a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya. Soon enough this sari and the jacket became the national dress for women. However, as Neluka Silva (2004: 102) observes, this national attire was less national and more ethnic, for the drape of the sari prescribed by the Dharmapala was slightly different from the way the Tamil women wore it, making even this edict commensurate with his larger claims of Ceylon being a predominantly Sinhalese Buddhist country with an Aryan heritage. As Marecek (2009) writes:

Thus, for Dharmapala, women's dress and demeanor would serve to demarcate the boundaries of Sinhala identity. Moreover, by practicing a superior form of femininity, Sinhala women would embody and ensure the cultural ascendancy of the Sinhala "race." (144)

To the sentimental nationalist indigenization of fashion appeared to be the most 'rightful' thing to do – an apt response to the colonial government's strategy to transform taste in fashion among the natives with the commercial motive of sustaining the growth of the English cloth industry (See Schneider 1989). However, the onus of preserving indigenous

fashion was delegated to the women. Although the Anagarika Dharmapala also urged men to abandon western clothes and materials manufactured in the newly emerging cloth industry of Britain, the diktat was not as strong as it was for the women. Ironically, the rising nationalist sentiments against the donning of foreign clothes pushed the liberated woman further into the interiors of the home.

While the cultural responsibility of establishing the superiority of indigenous Sinhalese and Tamil races over the foreign rulers and over each other, literally and symbolically fell on women, American or British missionary education which was viewed as the primary evil force behind robbing native women of 'respectability' was not necessarily aimed at emancipating women from oppressive patriarchal structures. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as Kumari Jayawardena (1986) notes, women's emancipation through education in effect was an ornamental accoutrement to patriarchy:

To foreign and local capitalists and landowners, women were the cheapest source of labour for plantations, agriculture and industry. To the colonial authorities and missionaries, local women had to be educated to be good (preferably Christian) wives and mothers to the professional white collar personnel who were being trained to man the colonial economy. To the male reformers of the local bourgeoisie, women needed to be adequately Westernized and educated in order to enhance the modern and "civilized" image of their country and of themselves, and to be a good influence on the next generation; the demand grew for "civilized housewives". (8)

If physical attributes were necessary in order to be a complete woman (*kula kanthawa*), education became another embellishment enhancing a woman's desirability in the marriage market. Under the aegis of religious nationalism that began to grow almost simultaneously with women's growing access to foreign education, this seemingly liberated woman was marked out as dangerous and in need of taming. For those who found it difficult to reconcile the need to be civilised through educating women and the need to comply with emergent nationalist sentiments, a more or less easy way out was to endorse and promote women such as Ms. Maniwathi, women who were educated but at the same time devotedly tied to their indigenous roots (manifested in Maniwathi's grand gesture of not cutting her hair short and holding it up as a symbol of purity and respectability).

Colonial education for women in Ceylon went through several phases, but, in each phase, it was directed towards making of women more accomplished homemakers. Although the curriculum for women's education underwent numerous changes over the nineteenth and early twentieth century, interestingly, almost all of them had on them courses on needlework and management of household economy, more commonly known as home science (See Jayawardena 1986: 118-122). In fact, Denham (1912) quotes a white woman, wife to an English civil servant posted in Ceylon to be claiming:

A good deal more might be done by devoting the time which is wasted in obtaining a valueless smattering of Latin, French, theory of music and trigonometry, to...music, drawing, dressmaking and fine needlework, subjects that will not only add to the charm of a girl's home life, but will also lead to a considerable saving in household expenditure. (426)

Malathi de Alwis explains the social significance sewing and 'fine needlework' had in constructing the colonial female subject's 'respectability' and desirable behavioural codes:

...the plying of the needle involved the very embodiment of the Christian virtues of piety, industry and docility. Sewing was also linked to the missionary project of garbing native bodies as a form of inculcating the additional Christian virtues of civility, decorum and cleanliness, and signalling, both visibly and tangibly, the transformation of 'heathen' bodies into 'respectable' ones. (1999: 181)

Female education was, therefore, aimed at making of uncivilised, unclean, unsophisticated colonial women decent, respectable, accomplished housewives, and certainly not political agitators demanding equal rights with men. But as it has always happened within colonial regimes, Ceylonese women, in a Calibanesque manner, began speaking back to the very forces that subjugated them and went on to demand voting rights, no matter how conservative their demands might appear today. Missionary educationists did not imagine their target subjects to find their own voice; and, the conservative nationalists at home, opposed to Christianity and everything western, launched an emotional and cultural project of indigenising their women, in an urgency to formulate a nationalist iconography to counter imperial domination, both cultural and political. As Kumari Jayawardena notes (1986):

...those nationalists who challenged foreign aggression had to tackle the problem of asserting a national identity by combating obscurantism, and by reforming and rationalizing existing structures and religious and cultural traditions. In short, they had to challenge and change the old order, by reviving what were defined as the true and pristine traditions of a distant and independent past. (5)

Within this framework, women were most noticeably victimised, although men too were not spared. Ironically, as Jayawardena (1986) along with many other commentators have noted, these nationalist projects, devoted to the revival of a more 'glorious' past, were influenced by Orientalist exaltation of Asia's ancient cultures, the ideals of the French Revolution, the emergence of liberal thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill in Britain, and the numerous anti-Christian movements in 19th century Europe. This indigenisation was all pervasive, cutting across class and ethnic differences; at the same time, however, a dissenting female voice was gradually emerging, even though, initially, it was concentrated within the new bourgeoisie of the colonies. One good example, as we shall see, is Annalukshmi in Shyam Selvadurai's *Cinnamon Gardens*.

Post-independence Sri Lankan Feminists: Liberators or Family Wreckers?

In the first few decades after independence, there was not any mentionable progress as regards to recognition of women's rights. However, few sign posts of whatever little progress took place in this period could include admission of women to Foreign Service in 1958, to administrative service in 1963, and elimination of gender disparities in education leading to considerable enrolment of female students into schools. Feminist critics usually see the period between 1948 and 1978 as unremarkable in the sense that no significant constitutional reform could be effectuated in favour of women. The impact of the second-wave feminist movement began to be felt internationally in the 1970s. The Sri Lankan constitution of 1978 eventually included a chapter on fundamental rights that clearly stated the right to non-discrimination on grounds of gender as an important dimension of the Right to Equality (Constitution of 1978, Article 12 [1, 2]).

While the women's movement constantly fought to attribute to women greater agency and access to the public domain, the post-independence political turbulence involving the rise of ethno-nationalisms preserved the 'woman-as-nation' motif as central to their discourses.

Sitralega Maneguru in her analysis of the cultural construction of women within Tamil Eelam National Liberation agendas notes how classics and legends were revived and reconstructed in which sacrificing mothers dutifully sent their sons off to war, and how LTTE's publication on women and revolution significantly carried a poster of a Palestinian woman cadre holding a gun and a baby (see Mauneguru 1995: 161, 164). Similarly, in the late 1980s, the Ministry of Women's Affairs urged women to give blood to nurture the soldiers of the future Sinhalese nation, in a poster representing a woman breast feeding a child, while dreaming of a soldier (de Alwis 1994: 101). The image of the 'good woman' was constructed vis-à-vis an 'other', which was not very different from the binary circulated by the pre-independence nationalist discourses. Neluka Silva (2004) writes:

The 'other', that is, the person (more specifically, the woman) of mixed ancestry, though largely absent from the discourses of ethnic purity is nonetheless, central to the conscious or subliminal construction of an exclusionary, discriminatory identity. The process of creating the other is not merely reliant on the demonization of a mixed lineage, but other assumptions pertaining to educational ability and aspirations, the desire to marry outside the community, and moral behaviour. (98)

To this list of the 'other' women, as oppositional to and corruptive of the 'good', the feminist soon found a place. Quite predictably, the feminist, like the 'homosexual', is still accused of being anti-tradition, westernised, elitist, and ignorant of local cultures and histories. In the 1980s, when the ethnic atrocities were becoming an everyday affair, anti-feminist discourses began to appear in local newspapers, even in the English language press (such as *The Island*). The invectives directed against the feminists hint at their being anti-family, women who are funded by foreign agencies to promote sexual debauchery, which would eventually bring about the decline of the Sinhala nation (See de Alwis 1998b). The anti-feminist slandering is unambiguously couched in the rhetoric of nationalist movement's celebration of the woman as a repository of tradition and spirituality, confined to the domestic space, shut out from the material 'world' of the corrupt West. Even the leftist press of the 1980s vociferously critiqued women's movement, rather naively mocking feminist agendas. Referring to feminists as 'bourgeois canaries', *Kamakarū Vithithi* (a leftist Sinhalese newspaper), libelled them for demanding equality. But the argument was immature, almost juvenile. The *Kamakarū Vithithi* irresponsibly interpreted the demands of equality in bantering terms: they wrote that the feminists believed equality could be achieved if they could make men creep

into the kitchen and scrape coconuts along with them. (See Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002: 257). An English language newspaper's editorial response to the first academic seminar on the 'women's question' (1976) was equally sarcastic and plain offensive – “We suggest as their motto the stirring call: Women of Sri Lanka unite: You have nothing to lose but your husbands.” (qtd. in Goonatilake 1984: 640). The larger feminist politics challenging power hierarchies and forms of oppression were completely overlooked or deliberately belittled or mocked at by the populist press. In fact, until the late 1980s, talking about domestic violence in public was considered uncouth and impolite. Radhika Coomaraswamy writes: ‘Women who raised these issues were dismissed as family-wreckers and troublemakers. At independence in 1948, the problem was completely invisible’ (2002: 81).

With the onset of the civil war, and the emergence of sub-nationalist agendas, women were further marginalised, for, again, the responsibility of preserving ethnic purity and tradition fell on their shoulders. Helen Goonatilake in the volume *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology* (1984) writes:

Ironically, the new form of “propaganda” about women – once performed by secular and religious literature produced at the ancient monastic centers (sic) and disseminated through the village temples – is today disseminated via modern mass communication: the press, radio, cinema, school textbooks, and magazines perpetuate the views that women are dependent, subservient, inferior, physically fragile, have less brains than men, and generally are fit only to be wives and mothers. The hidden message is that the woman's place is in the home and that women who work outside the home lose their “femininity”; this provides the rationale for discrimination in wages and unequal participation permitted in political, economic and social activities. (640)²⁷

Despite such nationalist denouncement of the women's movement, Sri Lanka saw the publication of its first feminist trilingual magazine *Voice of Women*, (in English, Tamil and Sinhalese) which made its first appearance in 1980. The English version of the magazine critiqued the cultural representation of women in advertisements, films, and literary and school texts, while matters of sexual discrimination at workplaces, issues related to lower

²⁷ See ‘Sri Lanka: The Voice of Women’, *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology*. Ed. Robin Morgan. Feminist Press at CUNY, 1984, pp. 638-643.

wages paid to women and unfavourable working conditions in the Free Trade Zones were widely written about (See Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002: 251). It also marked the emergence of working class women's voices which were so far not so strident. The Voice of Women Collective which was founded in 1978 and comprising of academics and socialists with different ethnic allegiances also played a major role in arousing awareness against the oppression of women.

After the change in executive presidency in 1978, any form of demonstration began to be viewed as suspicious, and throughout the 1980s, on International Women's Day, women demonstrators have been repeatedly 'teargassed, baton-charged and arrested' (Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002: 259). It was in 1989 that Seva Vanitha Movement (SVM) under Hema Premadasa's (President R. Premadasa's wife) leadership, the organisation underwent a remarkable transformation, when International Women's Day began to be celebrated with much pomp and grandeur, with generous government sponsorship. However, such celebrations, co-opted by the state, kept radical feminist voices at bay. In fact, it is interesting to note how this state-endorsed feminist politics, became a large 'family' affair, and quite unabashedly hierarchic – while the President's wife was the default head of SVM, the wife of each cabinet minister became the head of that ministry's SVM, and so on (See Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002: 259-260).

Although the state no longer unleashed violence on women demanding their own rights, by appropriating their 'cause', feminist politics was mellowed down by accommodating it within normative templates of the family welfare, motherhood, rural development projects, and alleviation of poverty. However, under the leadership of Chandrika Kumaratunga, in 1995, International Women's Day celebrations voiced concerns about the violence against women and issues of women rights, which were so far kept out of the discourses surrounding 8 March. The ground for this was prepared by the Women's Charter written in the early 1990s, which included a specific provision: the Right to Protection from Gender-Based Violence.

Radical feminist voices, however, have never found state endorsement, for women, no matter how politically vibrant, are expected to perform within the approved parameters of 'respectability'. Even when women such as Srimavo Dias Bandaranaike (elected in 1960) and her daughter, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (elected 35 years later in 1995) assumed power, they barely missed an opportunity to project their 'homely' image of the dutiful

widowed wife and responsible mother, emotionally prioritising that image over the public image of the leader of the nation. Yet, the media often pounced upon them, for not conforming to certain templates of respectability, and moralised endlessly on their ‘disrespectful’ behaviour, unbecoming of women. It is difficult to believe that even in the late 1990s, after Chandrika Kumaratunga became President, the critical stance of the media did not change. The opposition was much too proactive in assassinating her character, often projecting her as immoral and promiscuous. Jeanne Marecek (2009) writes:

Despite her aristocratic heritage and her use of the symbols of motherhood, widowhood and filial respect for her deceased father and her mother, Mrs. Kumaratunga’s respectability came under siege as soon as she stepped into the public sphere. Neither her aristocratic background nor her effort to portray herself as a maternal figure insulated her from moralistic attacks by both mainstream newspapers and the tabloid press. Simply being in public life and fulfilling the ordinary social obligations of a head of state was recast as immoral conduct by the mainstream press. Drinking wine at formal state dinners, eating meals in five-star hotels, staying out “too late” and travelling without her mother’s permission were described as improprieties in Mrs. Kumaratunga’s personal conduct. Tabloids and gossip columns circulated inflammatory rumors about inebriation, alcoholism, love affairs and even casual sexual liaisons with men of lower standing. (148-149)

Even Hema Premadasa’s untiring endeavour to construct a self-image of the ‘Mother of the Nation’ was often tarnished by gossips about her alleged affairs with men. But what is more distressing is how Premadasa was taken to task for her low class and caste status (de Alwis 1995: 146-147) and was dubbed ‘vulgar’ and improper.²⁸ The public slander of which both Premadasa and Kumaratunga were victims underlines the extreme vulnerability of women who dare to step into the male domain of politics, defying their traditional role. An alarming feudal obsession with class and caste, which gets unambiguously manifested in these misogynist media slurs, underscores the difficulty of allowing democratic space to any dissident voice. What is even more unsettling is the consistent almost indulgent emphasis on the pre-eminence of the monogamous heterosexual family over anything else; women’s respectability is measured against how pro-family they are. Any digression from expected

²⁸ de Alwis, M. (1995) “Gender, politics, and the ‘respectable’ lady,” in P. Jeganathan and Q. Ismail (eds.) *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Social Scientists’ Association, pp. 137–157.

social behaviour is demonised as anti-family, and therefore, sacrilegious. This also explains the insurmountable obstacles the LGBT movement in Sri Lanka has been encountering since its emergence. While the state might not allow these voices to be heard, cultural texts, particularly, the Sri Lankan English novel, open up space for these dissenting feminist voices, as I shall argue in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Bereaved Mothers, Women Warriors and the Militant State

With the increasing militarization of the Sri Lankan state, democratic spaces shrunk, and feminist voices aggressively muffled, although the need for feminist voices was most urgently felt during the time of the civil war; for, violence against women reached unspeakably new heights. In fact, women, imagined as repository of ethnic traditions and values, became easy target of racist aggression. Defiling the woman became a symbolic act of shaming the community, the enemy camp. Neloufer De Mel in *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict* (2007) writes:

Women have been subjected to custodial violence during cordon and search operations, and harassment at checkpoints...They have been the victims of militarized rape and torture. At the same time, a climate of self-censorship prevails in an atmosphere of fear and militarized violence. Women stop short of lodging formal complaints against the abuse they face in a gendered submission not unrelated, for instance, to a general reluctance in reporting incidents of domestic violence despite findings by the UN Rapporteur on Violence Against Women that over 60 per cent of Sri Lankan women are victims of domestic violence...Even when they do lodge complaints about 'excessive' abuses such as rape and torture, the breakdown of credible judicial structures has meant that their pleas have fallen on deaf ears. (40)

Radhika Coomaraswamy (2002) charts four different ways in which women were victimised by a long-lasting armed conflict:

First, they are direct victims of the violence, raped or killed in the conflict. Second, they may experience armed conflict by becoming refugees or the internally displaced. Third, they may have lost their relatives and find themselves in a situation of

economic and social disempowerment. Finally, they may experience war as women combatants, and as women perpetrators of violence. (92)

The last point which Coomaraswamy raises is of immense significance. The irony of the situation is while one school of feminists looks upon the inclusion of women in the army as an ultimate triumph of women, an achievement of equality, another school voices its deep apprehensions about this idea of victory. Coomaraswamy writes:

...the emergence of women combatants is not a sign of equality but a signal that civil society is becoming militarised. This school has always claimed that feminism is a non-violent movement, and these women have worked closely with peace movement throughout the world. Violence and militarisation are anathemas to its worldview. (97)

In fact, the co-opting of women into hetero-patriarchal discourses of racism and nationalism is highly problematic, for, it inevitably fails feminist agendas. This becomes all the more clear when one turns to media reports and articles on feminist activism during the war. Malathi de Alwis in her doctoral dissertation (1998) investigates how Sinhalese newspapers, especially *Divania*, threatened to expose Sinhalese feminists who were working for Tamil women, raped and molested in war. Marking them out as traitors, the article in *Divania* maligned feminists for publicising to the world the plight of the Tamils, thereby projecting a poor picture of the Sinhalese nation. The allegation of foreign sponsorship and support of Christian organisations which was also central to the derision of feminists in the 1980s was reiterated. For these fundamentalists, winning over women to foreground and endorse exclusionary sub-nationalist ideologies was, therefore, a huge victory. In this sense, the inclusion of women in the military could not be unproblematically celebrated as an accomplishment.

One of the pioneer feminist writers who contributed significantly to the problematisation of the category of the 'woman warrior' is Sitralega Mauneguru. Her work is based on the different historical phases through which the category of the 'woman warrior' in Tamil militant forces evolved. The first phase saw the emergence of the 'warrior mother' figure, while the second phase aligned itself more with feminist ideologies, under the aegis of more progressive Tamil militant groups. The third phase, which Mauneguru does not talk about,

saw the emergence of a martial feminism. Radhika Coomaraswamy (1996) critiques the idea of the masculinised virgin warrior, which did not have any precedent in Tamil cultural history, and was purely an LTTE invention.²⁹ The virgin warrior, donning male clothes and abandoning makeup, was celebrated as the female martyr, who dedicated her life to the cause of the Tamil Eelam. Abandoning feminine accoutrement was not much of a concern of the feminists; what appeared problematic was their aggressive allegiance to violence and militancy under the influence of Tamil militant ideologies. These ‘virgin warriors’, by appropriating what was perceived as ‘masculinity’, were allowing themselves to be interpellated in hypermasculinist nationalist discourses. While the LTTE extensively celebrated the heroism of these virgin warriors, feminists were largely apprehensive of the political and cultural implications of such an image.

What is striking is that the woman is celebrated as long as she is sufficiently de-sexualised (Chatterjee 1989), either as the virgin warrior³⁰ or as the mother. The mother figure again became central to nationalist discourses surrounding the civil war. The Mother’s Front was founded in Jaffna in 1984 to protest the mass arrest of Tamil youth by the Sri Lankan state. While the formation of the Mother’s Front was necessary, what feminists found outrageous was the manipulation of this identity of motherhood by the Tamil militant groups. Various Tamil militant groups put up posters instigating women to have more children; in other words, more soldiers who would help further the cause of the Tamil Eelam. Malathi de Alwis (2002) cites two intriguing examples of this de-sexualisation of the female body and valorisation of female sacrifice: the first is a poster, circulated by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, that depicted a Sinhalese mother feeding a baby and dreaming of a soldier, with the caption – ‘Give your life blood in breast milk to nourish our future soldiers.’ The second is newsletter run by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which contained a column entitled ‘The Notes of a Courageous Mother’. As the title suggests, an unnamed mother chronicled her experiences of coming in close contact with the war and a brutal state, thanks to her children’s participation in it. She wrote about the brutalities she suffered in the hands of the state, with dignity and stoical calm, thereby projecting herself as a model for all Sinhalese mothers, whose children took up arms against the government. de Alwis (2002) writes:

²⁹ The virgin warrior, one may note, was not an invention of the LTTE. The virgin warrior is commonplace in Christian mythology and history – Joan of Arc or St. Clare, who shielded her convent from Muslims through the power of the Eucharist, are well-known examples.

³⁰ The virgin warrior was supposed to observe what is called in Tamil ‘karpu’ which translates roughly into chastity.

In a situation of patriarchal militancy and violence, Sri Lankan women are not only expected to sacrifice their bodies and the products of their bodies - their children - but they are also made into metaphors of the dishonoured nation patiently waiting to be avenged by the courageous and virile “sons of the soil”. Throughout Sri Lankan history, the masses have been exhorted to defend the “Motherland” and their “Mother tongue” from foreign invaders/rulers or their own countrymen like the Tamil Eelamists demanding a separate Tamil state. Buddhist monks, who supported the JVP youth uprising in 1971, articulated their concern through the slogan: “The Motherland or Death!”, while student activists in the universities protesting the occupation of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) in 1987-89 rallied under the slogan: “First Our Motherland, then Our Degrees”. (35)

The repeated construction of the woman as the mother, celebration of her selfless sacrifice, her modesty, within nationalist discourses, since colonial to contemporary times, has left little space for radical feminism to thrive in Sri Lanka. Yet, narratives of resistance have emerged time and again in literature and other cultural texts. The war has caused a massive displacement of population, and from this expatriate communities of Sri Lanka have emerged texts which offer interesting perspectives on this construction of women and provide counter-discourses that open up liberating spaces for dissenting voices to be heard. In this sense, these texts acquire a political charge, by putting up an obdurate resistance to state violence, militancy, and ethnic othering, with which the subjugation of the woman is intimately related.

Performing Gender in the Diaspora: Sri Lankan women and displacement

Representation of women in Sri Lankan expatriate fiction has to be made sense of from a critical engagement with the subject-position of the writer in question. Since in Chapter 2, I have already discussed the anxieties of reformulation of gendered identities that by default accompany migration, I refrain from reiterating the same here. Although migration to the West or Australia might seem liberating, the little Sri Lankan ghettos that are formed within the diaspora, in no time, replicate the models of gender performance, in order to preserve their distinctiveness in resistance to the new homeland’s racial and xenophobic othering of immigrants. Gayatri Gopinath observes that little attention has been ‘paid to the ways in which nationalist framings of women’s sexuality are translated into the diaspora, and how

these renderings of diasporic women's sexuality are in turn central to the production of nationalism in the home nation' (2005: 9). In this chapter, through my analysis of the representation of bourgeois Sri Lankan women, from the three different ethnic communities – Sinhalese, Tamil and Burgher – in expatriate fiction, I shall make an attempt to address this lacuna. Tejaswini Niranjana, in her article, 'Left to the Imagination: Indian Nationalisms and Female Sexualities in Trinidad' (1998), which Gopinath also cites, provides a useful theoretical framework for delineating how the female nationalist subject is constructed within the Sri Lankan diaspora, through a disavowal of her Other. But in the novels, set in Sri Lanka, the woman, I shall argue, comes across as an always already diasporic category, in her passive interpellation in nationalist discourses. In three novels at least, *Cinnamon Gardens*, *Funny Boy* and *Bodies in Motion*, the representation of the woman is further complicated, since the writers significantly challenge 'institutionalized heterosexuality as a primary structure of both British colonialism and incipient Indian [or Sri Lankan] nationalism' (Gopinath 2005: 10).

As mentioned in the Introduction, my reading of the interpellation of mothers, wives and daughters in nationalist discourses, will be informed by the radicalism of queer politics, which, in a broad sense, calls into question all forms of normativity. It's interesting to note how the non-normative woman, who continuously challenges restrictive categories of mother, wife, and daughter, or harbours a polychromatic vision of syncretic nationalism, is often marginalised within Sri Lankan cultures at home or in the diaspora. Speaking of the emergence of the genre of the novel in South Asia, Vibha S. Chauhan (echoing Chatterjee) writes:

The educated, colonised classes of the time were devoid of rights in the public sphere, and in contrast the domestic space – the home – became the site of exclusive and unquestioned right. The novel recreated this duality of a subordinate colonial status of men in the external world and the need to compensate for it through the creation of homes where their 'natural' rights over the women remained unquestioned. It was therefore important to insulate the world of the home from external influences and create the icon of the unsullied womanhood. (2007: 246)

Ironically, within the diaspora too, the separation of the private sphere from the public, in which the immigrant is a minority and more often than not victim of racism, is even more

rigorous. Within Sri Lankan ethno-nationalist discourses, this separation of the private and the public is also very conspicuous, in which otherness is constructed in terms of ethnic differences, with each community projecting its superiority over the other, by configuring their women as the repository of their specific cultural traditions and values. Yet as Bhabha says, to be 'unhomed' is 'not to be homeless, nor can the "unhomely" be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres. The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow' (9). This idea of the 'unhomely' applies very well to the Sri Lankan woman, Sinhalese, Burgher or Tamil, located in the country or within the diaspora. Whether the woman is victimised or empowered within the diaspora is the commonest concern of literary and social critics. The novels which I have selected for analysis in this chapter problematise these issues of victimhood or empowerment. Firmly located in history, the representation of Sri Lankan women by the expatriate writers, although informed by the 'positive charge' of the diaspora, unravels the unhomeliness of these women, while also, sometimes, opening up for them liberal spaces, which might only be achieved in a fictional world. But these imagined liberal spaces underline the unbridgeable gap between what is and what should be. In the next segment I shall look into the individual novels mentioned above.

Cinnamon Gardens: Colonial daughters and feminist dissent

Shyam Selvadurai's *Cinnamon Gardens* introduces Annalukshmi, a prototype of the English educated, liberated woman belonging to the emergent class of the urban colonial bourgeoisie of Ceylon. However, Annalukshmi constantly disrupts the prototypical model by questioning her lack of autonomy in making life choices. Although Annalukshmi's rebellion against hetero-patriarchal power structures is muted and is played out at a personal level, her rebellion, nonetheless, is extremely meaningful and necessary, given the extremely marginalised status of women in the early twentieth century. 'Two young women, whether married or not, engaged in a conversation with an unknown man on Horton Place was not something that could escape attention or comment' (CG 339) – this statement clearly sums up the societal constrictions within which the woman had to function in those times. Annalukshmi's constant struggle with her family, which is hell-bent on marrying her off at the first opportunity, is pitted against acerbic censures of disapproving relatives. 'She would be expected to exemplify the True Wife of the *Tirukkural* whose husband is her only God' (CG 173) – her rebellion, against this expected role playing may be likened to the kind of

proto-feminist politics one encounters in the novels of Jane Austen, whose *Pride and Prejudice* is a subtext of the Selvadurai novel. In the 1920s, for a woman, no matter how apparently emancipated she was, it was a radical decision to stay single or to exercise one's choice in matters of marriage; Annalukshmi, therefore, presents a model for the posterity of liberated women of Sri Lanka, who are still dubbed anti-family or even anti-nationalist, if they choose not to marry.

Apparently, Annalukshmi's sense of freedom and self-reliance seems to be influenced by her exposure to English literature, her missionary education and her intimacy with Miss Lawton, her teacher and mentor, who has dedicated her life for the intellectual uplift of the colonial subjects. But, Selvadurai, while drawing heavily from the nineteenth century English novel, problematises the category of the liberated 'westernised' woman, unravelling how missionary education or acquaintance with the English literary canon are not really instrumental in liberating the Ceylonese woman. Annalukshmi is dejected that the seemingly liberal missionary educationists are in no way different from the despotic Mudaliyar or even her own father, only that the missionary rhetoric of tyranny is couched in a less offensive and more patronising lingo. It does not take long for Annalukshmi to discover that Miss Lawton, despite her apparently sincere commitment to the betterment of colonial women, is deeply condescending of them: '...for Miss Lawton the right of women to be free...did not truly encompass women of the colonies' (CG 287). Annalukshmi gives up on Miss Lawton who she has worshipped as role model for long after she hugely disappoints her, at least on two instances: first, in her reproach of the Labour Union movement (CG 99) and later, in her disapproval of Nancy and Mr. Jayaweera's relationship – "This man has nothing to offer you. A poor clerk, with a family to support. I didn't bring you up a good Christian to have you give yourself to this" (CG 327). Ironically, while the capitalist economy opens up opportunities for upward social mobility, remnants of the feudal past, endorsed by Christian missionaries and the colonial bourgeoisie alike, continue to shape relationships and marriage. This in turn becomes an insurmountable obstacle for the non-conformist woman who refuses to fit into socially sanctioned roles.

Annalukshmi's 'difference' from the other womenfolk of *Cinnamon Gardens* is established early in the novel, when she visits the seaside with Nancy and Miss Lawton. While bathing in the sea, Annalukshmi is taken aback by the passivity of married women who demurely sit in the shade, looking on as their husbands and children play on the beach: 'She glanced back up

the beach at the other women and it came to her that if she did marry she would end up like them forced to sit in the shade, only a spectator' (CG 93). She learns to admire the freedom she enjoys, feeling blessed that she is not one of those passive spectators. This realisation is followed by a telling scene in which Annalukshmi's eyes fall on a young man 'wearing a style of bathing suit that had just become fashionable in Ceylon' (CG 93). She admires him, and Selvadurai attributes to her an agency in the way she gazes at him sexually – '...Annalukshmi saw all she needed to. His handsome face and nice teeth when she smiled, the straps of his suit awry over his smooth chest, the shape of his crotch clearly outlined in the bathing suit. She felt the heat from somewhere in her lower back and spread down her legs' (CG 93-94). In this sequence, the male body is exhibited as an object to be looked at, in which Annalukshmi's gaze is made to fuse with that of the reader. This is an important episode where the queer novelist's homoerotic gaze is transferred to his female protagonist, and this tellingly challenges the repetitive projection of the female body as spectacle, exhibited for the consumption of heterosexual male readers. As discussed in the previous chapter, Annalukshmi's story runs parallel to Balendran, the closeted queer son of the Mudaliyar. This particular sequence is one of those moments in which the novelist's queerness informs his feminist politics: the novel's subversive potential is best realised in this ploy of reversing the controlling (male) gaze of literary (or cinematic) narrators, by parading the male body as spectacle.

Annalukshmi seriously challenges the image of ideal womanhood which was being constructed by nationalist discourses of the time. Her resistance to codes of 'respectability' is established at the very outset, as she rides to school, where she teaches, on a bicycle, invoking severe reproof from her over-concerned aunt, Philomena. Scandalised by her audacity of riding a bicycle through the streets of Colombo, Philomena arrives at her place with the urgency of averting a disaster: "This is serious, very serious. We all warned you about giving that girl notions that were above her" (CG 45), she reprimands Louisa, her mother. Philomena is a stereotype of those curious aunts whose major preoccupation in life is to make matches for a particularly marriageable niece, and presages Louisa that it might be difficult to find a suitable match for a school-teacher who rides a bicycle. Annalukshmi continues to defy Philomena's authoritative dismissal of her career and her untiring efforts to settle her down with "some nice Tamil boys" to an extent that Philomena is reduced to a ridiculous caricature. The 1920s, as charted above, was a time when English-educated Ceylonese women were being gradually ushered into modern ways of life; while savouring

the fruits of liberalisation effectuated by the colonial economy, Annalukshmi feels increasingly marginalised. This liberty, which is bestowed upon women by the newly enlightened colonial patriarch, has serious limits to it:

Though she had been made aware by her family all along that a decision to marry would end her teaching, that unlike certain other professions, women teachers, by regulation, could not continue in their careers once they were married, she had not allowed this to stop her. (CG 90)

Annalukshmi's insistent endeavours at establishing her individuality and preserving her dignity as an independent woman are obstinately opposed by state apparatuses, both repressive and ideological. It is interesting how Selvadurai deploys Kumudini, Annalukshmi's younger sister, as a foil to her, underscoring that all women of her generation are not necessarily like her. Kumudini who marries early and returns to stay with her family during pregnancy is clearly disapproving of her sister's free spirit, as much as Aunt Philomena or the Mudaliyar. The novel is replete with such examples of women who have unquestioningly internalised the hetero-patriarchal construction of women as weak, easily driven astray from the 'moral' path, if not put under the control of a husband.

While critics such as Karl Woelz (1999) and S.W.Perara (1998) accuse Selvadurai of his unquestioning interpellation in colonial discourses (the fact that the characters often allude to English novels to make sense of their immediate realities), I feel that it is through Annalukshmi that Selvadurai advances a profound critique of the same. Despite her obsession with English novels, Annalukshmi reads up on Hinduism, and in the end, by remaining single, she subverts the desired ending of the English novel which mostly concludes with happy marriages. On the other hand, her fascination for Miss Lawton, as mentioned earlier, dwindles, once she discovers her colonial high-handedness. Annalukshmi does learn to critique the very knowledge systems that produce her and instil in her a different outlook. Sayantan Dasgupta is correct to observe that the English novels which are alluded to or quoted from have a parodic function within the narrative of *Cinnamon Gardens*:

Cinnamon Gardens...parodies precisely the values that are sought to be imposed through certain readings of the very texts being cited. The texts quoted, then, are not

necessarily authorial homage, but rather are used to critique their use by imperialist-colonialist discourses. (2009:292)

The intertextual relation *Cinnamon Gardens* fosters with English novels is fraught with a political tension, which cannot be reduced to a simplistic interpretation of the author's sycophantic exultation of the English canon.

Annalukshmi is a product of a political milieu in which Ceylonese women were actively fighting for their right to vote, and were eventually successful. The women's movement in Ceylon was gradually taking roots, informed by the human rights movements of Europe. It was mostly dominated by English educated upper class women of different ethnic allegiances. Annalukshmi is ushered into the active domain of politics by Sonia, her uncle Balendran's wife. However, as most of these (married) women, involved with the demand of universal franchise, operate from secure homes of well-placed elite husbands, Annalukshmi remains unhitched till the end, considering "many possibilities" (CG 383). She does not completely negate the possibility of tying the knot some day, but is acutely conscious of the pitfalls of being married. As Selvadurai foregrounds the deep fractures in every marital relationship that features in the novel, he dismantles the romanticism associated with marriage and family. Annalukshmi's resistance to be co-opted into what Kumudini or Aunt Philomena concedes to be the only avenue to happiness for women advances a strong feminist statement, which is indeed quite ahead of its time. She refuses to be relegated to the privacy of the home, unlike many of her contemporaries, and continues with her rebellion. The agency Selvadurai attributes to Annalukshmi is, of course, facilitated by the writer's awareness of the current taxonomy of feminist and queer politics, a taxonomy which is certainly not available to Annalukshmi. But her story, written in 1998, becomes a strong counter-discourse to the hetero-patriarchal construction of women in the politically charged milieu of formal decolonisation.

***Funny Boy* and *The Hungry Ghosts*: Unhappy mothers, distraught aunts and failed romances**

Both *Funny Boy* and *The Hungry Ghosts* run queer love stories parallel to intensely painful narratives of oppressed women and their lack of choice in matters of love and marriage. These narratives reinforce each other, attributing to the female voices a disruptive political

edge or underscoring the serious lack of female agency. *Funny Boy* located in Sri Lanka, and *The Hungry Ghosts* moving between Sri Lanka, Canada and the United States, the first emphasising on the impossibility of transgressing certain gender codes, no matter how rebellious one is, while the latter showing its women (particularly Renu) comparatively liberated, owing to their diasporic locations, away from the rigorous surveillance of a rigid hetero-patriarchal ethno-nationalist state(s) at home.

In *Funny Boy*, it would be interesting to assess Radha Aunty's predicament in love, vis-à-vis Arjie's gradual awakening into the reality of his queerness and the family's fanatical opposition to it. Radha Aunty who spends most of her formative years in America, returns to Sri Lanka, and immediately, strikes a chord with Arjie, usually maltreated by his grandmother, his father, and other family members. Arjie is drawn to her, when she allows her play with her makeup and jewellery, and instead of ridiculing him for his obsession with these 'feminine' commodities, indulges him: 'She painted my eyelids with blue shadow, put rouge on my cheeks, and even darkened a birthmark above my lips' (FB 50). She appreciates the makeover herself: "You would have made a beautiful girl" (FB 50). Later, she even discusses her wedding plan, allowing Arjie a free play of his imagination in conceiving the look and feel of the bridal party. It is in Radha Aunty's presence that Arjie is most free to inhabit his queerness, which, otherwise, has to be hidden from the censoring gaze of the other family members: 'Radha aunty had turned out to be different from what I had expected, but better' (FB 52). In fact, it is through Radha Aunty and his preoccupation with the imagined organisation of her bridal party that Arjie lives his own queer dreams: of dressing up, applying makeup, participating in elaborate rituals. While he is made fun of for playing Bride-Bride with his female cousins (an issue which I shall expand upon in Chapter 4), Radha Aunty, indulgently well-disposed to what is perceived as his 'funniness' by others, opens up for him a liberal space, within which Arjie could be what he wishes to be. Gairola (2015) also makes an intriguing connection between Arjie's coming of age as a queer Tamil boy in a Sinhalese-dominated nation-state with Radha Aunty's failure in marrying the person she loves:

...Radha Aunty's and Arjie's transgressions of sex and gender norms elicit communal violence through a traumatic awakening to difference that climaxes at the end of the novel with the destruction of Arjie's family home. While Radha Aunty's family conscribes her to heteronormative sexuality through an arranged marriage to an

upper-caste Tamil, Arjie endures ethnic violence in the disciplinary space of his colonial-style school...the stories of Radha Aunty and Arjie are interwoven queer narratives rather than parallel or separate life stories. Set against the backdrop of domestic and institutional spaces that articulate exclusive identity formations and heteronormative ideals, these queer narratives that surface initially in transgressive spaces (like Radha Aunty's bedroom and the garage) gradually subvert disciplinary gender roles consolidated by heteronormative, institutionalized spaces. (73)

The Radha Aunty episode (the second of the six connected stories that constitute *Funny Boy*) is extremely significant in making sense of the limit to freedom of speech and choice that is granted to women by the family, notwithstanding its apparently liberal disposition. In fact, the rebellion in which Radha Aunty will soon be engaged in will fill Arjie with hope that the constant surveillance of the family could be broken away from. However, what seems impossible to outdo is the vigilance of the state, and the family's unquestioning interpellation in its dominant ideologies. Radha Aunty's rebellion comes to naught, when disturbing awareness of ethnic discord and memories of communal animosity in the past, draw a wedge into her relationship with a Sinhalese man, Anil Jayasinghe. It is also at this time that Arjie gets introduced to the word 'racist' (FB 60). For the first time, Arjie comes to realise that love and coupledness do not operate through emotional compatibility alone; race and other factors are unavoidable obstacles in forging romantic bonds with the person one loves. In fact, Selvadurai runs four parallel stories, including Arjie's own, in which cross-ethnic partnership is relentlessly frowned upon and discouraged, leading to unhappy unions or permanent loneliness.

Enthusiastic about stage performance, Radha Aunty engages her nephews and nieces in a drama based on the story *The King and I*, the story providing a subtext to the entire episode, which revolves around the family's abandonment of rebellious members or failed marriages owing to racial differences. When Arjie hears the story of the English governess who teaches the children of the King of Siam, he is disappointed that the story does not end in marriage, as is expected in the beginning. His mother, in her characteristic matter-of-fact manner, explains to him that marriage was impossible, because "at that time people did not marry outside their race" (FB 54). Inquisitive as he is, Arjie asks her: "If it was now, would they have married?" (FB 54), to which, his mother gives a half-hearted reply, "Probably not" (FB 54). Arjie is dejected and pesters on to know the reason, to which his mother does not have a satisfactory

answer: “Because most people marry their own kind” (FB 54), as if that is the norm. It does not take Arjie long to realise that it is impossible to forge relationships, especially, marital relationships, without being faced with the question of ethnic differences. Radha Aunty’s Burgher friend Doris has a similar story to narrate: how her family gave up on her when she married a Tamil man, despite no difference in their class status. Her family, unable to accept her decision to marry outside her own kind, “emigrated to England without even telling me, left no address or anything” (FB 81). Both these stories prefacing Radha Aunty’s ordeal of converting her family to accept her choice anticipate her eventual failure. Later, Arjie discovers his mother’s real love interest: Daryl Uncle. This relationship too fails because of ethnic differences. Interestingly, Arjie presents all these stories from the point of view of the woman; for, he could relate to them the best. Aligning his own predicament in a heteronormative society that expects a certain kind of gender performance from him, with the loss these women suffer, Arjie gradually comes of age to understand the enormous struggle involved in defying normative expectations. This story set in 1983, when read along with *Cinnamon Gardens* set in the early twentieth century, reveals that nothing has really changed. That Radha Aunty fails to sustain the fight with her family disappoints Arjie, and his idea of romance, culled from the literary works and films he has read or watched, no longer seems to have any parallel in reality (FB 100).

While questioning hetero-patriarchal power structures intervening with non-normative desires, Selvadurai is careful to problematise these power structures by projecting women who have internalised the rhetoric of patriarchy and are complicit with men in stifling dissenting voices. As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, especially in the segment on *The Hungry Ghosts*, Selvadurai in his representation of Aachi (or Daya Ariyasinghe), dissociates masculinity and biological maleness, to underscore how masculinity as a discourse of power and coercion is not necessarily incarnated by or transmitted through men alone. In *Funny Boy* as well, Arjie is severely critical of his grandmother, Ammachi. Interestingly, Ammachi and also to a certain extent Arjie’s mother remind of Ms. Maniwathi, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter – an educated Ceylonese woman who despite her exposure to modernist ideas is terribly ill-disposed towards her peers who cut their hair short and accuses them for transgressing a serious code of womanly respectability. Ammachi uses the same libretto in reprimanding Radha Aunty for being open about her relationship with Anil; she perceives this openness as a disrespectful to the family, for it projects Radha Aunty in a poor light: “You dare to flaunt your illicit relations in public and you dare to say

you haven't done anything" (FB 76). The comment draws a strong reaction from Radha Aunty who accuses her mother of aligning her with "a prostitute or something" (FB 76). Every relationship that transgresses the boundaries of approved social associations, whether racial or sexual, is immediately termed 'illicit' or unlawful; in other words, not supported by the state. Consequently, women such as Radha Aunty (or queer men such as Arjie) become illegitimate citizens of the nation-state. Radha Aunty poses a major threat to the 'respectable' markers of *lajja-baya* into which women (as well as men) are socialised into.

The same question of respectability and shaming the family is raised in *The Hungry Ghosts*. Shivan's story is paralleled by his grandmother's and his own mother's, both of them, alienated by the family for pursuing desires which are perceived as 'illegitimate'. It is interesting how Selvadurai connects homoerotic desires, which are literally 'unlawful' within the state, with heterosexual desires, which despite being the accepted mode of coupledness, are severely delimited by other forms of state monitoring. While Aachi comes across as mindlessly authoritative and intolerant of any form of non-normative desires or freedom of expression, Selvadurai, through the device of a dramatic flashback, offers a rationale to Aachi's disposition.

Shivan's sister Renu, after being exposed to radical feminist politics in western universities, reproaches her mother for having internalised patriarchal notions about women – "Sri Lanka is the most sexist and violent place for women on earth...Ah, here you go, Amma. This is your internalized sexism speaking. You are so brainwashed you are defending your oppressors" (HG 111). This is exactly the standpoint one should take in understanding Aachi, the terrorising matriarch, who is so interpellated in sexist discourses on women that she ends up endorsing her oppressors' view as sacrosanct. Daya (or Aachi) recalls to Shivan how she, in her youth, enjoyed extreme indulgence of doting aunts in the absence of her brothers who were all in boarding school: 'Her wildness was encouraged by the aunts, who dared her to climb the roof and walk along its ridge, or sent her up a mango tree to throw down ripe fruit to them...' (HG 252) Unlike the other girls, Daya was bold enough to sneak out of the house in the middle of the night to enjoy a quiet swim in the sea. All went well, until Charles, a cousin from England arrived and fell in love with her. Aware of the humiliation she might have to suffer, Daya resisted him, until, one night, when Charles kissed her, almost forcefully. Taken aback, Daya gave out a little cry, waking up the dogs in the compound, and then every family member. The scuffle with Charles had her night dress come off slightly, to

which the women reacted as if Daya had already met her death – ‘It was the ayah who led [Daya] to their house, the other women following behind in silence as if trailing a hearse...’ (HG 258). This moment onwards Daya began to be treated like a shameful disease that had to be hidden from everyone; in no time, as if by mutual understanding, in which Daya too was a demure participant, a closet was erected for her: ‘After that my grandmother became a spectral thing who stayed in her room or the back garden of her parents’ house. She was the only child, and they alternately wept and railed at her’ (HG 258).

Sarah Ahmed (2004) notes that the word ‘shame’, which has its etymological root in the Indo-European verb ‘to cover’,

...covers that which is exposed (we turn away, we lower our face, we avert our gaze), while on the other, shame exposes that which has been covered (it un-covers). Shame in exposing that which has been covered demands us to re-cover, such a re-covering would be a recovery from shame. Shame thus conceals and reveals what is present in the present. (104)

The experience of this shame may be so traumatising that the propensity to ‘cover up’ on the part of the person who has been once shamed might take pathological proportions. Daya’s experience of being ‘exposed’ for allowing Charles to touch her, is so deeply ingrained in her mind, that her whole life becomes an exercise in ‘covering up’ or totally eliminating those actions that do not have social approval. What Daya does not realise is in deploying the same tactics of shaming and punishing, she ends up willingly endorsing the same hetero-patriarchal notions of respectability, sexuality and purity that had once made her own life intolerable. It is alarming how later Daya resorts to an extremely aggressive form of violence in order to separate Shivan and his boyfriend Mili, when their affair is ‘exposed’. She also abandons her daughter, when she dares to defy her and marries a Tamil man. In both *Funny Boy* and *The Hungry Ghosts*, Selvadurai unpacks the deep structure of patriarchal apparatuses of oppression, victimising as well as interpellating women in them; the women, in turn, use the same apparatuses to punish those who refuse to conform to a normative life or a way of thinking.

In *Funny Boy*, for example, Arjie’s mother is an equally willing participant in her husband’s design to make a man of her ‘funny’ son; when confronted by Arjie, she tells him that he

cannot possibly play with the girls or participate in the ‘girly’ rituals of dressing up, but cannot convincingly rationalise her dictate:

Amma held up her hand to silence us. ‘That’s an order,’ she said. ‘Why?’ I asked, ignoring her gesture. ‘Why do I have to play with the boys?’ ‘Why?’ Amma said. ‘Because the sky is so high and pigs can’t fly, that’s why.’ (FB 18–19)

It is not difficult to read in this insipid command an implied violence, because, it does not encourage dialogue. What comes across unambiguously is Amma’s complete internalisation of certain notions of behavioural codes by which boys (and girls) should abide by. By alluding to pigs’ inability to fly, Amma attributes to her idea of gender normativity a *naturalness* which cannot be flouted. Jazeel (2005) writes:

Sri Lanka’s contemporary sexual politics are clearly dominated by hegemonic discourses of sexual virtue, respectability and reproductive coupling, and the very persistence of its late colonial anti-homosexual legislation suggest the colony’s networked role in the production and normalisation of nineteenth-century European discourses on bourgeois sexuality. (233)

The unbendable ideas of sexual virtue and respectability which Sri Lankan society abides by, and has, in fact, abided by for generations, is evidenced by the social alienation which men and women – Aachi, Arjie, Radha Aunty, Shivan – belonging to different generations and different moments of history suffer. In *The Hungry Ghosts*, it is Renu, sufficiently liberated into the diasporic space of North America and Canada, takes a long look at the Sri Lankan state of affairs and tutors her mother into realising how women have been co-opted into hetero-patriarchal notions of sexuality, respectability and honour in Sri Lanka for years. It is indeed difficult to erase and unlearn what has been instilled into the psyche. Both *Funny Boy* and *The Hungry Ghosts*, by running victimhood narratives of both women and queer men within the family simultaneously, unravel the deep structures of hetero-patriarchy.

When Memory Dies: Civil unrest and women’s victimhood

A. Sivanandan’s *When Memory Dies* presents a classic case of communal animosity which is symbolically played out on the body of the woman, perceived as a repository of a

community's pride and honour. In *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Susan Brownmiller (1975) observes that women have been made to relinquish control over their sexuality to male relations such as fathers, brothers, and husbands, perceived as protectors. In fact, this was the root cause of the imposition of compulsory chastity and monogamy on women. The ownership of the woman's body was transferred to her protector, and rape became, as Alexandra Wald (1996) observes, a crime not so much because it is violence against the body of the woman, but as a property crime against the man who held its ownership (488). According to this logic, an attack on a woman becomes the commonest way to inflict damage on her male protector. This is exactly what happens at the end of Book 2 of *When Memory Dies* (WMD 232-234). Rajan, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, undergoes a severe crisis, having failed to protect Lali from the Sinhalese thugs. The non-normative family collapses, the family which had achieved a union of two warring ethnic groups. However, it is not difficult to see why in times of civil discord between two ethnic communities, each engaged in a fierce game of othering the enemy, such interethnic families would not be allowed to survive. Lali's rape and murder which is a significant event in the narrative not only spells the end of communal harmony, but also, foregrounds the excessive vulnerability of women in times of civil unrest. At the same time, one is also compelled to ask whether it is Lali's rape and murder that traumatise Rajan as much as his perceived assault on his manliness. For, men too are exposed to a symbolic violence which is literally perpetrated on the woman's body.

This question takes us back to a more fundamental one: had rape not been perceived as shameful, or as a permanent blemish on the woman who has been raped, would it have been so traumatising for the man who fails to protect and the woman who is the victim of rape? While rape involves a terrible physical trauma, its social ramifications are even more perilous. Radhika Coomaraswamy (2003) raises this question, and advocates the importance of embracing hybridity, ethnic miscegenation, and healthy interethnic relationships, so that the body of the woman as a symbolic marker of boundary loses its significance in the national-cultural imaginary. For example, in *The Hungry Ghosts*, the treatment Aachi (Daya) receives for her perceived sexual escapade with a cousin is no less harrowing than a real victim of rape suffers. The point is the woman's body has been constructed in such a manner in cultural and social discourses for ages, its real or perceived violation is looked upon as disgraceful. Most women, such as Daya, is made to reel in a sense of guilt of having transgressed a moral code, although women are not complicit in the act of violence

perpetrated on their bodies by men. Hyojin Han in the thesis entitled *Sacred Bodies, Profane Bodies: Psychology, Politics and Sex in the Literatures of Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict* (2010), puts forward an interesting question:

What would have happened to Rajan if Lali had not been killed? How would the incident have changed their relationship? Book Three gives a partial answer to this question in the romance between Vijay and Meena. In keeping with the more liberated era, Meena is more casual about sex —It was a part of their love for each other. Meena is also raped though in a less traumatic manner than Lali—she is raped by the lorry driver, who helped her and her father in their flight. In spite of her fear that the rape could be a stigma that would repel Vijay’s love, Vijay’s pain is more for her than for himself. Rape has lost some of its threat as the potential disruptor of the fabric of relationships. (152)

While Han points out how with the progress of the Sri Lankan nation-state, the stigma of the rape victim has been allayed to a certain extent, Vijay and Meena’s case might be an exceptional one. It is, in my opinion, more important for Meena to challenge the way victims of rape are perceived by people, than Vijay’s sympathetic understanding of her situation.

However, in a country like Sri Lanka, sexual violence against women at the time of civil unrest is to be understood not just as a metaphoric disgracing of men of the community to which the violated women belong; but the symbolic dishonour of the community is embedded within a more complex matrix of caste identities and concepts of hypergamy and hypogamy. As Nur Yalman (2010) shows in her study that hypogamy (a woman marrying into a lower caste) is severely castigated, for it is believed that by sleeping with a lower caste man, the woman’s blood is contaminated, and the children that are born out of such wedlock continue to pollute the family bloodline. Yalman writes:

The Sinhalese always used to say, it does not matter where a man goes; he may sleep with anyone, but the woman must be protected. Men, in other words, can have sexual commerce with women high or low, but women’s pleasures are curtailed. (41)

While the woman who has committed the ‘sin’ of hypogamy is sometimes excommunicated and consigned to the lowest Sinhalese caste, there was a time when mother and child were both drowned to death, to avoid contamination. I agree with Han (2010) who links the ‘sin’ of hypogamy to Lali’s rape and murder in the end of Book 2 of *When Memory Dies*. The punishment meted out to her is similar to what women suffered for entering into hypogamic relationships. By marrying a Tamil, despite being a Sinhalese, Lali has allowed ‘impurities’ to flow into the Sinhalese bloodline. What is intriguing and disturbing is the biological deterministic discourse within which these ideas are contained. In this sense, Lali’s rape and murder can be connected with Arjie’s incarceration in the cricket field or the murder of Shivan’s boyfriend in *The Hungry Ghosts*. No hypogamic relationships are involved in case of the boys; but the punishment meted out to both ‘non-normative’ men and women are rooted in warped ideas of what is *natural* and *pure* and what is not.

When Memory Dies also introduces Padma, the revolutionary woman, in Book 3. As discussed in the introduction, Padma is one of those women who have willingly participated in the revolution against the tyrannical Sinhalese government, and belongs to a period when the LTTE has not yet been formed. Padma challenges the image of the conventional homely woman in several ways; active participation in the revolution demands of the woman a certain kind of performance, which often involves hardening of emotions, detachment from familial affairs, and abandonment of desire and personal aspirations, just as the family demands of the woman another kind of performance. The woman is trained to become a revolutionary, which, as I have discussed above, often involves elaborate schooling in aggression and violence. However, in *When Memory Dies*, Padma is seen through Vijay’s point of view, and although there is a deep reverence mixed with romantic admiration in Vijay’s delineation of Padma, she is barely given a voice of her own. I thought of positing Padma vis-à-vis the other female characters I have discussed or will be discussing in this chapter, because Padma’s uniqueness lies in her abandonment of expected behavioural codes considered appropriate of a woman. The first impression Vijay forms of her on hearing about her from Gamini, her brother, is interesting:

Vijay in fact would not have been surprised if Padma had turned out to be a man, so insistent was Gamini about her ability to get things done, and to run, climb and jump with the best of them. (WMD 244).

Padma, as it turns out, is a strong believer in equality of rights, questions any kind of excess (“We eat too much anyway, *amma!*” she protests when her mother confronts her for stealing food and giving them over to beggars), and as she matures, begins to believe that nothing short of a violent revolution could change the situation in Sri Lanka (WMD 248- 250). It takes long for Vijay to realise that she has indeed joined the People’s Liberation Front, following her conviction that violent revolution is the only way out. Sivanandan does not develop Padma’s character beyond a point, and she is soon killed in a political strife she gets involved in. However, what becomes evident in Padma’s willing participation in violence is the increasing militancy of the Sri Lankan state, severely divided not only along ethnic but class and caste coordinates. What is alarming is the pervasiveness of this militancy which co-opts women into embracing hyper-masculinist ideals, which, as I have discussed above, is piercingly criticised by a group of feminists (see Coomaraswamy 2002) who perceive this aggressive militarization as eliminating softer emotions which are necessary to establish bonds across ethnic, class and caste differences. The situation is a paradoxical one: while on the one hand, the woman’s incarceration within oppressive hetero-patriarchal structure of the family is undesirable, on the other hand, her complete abandonment of the family and affective ties to pursue revolutionary ideals is no less upsetting. This paradox becomes all the more difficult to resolve in an ethnically and politically divided militant state, where predilection to violence, warring spirits and arrogance are applauded as necessary qualifications to survive and shield one’s identity.

Love Marriage: Women’s histories, revolutionary bloodlines and affective ties

V. V. Ganeshanathan’s *Love Marriage* is a family saga woven around several kinds of marriages, ‘Proper’ and ‘Improper’, or unmarried women who have been relegated to obscurity. Narrating the history of her Tamil family, Yalini, the ‘unmarried’ daughter of Vani and Murali, shares the stories she has heard about various family members from various sources, and in the process, tries to make sense of the emergence of the Tamil Tigers and the extremist position they have taken in demand of the Eelam. Moving between the United States, Canada and Sri Lanka, Yalini revisits her family history, trying to understand herself, her own identity, her political position, her emotional connection with the land she has barely ever seen –

Reverse a family tree, and branches of the blood are whittled down to one person. I am composed of all the women and men who came before me. I am the result of many Marriages. (LM 243)

As discussed in Chapter 1, while she finds herself relating to both her father, Murali, an emotional, ‘big hearted’, altruistic doctor, and her uncle, Kumaran, the ‘wanted’ Tamil Tiger, she discovers in her traces of all the women who made up her family tree– Tharshi, her grandmother, who single-handedly brought up eight children, the demure but excessively stoical Harini, who never confronted her abusive husband, the eccentric Uma locked up in a rehab, the quirky Mayuri who refused to marry, her own mother Vani who eloped with her father, apparently betraying her national duty as a Tamil citizen of Sri Lanka, thereby challenging ‘Propriety and Tradition’ (LM 119) –

She has Uma’s brains, Mayuri’s prickliness, and underneath it all, Harini’s steel. She has [her father’s] Heart. But they know that she is perhaps more like Uma. More like Uma than he would prefer, although this is something he only admits in the dark. No one has said Uma’s name aloud for years. (LM 225)

In other words, Yalini’s (her name meaning Jaffna or Jaffna music) story, her search for identity, her attempt at understanding her homeland, its culture and the eternal war it is caught in, is informed by a historiography of Jaffna women, belonging to different moments in history. While Yalini’s narrative is replete with examples of familial likenesses, hinting at a genetic transmission of qualities, not just physical but also characteristic, it is also undercut by a strong sense of distancing from those with whom she fails to identify politically, despite physical likeness. What appears intriguing is that, her father sees in her traces of all the women in their family who have been unconventional or slightly non-conforming. Yalini too recognises that; however, she constantly posits herself vis-à-vis Janani, Kumaran’s daughter, more or less of her own age, but with a stronger emotional connection with the political cause of the Tamil Eelam, having been brought up by revolutionary parents:

I did not want to be a part of this, but I could not help but compare myself to her: darker, shorter, bigger. Less lovely. Less Sri Lankan, less proper. Less modest. I wore pants. I had cut my hair short at the beginning of the summer, and it had not yet grown out. Janani, I thought, looked like my mother. I was suddenly sure of it: that

Janani, with all her knowledge of what violence could do or be, looked more like me peaceful, lovely mother than I ever did. (LM 94)

Later, when Yalini learns that Janani's acquiescence to marry the groom selected by her father has nothing to do with love, she is devastated. In this strategically 'arranged marriage', Janani is given away to an emerging Tamil Tiger, one quite well-known within the diasporic community, and Janani acquiesces for that is how she could respect her father's wish – the necessity of preserving the imagined Tamil Eelam by marrying off her daughter to a young revolutionary like him. Yalini tries to dissuade her, but is countered by an emotional logic, which she fails to make sense of; Janani tells her categorically that she is doing the right thing

—

This is the tradition of the place where I was raised, and where by rights you should have been raised. If you try to talk me out of it because you think it's not what I want, you're being too simple. (LM 275).

Janani is scathing of Yalini's diasporic status, her physical detachment from the great cause which her parents have fought for with their life. What plagues Yalini is Janani's complete interpellation in the cause which has acquired terrorising proportions across the globe. If Janani sees Yalini and her parents as escapist, Yalini sees in her a constricted, warped idea of the nation as a homogenous territory, with recognisable boundary markers. Yalini's cosmopolitan vision which is more inclusive helps her take an objective distance from the cause and critique it, a critique which Janani is not just incapable of appreciating, but would find blasphemous.

One can make sense of Yalini's 'difference' in the self-description she provides while comparing herself with Janani. Yalini comes across as someone not conventionally beautiful, and more importantly, someone who does not abide by Sri Lankan standards of feminine propriety: she wears pants and has cut her hair short. However, the new homeland allows her a certain degree of freedom of choice in matters of clothes and fashion, which would not have been so easily had back in Sri Lanka.

Interestingly, this passage is preceded by a scene in which Vijendra and his son Suthan, who have come to “see” Janani, the prospective bride, stand up as soon as she enters. Astonished at their show of civility, Yalini wonders:

They both stood up, and I thought: that is what men of a certain era do in the presence of a lady. What time are we in? I wondered. When are we? (LM 94)

Yalini’s disgust underscores her disapproval of social manners and decorum which men display in presence of women: in the name of showing respect, these customs end up repressing or repressively patronising women even more. I choose to mention this episode in particular because it reveals Yalini’s feminist disposition, her ability to question norms and her fierce individualism, despite her strong connection with her family members, especially her parents. Yalini is certainly not like the others. Murali sees in Yalini an unmistakable shadow of the ‘genius’ Uma, his sister, who had been abandoned by the family.

Yalini’s aunt, Uma, who is left at a rehab by her family, is a classic ‘case’ of the ‘madwoman’ who the family conceals from public view and shoves into obscurity –

...Uma was a full-blown genius. And that could be intimidating. What good could genius do a girl? Especially a reclusive girl like Uma? Tharshi was proud of the possibility of genius, egged it on, cuddled it close in secret – but she was a little frightened of her daughter who seemed always to be looking into another country. (LM 183)

Uma’s ‘unnatural’ behaviour, the habit of locking herself up in her room, and her refusal to socialise or her refusal to take part in the household chores, worries the family. Soon she is diagnosed with an illness, which medical science cannot cure – “probably epileptic”, says the diagnosis (LM 186). Her teachers tell Tharshi – “*Uma has always been odd*” (LM 187; emphasis in the original). Her brother Neelan, a student of medical science, on seeing her, “closed up his own practice and took her to a temple on the top of the mountain, where they saw an old and holy man” (LM 190). Even supernatural powers could not heal her. Since then Uma becomes an outsider to the family, outcast in a rehabilitation centre. Soon rumour spreads that “Uma had been disappointed in Love, and she had gone crazy because of it” (LM 191), although there is no evidence of that. Only Murali, her younger brother and Yalini’s

father understands her: she is “just Too Special” (LM 191). This “specialness” is explained by him thus: “Those luminous eyes that saw into other countries. Otherworld eyes” (LM 187). In fact, Murali is struck by the same other-worldliness in Yalini’s eyes and “knows now you cannot escape your demons” (LM 225). What Murali misses out becomes conspicuous to the reader: the kind of clairvoyance Yalini has, which Uma too perhaps had, is of a special kind, an “odd” characteristic. It is the kind of insight one needs to see beneath the surface of things, an insight which is necessary to see through the futility of the war, the ethnic animosity, the hunger for power, and jingoistic nationalism(s) that are tearing the Sri Lankan nation asunder. However, women with such power have been often hunted out and killed. Uma is no exception. Yalini might not have to encounter the same fate, given her location. But, nonetheless, she defies convention, worrying even her father, who, unlike many, is extremely understanding and sympathetic.

Murali finds in his daughter, the ‘prickliness’ of Mayuri, Vani’s aunt, as well. As Uma is ‘shut up in the quiet and cool cabinet of memory’ (LM 195), what ‘eventually happened to’ Mayuri ‘is entombed’ (LM 195). Mayuri who never marries, turns out into a cranky ‘spinster’ until she finds a special kind of friendship in Shanthi, her colleague at school: “They were familiar in a way that was more than sisterly. No one had ever seen a relationship quite like this before” (LM 197). The suggestion of homoeroticism that underlies this special bonding becomes a matter of disconcertion for the family members: they gradually see a new Mayuri emerging, with Shanthi holding her ‘thoroughly in her thrall’ (LM 197). However, the relationship turns out to be an exploitative one, in which Mayuri is victimised; Mayuri grows weak and sicker by the day, when the school terminates her, compensating her with a generous pension. Shanthi, declaring Mayuri ‘unfit to take care any of her own affairs’, becomes her care-giver, but at the cost of taking away from her everything. Although the relationship does not work out, as Mayuri had imagined it would, it is interesting to note how she defies censoring social gaze and family disapproval to get into a relationship which no one could name.

It is noteworthy how Ganeshananthan’s novel is sated with stories of women, abandoned, quirky, rebellious, and how their stories are carefully hidden within the family saga. Yalini by returning to these warily hidden secrets unravels the necessity of recognising women who have not been conventional or conforming. Excavating these stories from the depths of ‘entombed’ family secrets, Yalini deconstructs the image of the traditional Sri Lankan

woman, the *pancha kalyani*, while underlining the necessity of narrating alternative histories of women, which are often glossed over in official records. As Yalini writes, “I am just recording it. They do not understand this: *history*. Cure the future by knowing the past” (LM 247; emphasis in the original). In so doing, she writes her own story as well, a personalised history, which disrupts, upsets and challenges conventional notions of traditional femininity as well as the dominant political discourses of the nation.

If the Moon Smiled: Traditional wives, rebellious daughters, and diasporic discontents

As discussed in the previous chapter, Chandani Lokugè’s *If the Moon Smiled* deals with the discontents of migration that plague both men and women, no matter whether such migration is voluntary or forced. However, as the novel progresses, migration and displacement and the feelings of alienation associated with them become metaphorical of a South Asian woman’s life – the migration that is involved with compulsive displacement from her natal to her conjugal home, and in the process, rediscovering both homes as equally alienating. *If the Moon Smiled* pits two women, Manthri, a traditional Sinhalese village girl married off to Mahendra at a young age and Nelum, their daughter, born and raised in Australia, against each other. The two-generation family narrative dramatises a certain progress in women’s empowerment; however, this progress, which is undercut by several counter-discourses from within the family, is somewhat facilitated by the diasporic space which liberates the women from compulsory adherence to the image of the ideal Sri Lankan woman. Nivedita Menon (2012) writes:

Forcibly trained from girlhood for marriage and marriage alone, not permitted to dream any other future, expecting that marriage will be the beginning of their lives, and finding that it is in fact the end of their lives; the frustration and resentment that this situation generates has led to increasingly what I see as the *implosion of marriage* – young girls simply refusing to perform the role of the docile wife and daughter-in-law, to the bewilderment and rage of the families into which they marry. (45-46; emphasis in the original)

If Manthri’s story is typical of the first part of the above passage; the implosion of marriage takes place in the second generation. Nelum refuses to replicate her mother’s life, and emerges as a fiercely independent woman with dreams and aspirations that were unavailable to her mother brought up on the only dream of ‘finding a home’ in her husband’s. While

Manthri is initially devastated and ashamed at Nelum's defiance, in my reading, it is from Nelum that Manthri eventually derives a notion of freedom which had remained unknown to her for a very long time. In the process, the family undergoes a severe crisis, whereby its oppressive structures are unambiguously laid bare.

In the previous chapter, I have discussed in detail Manthri's gradual awakening into womanhood, which involved physical distancing from her father, rigorous tutoring in propriety and decorum, and imagining a future unknown husband as God (IMS 6-7). As her mother locks her up in the room, after she starts menstruating, and she asks the servant for a dragonfly to play with, he says: "You are not a child any more, baba, and will have to learn to cook and sew and get ready for marriage" (IMS 19). Manthri's life is suddenly under uninterrupted vigilance from all quarters – parents, servants and relatives; and she is made to accept this symbolic incarceration as desirable in order to make some unknown man happy – "They are trying to turn you into a beautiful princess, baba, so that you will be a treasure for a king", consoles their servant (IMS 18). As Manthri is coached in lessons in ideal womanhood, a strong feeling of alienation creeps in, and adulthood into which she is ritualistically ushered in, appears claustrophobic – 'She clings to childhood, reluctant to let it go' (IMS 15). A Sinhalese village woman could not afford to consider alternative options, despite her exposure to English education and the likes of George Eliot and Bernard Shaw (IMS 21-22). She develops a deep interest in *Viragaya*, based on the life of Aravinda Jayasena, and raises questions about detachment from worldly desires and material pursuits (IMS 22-23). In retrospect, her introduction to this Sinhalese novel and her deep engagement with Buddhist scriptures at a young age appear meaningful, when she gives up on her family and returns to her homeland, detached, composed and stoic – "I don't want to return to Australia. I have found peace here in the temple and in my mother's house. I am at home" (IMS 186). She gradually awakens into her subservient status within the family, her powerlessness, her lack of agency – 'My life is an endless waiting. Waiting on them at breakfast. Waiting for them to come home in the evenings' (IMS 195). She develops a strong interest in reading, and finds herself most at home in the library –

I only care about going to the library. It sends me into a depression if I miss out on my Friday morning at the library. I browse among the shelves. The books are mostly old friends now. I talk to them, and they tell me I am one of them. (IMS 199)

Manthri does not take her rebellion to the streets; she does not even abandon her duty as a mother or a wife. She learns to detach herself, and achieves an inner peace which is otherwise beyond her reach. Her rebellion against the oppressive structure of the family, not only represented by a patronising father or a tormenting husband, but also by children who outgrow her, never to make her a part of their lives, can be described as spiritual – a rebellion which is not ‘out there’, but carried out in muted resignation, inside herself, which, however, does not take away from it its political currency.

Nelum’s rebellion against her father is more strident; she, unlike her mother, is more articulate about her rights, her desires and her aspirations. Nelum’s generation, brought up on radical ideas about marriage, kinship, love and family, is more vocal about their rights; unlike Manthri who did not have any exposure to an alternative life other than a marital one, arranged by parents, Nelum fiercely resists any parental interference in her personal life. Mahendra is devastated and ‘wants to arrange a marriage for her. Before she goes out of control’ (IMS 99). He is perturbed by her relationship with a white man, David, and tries his best to dissuade her from carrying on with this relationship – “How can you even consider the idea of Nelum having anything to do with an Australian? She’s going to marry a Sinhalese” (IMS 113). Both Nelum and her brother feel terribly victimised by their father’s tyrannical authoritarianism, and Nelum stands by her brother, emotionally smothered by the impossible demands of manliness Mahendra makes of him (IMS 107-109). Both Nelum and Devake, exposed to more cosmopolitan ways of life in Australia, vehemently challenges their father’s warped notion of gender and his urgency to preserve racial purity. Manthri, though herself a victim of Mahendra’s despotism, fails to understand the meaning of Nelum’s unabashed rebellion against her father, at least initially – ‘I am estranged from my daughter’, she declares to herself with her characteristic sense of resignation (IMS 110).

Nelum is enraged to discover an advertisement Mahendra puts up in the local newspaper’s matrimonial column for her – “I’m not a house that you can measure and advertise and auction off” (IMS 118). She asserts her cosmopolitan identity time and again – “We are not Sri Lankans any more” (IMS 119). To Manthri’s astonishment, she raises a fundamental question about romance and marriage – ‘Why does it have to be love and marriage? Marriage and children’ (IMS 119). Nelum has come a long way off from her mother’s past, her faith in the scriptures, her ideas of womanly duties. Manthri is overwhelmed by her daughter’s notions of love, marriage and identity, but slowly she begins to see reason in Nelum’s dissent

– ‘May I tread the fringes of her dream?’ (IMS 130) Manthri remembers how Nelum has always been critical of the idea of the home and family, as she recalls a picture which she had drawn in school. The teacher having found it particularly disconcerting showed it to Manthri – “See, everyone will think that there’s something wrong with us. You must never draw another picture like that again” (IMS 133). Manthri who has always been busy living up to her image of the *pancha kalyani*, the one to whom the protection of the inner sanctum of the home is relegated, feels deeply upset. Mahendra does not let go of a single opportunity of taking her to task for not having performed her duties, the primary duty being bringing up her children well – “Is that how you have taught your daughter to respect her parents and her culture?” (IMS 129)

Nelum, in particular, appears terribly perturbing to Mahendra because she is not the kind Sri Lankan mothers are expected to *reproduce* – the children of the nation, as I discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Rather, Nelum challenges all the ideas which Mahendra and to some extent Manthri too have held as sacrosanct – the ideas of racial homogeneity, of prescribed gender roles. The novel moving between Australia and Sri Lanka vaguely touches on the war which is raging at home. The war is a distant reality, gruesome images of which reach the Australian- Sri Lankan diaspora through newspapers – ‘We are fortunate to be out of the bloody mess, Mahendra says loudly. Let us count our blessings’ (IMS 68). While there is a sense of detachment, a sense of relief for having escaped the war’s brutal everydayness, a long distance nationalism is ritualistically *performed*: “We’re all going to meet at Sumith’s house...Drink tea, sing a few [Sinhalese] songs”, proposes Suranjith, a Sri Lankan known to Manthri and Mahendra. This long distance nationalism becomes all the more palpable in the advertisement which Mahendra inserts in the matrimonial column for Nelum – “Govigama Buddhist parents permanently resident in Australia seek...” (IMS 117). Nelum with her radical ideas of freedom and marriage dismantles this Sinhalese ghettoism and challenges the ferocity with which it is preserved by Mahendra in a foreign land. Nelum, therefore, offers a counter-discourse the cognition of which is necessary in order to bring an end to war that is raging in Sri Lanka, taking hundreds of innocent lives. Nelum may not be aware of the political turbulence in her ancestral homeland; but her rebellion, which involves challenging ideas of racial Puritanism and prescribed gender roles, and which debunks Mahendra’s authoritarianism as a patriarchal tyrant, has a remarkable significance in an ethnically fragmented Sri Lankan nation-state.

Nelum's room appears 'strange' to Manthri (IMS 140-142); she cannot make out when exactly did Nelum begin drifting away from them. The very strangeness of Nelum's room is figurative of the thoughts she harbours, the ideas she articulates. In fact, her perceived strangeness is the strangeness one sees in Uma or Yalini in *Love Marriage*. Because both Mahendra and Manthri fail to understand her, they dismiss her as strange; this *strangeness*, if appreciated, could have solved larger problems. Although Mahendra finds it difficult to convert himself to Nelum's world-view, Manthri slowly comes to appreciate her fierce sense of freedom. She recognises that Nelum's world-view is shaped by a whole new universe of radical ideas, of the emergence of a new world, when women are no longer locked up away from public view as they enter puberty. Manthri feels the huge distance that now lies between her and her daughter: she who was isolated from others for days, when she began to menstruate, and Nelum's entry into puberty that happens casually, without any credulous fuss – 'There was no containing Nelum. No shielding her from evil eyes...Nelum to whom becoming a woman was nothing but the nuisance of a pad' (IMS 140). Although mother and daughter do not reunite as would have been expected; for, Manthri's world is remarkably different from Nelum's. While Nelum is driven by ambition, fame and aspirations for greater success, Manthri resigns herself to a life detached from her family, which has most oppressed her. Her children eventually leave, rarely to reconnect; her husband has never been particularly concerned about her. However, despite all her misgivings, there is a proud recognition of Nelum's accomplishment: 'My daughter: the surgeon. She has created her world. All by herself' (IMS 199). The novel does not privilege one kind of liberation over the other. But that is not important. What is important is the celebration of the struggle that women must undergo in order to overthrow the mantle of patriarchal oppression.

Running in the Family: Indecorous women and marginal identities

It would be interesting to look at Michael Ondaatje's fictionalised memoir *Running in the Family* in constructing a feminist historiography of Ceylon/Sri Lanka. I would particularly focus on Ondaatje's grandmother Lalla and her eccentricities which dismantle Ceylonese/Sri Lankan dominant ideologies of femininity and feminine propriety with an almost 'queer' iconoclasm. Coming of a Burgher family, Lalla inhabits a marginal identity, which, to some extent, fits into the dominant nationalist discourses which label the Burgher woman as sexually licentious and morally depraved. Ondaatje's representation of Lalla counters such labelling; delineating Lalla's 'antics' with a delightful sense of humour, Ondaatje subtly

challenges the popular perception of the Burgher woman. Lalla is indisputably an extreme countertype of Arjie's mother or grandmother (*Funny Boy*), or Annalukshmi's Aunt Philomena (*Cinnamon Gardens*) or Daya (*The Hungry Ghosts*), conforming, 'respectable' Sri Lankan women. Lalla is not exactly rebellious, in the manner of Nelum (*If the Moon Smiled*) or Yalini (*Love Marriage*); rather, her life, her choices, her complete discard for feminine decorum, which might not be aligned with any 'political' position, are disruptive of the notion of ideal Ceylonese or Sri Lankan womanhood. Neluka Silva (2004) writes:

The issue of sexual relations interlinks with the ideologies of Westernisation and Christianisation. The life style of this social group [i.e. the Burghers] was construed as sign of sexual permissiveness, and the mantle of "immorality" fell most harshly on the Burgher woman. She was conspicuously positioned as the "siren" who exploited her sexuality for social gain. In addition the popular belief that the Burgher woman was intent on effacing her "Burgherness" by marrying into the ethnically "pure" communities reinforced the existing prejudices against them. (106)

The popular ideas about the Burgher woman are not really discarded by Ondaatje and replaced with a counter-discourse. By laughing off Lalla's antics, her promiscuity, her vivacity and disrespect for decorum, Ondaatje proposes a re-imagination of the Burgher woman within the national imaginary. While the ideal Sinhalese or Tamil woman is a stereotype constantly iterated by the nationalist and sub-nationalist discourses, the Burgher woman, the corrupt and the frivolous Other to this ideal image, has also been stereotyped in the media and popular culture. Just as the Sinhalese and Tamil writers I have discussed above deconstruct the stereotype of ideal (Sinhalese/Tamil) womanhood, Ondaatje also dislodges the stereotype of the Burgher woman.

Ondaatje's memoir which is constructed through a revisiting of various family homes, investigating family archives of photographs, letters and souvenirs, and listening to aging relatives' narration of the past, covers a huge time span of Ceylonese/Sri Lankan history. Located partly within the Cinnamon Gardens elite class, the kind Selvadurai explores in most of his novels, Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* looks back on the arrival of modernity in the Ceylonese low country, most conspicuous in the liberty the Burgher women begin to get a taste of. Lalla's polyamory and her endless flirtations with men make her quite popular in Cinnamon Gardens during her youth. Aunt Dolly recalls:

Your grandmother Lalla for instance had lots of relationships. We could never keep up with her. We almost had to write the names down to remember who she was seeing. My advice you see is to get on with everybody – no matter what they do. (RIF 114-115)

The last sentence in Aunt Dolly's remembrance of Lalla's amorous adventures immediately dismisses the possibility of moralising on Lalla's apparent promiscuity which is often projected as innate to Burgher women. By declaring magnanimously that it is important to get on with everybody, Aunt Dolly sets the tone for Ondaatje's representation of his grandmother which is then sustained throughout.

Lalla's birth, death and special abilities – 'She could read thunder' (RIF 117) – all have a magic touch to them. Born of an 'eccentric' bloodline from her mother's side, Lalla has a passionate life and an equally dramatic death. Her birth which takes place 'abruptly, during a picnic' and her death 'in the blue arms of a jacaranda tree' (RIF 117) mark her extraordinariness, which becomes a part of the family gossip. As Ondaatje puts together the various rumours, gossips and truths available in the family memory, he discovers an amusing woman, almost comical, but highly spirited, energetic with little concern for decorum.

Forsaken by the immensely good-looking Shelton de Saram, Lalla becomes irritable, but soon marries Willie Gratiaen, a 'champion cricketer', a 'broker' and an employee of a colonial company, 'on the rebound'. ((RIF 118) However, she never becomes the ideal wife, often causing her husband considerable loss. For instance, carelessly, she ends up cooking all the Australorp eggs Willie imports from Australia to raise a breed of exceptional black chickens and start a farm (RIF 118). Her life is full of such slipshod mistakes, for which she is never remorseful. It seems that she gets her real freedom and the licence to be herself, once her husband dies. Although not reflected upon explicitly, it is difficult not to see that 'the death of a spouse is the only form of emancipation from the constraints of marriage' (Silva 2004: 125). Ondaatje writes: 'She had been beautiful when young but most free after her husband died and her children grew up' (RIF 132).

The widowed Lalla and her widowed neighbour Rene, both become the centre of attention of 'numerous bored husbands' of Colombo, and both, impenitently survive on 'their wits and

character and beauty' (RIF 119). The sexual excess Lalla (along with Rene) indulges in attributes to her an agency, which is usually unavailable to Ceylonese women of her time, and even today. Abiding by the law, social decorum, and prudishness are alien to her character, which if appreciated without being judgemental, actually undo the various social norms women are handcuffed to – She hides her milkman from the police after he commits an inadvertent murder, she makes people laugh in the court, she plays bridge, she steals flowers from the church altar, she boozes endlessly and she entertains her numerous admirers all through the day, after having finished her domestic chores early in the morning. Lalla is someone who amusingly challenges the concept of respectability, thereby confirming the Tamil or Sinhalese perception of the Burgher woman; but in this act of flouting is implicit the rhetoric of freedom from hetero-patriarchal structures many modern Sri Lankan feminists endorse.

Lalla is happily remembered for her high-spiritedness and whimsicalities; but she is driven mad whenever she is 'grabbed' or 'contained' by anyone (RIF 124). To explain her rebellion at being grabbed or contained, Ondaatje narrates how she has to be 'pinned down' to suckle her infant son, before she could run away to her dance class (RIF 125). The example Ondaatje cites is instructive of her utter disregard for maternal feelings, throwing to the winds the behavioural codes which mothers are expected to abide by, uncomplainingly. Lalla's refusal to play the doting and compliant mother is one of her many whims, but is also symptomatic of her willing disruption of conventional femininity within which women are often restricted. It is interesting to note that Lalla's disavowal of tradition and womanly respectability is coterminous with her largesse, testified by her treatment of her brother Evan (and many others). Evan, a thief, a burglar, finds his only supporter in Lalla, who financially supports him all through – 'But all through her life, when the children sent her money, Lalla would immediately forward it on to Evan' (RIF 127). She has her own justification for supporting Evan, conveniently and without qualms appropriating the teachings of the Bible to explain her generosity towards him – "Jesus died to save Evans...and I will die for Evan" (RIF 127). In this display of magnanimity and sisterly love, Lalla is peerless. By punctuating Lalla's story with these little narratives of her extreme generosity, her concern for others, her non-judgemental disposition, Ondaatje establishes her Burgherness in such positive terms that render any inkling to morally judge her character impossible: 'There was some sense of divine right she felt she and everyone else had, even she had to beg for it or steal it' (RIF 132). In this way, Ondaatje also reclaims the image of the Burgher woman from the colonial

and nationalist vilification of her as an avaricious, erratic, sexually pervert social climber with no sense of righteousness and etiquette (See Raheem et al. 1989).

Ondaatje takes Lalla's exclusivity to another level, when he reveals that Lalla 'was the first woman in Ceylon to have a mastectomy' (RIF 130). A beneficiary of colonial modernity, manifested in the availability of progressive medical science in the country, Lalla survives an ailment which kills several women. Back then, it was a major step which Lalla took, given that most women of her time would have died of shame rather than going for medical treatment in colonial hospitals. However, what follows the mastectomy is highly comical, but at the same time, suggestive of a sexual revolution Lalla engenders unwittingly.

The false breast would never be still for long. She was an energetic person. It would crawl over to join its twin on the right hand side or sometimes appear on her back...She called it her Wandering Jew and would yell at the grandchildren in the middle of a formal dinner to fetch her tit as she had forgotten to put it on. (RIF 130)

There are several such stories about Lalla's 'Wandering Jew' which have gone into the archive of family gossip, each more hilarious than the other. What is remarkable in all these stories is Lalla's casual dismantling of certain taboos associated with the female body and sexuality. The artificial breast, about which Lalla is least secretive or diffident, is desexualised by its everyday presence in drawing (or dining) room discourses of the family; no matter how embarrassing it may appear to some of the members, more embarrassing because of Lalla's openness about it. Her son-in-law, Michael Ondaatje's father is one of those who feels terribly disconcerted because of her lack of decorum –

He reportedly couldn't stand his mother-in-law, Lalla, for what he saw as her crudeness...While we used to love rushing around the house and estate at Lalla's insistence to catch the dog Chindit, who had run off with her false breast, my father would retire to a book or his office acutely embarrassed. (RIF 187)

Ondaatje speculates that perhaps it was his father who trained the dog to torment Lalla that way, for he could not stand her. Even in this act of torture, there is an unmistakable sense of humour which palliates the feeling of bitterness to a great extent. Lalla's sexual escapades, her eccentricities, her disregard for taboos and interdictions set her apart in the family tree.

Her dramatic death in a flood in 1947, one year before Ceylon is declared an independent nation-state, is also symbolic of the death of sexual freedom to which women would rarely or scarcely be entitled to. This is not to claim that women enjoyed such freedom in pre-independence Ceylon; Lalla was an exception, nonetheless.

Lalla's death is described in surreal terms, her body being borne by floodwaters, and carried over half the country. Ondaatje, true to his family's tradition ('If anything kept their generation alive was this recording by exaggeration' [RIF 186]), hyperbolically presents Lalla's death so as to match it up to her immensely passionate life, as it were. Neluka Silva sees in Ondaatje's fantastical delineation of the flood in which Lalla is killed an allusion to the biblical flood, heralding a new era. This new era, marked by the official decolonisation of Ceylon, is not necessarily a liberating one. Lalla's death brings about a closure so to speak –

Her transgressions of social hierarchy, her love of masks and theatre and uninhibited celebration of life is, as Ondaatje realises, a part of a world in which the familiar or accepted "reality" is to be rendered problematic with the dawn of Independence and the emphasis on a more indigenous ethos. (Silva 2004: 133)

However, this is also the moment which marks the decline of the Burgher community, its gradual 'decentring', and a slow rise of the Sinhalese community, so far marginalised under colonial rule. Despite major transformations in class and ethnic dynamics of the post-independent nation-state, perceptions about gender and sexuality barely undergo any change. The deep structures of hetero-patriarchy underpinning every affective or political relationship are reinforced, rendering women even more powerless. As charted above, even liberal feminist agendas, let alone radical ones, are mocked at and innumerable obstacles are raised to jeopardise women's movement across the country.

Bodies in Motion: Tradition, displacement and non-conforming women

Mary Anne Mohanraj's *Bodies in Motion* (2005) is another family saga that moves between Sri Lanka and the United States, spanning a timeline of six decades. Told in twenty interconnected short stories, the intense dramatic saga of the Kandiahs and the Vallipurams is built on a series of family secrets that dismantle myths of purity, happiness, romantic coupling, parent-child relationship, and sexual desire. Adultery, incest, paedophilia, homoerotic desires, polyamory – all are parts of well-guarded family secrets. Non-

conforming women populate the novel, inhabiting extreme positions of non-conformity to the family, hetero-patriarchal demands and ideas of social decorum. The title 'Bodies in Motion' underscores the idea of displacement and mobility, with a focus on the body – mostly the female body, not simply as a signifier of cultural traditions, of Sri Lankan-ness, but as a sexual body, with all its desires. Writing in the tradition of the erotica, Mohanraj seems to reclaim the female body from the destructive hetero-patriarchal gaze much in the same manner as Frantz Fanon attempts to rewrite the body of the colonised man, recuperating it from the dismemberment and castration inflicted by the gaze of the colonial master in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The female body is often the register of colonial and indigenous patriarchal violence, not always in the literal sense of carrying a scar or a mark. Violence is often unleashed on the female body symbolically, the psychological effect of which is so deep that the scars continue to show in generations to come. As discussed above, clothing the female body in a certain way, or setting certain constrictive behavioural codes for them is no less brutal than the actual violence of rape, molestation and physical aggression on the body. Mohanraj's novel takes a queer-feminist position in radically challenging the repeated emphasis on chastity, *lajja-baya* and discourses of appropriate sexual behaviour both men and women are often made to subscribe to. In Chapter 4, I shall further elaborate on the novel's dismantling of sexual norms when I shall turn my focus on the gay and lesbian characters; in this chapter, I shall analyze three women characters – Shanthi and the two sisters, Kuliya and Raji – to bring home my point. The narrative which covers six decades of the twentieth century historicises changing as well as rigid notions of female sexuality within the Sri Lankan homeland of the early twentieth century through its last decades within the diaspora in the United States. Shanthi's story set in the 1920s and moving through the 1950s and Raji's story set in the 1980s provide an interesting insight into the history of Sri Lankan women. The stories are not exemplary of general experiences; but they have in them disruptive potentials of taking apart such celebrated notions of motherhood, wifely devotion, chastity and monogamy circulated by nationalist discourses in their urgency to control and contain women's sexuality.

Shanthi's coming of age roughly coincides with that of Annalukshmi's in *Cinnamon Gardens*. The novel begins with the dilemma of a crucial decision that needs to be taken: whether or not, the Chellias should send their daughter to Oxford, as suggested by the missionary school nun. In 1939, nine years after the Donoughmore Commission has granted the right to vote to Ceylonese bourgeois women, Shanthi is faced with the challenge to coax

her mother Bala into acquiescing to let her go. Belonging to an affluent Colombo family, Shanthi, unlike most Ceylonese women of her time, has an alternative path to choose from – an alternative to marriage and confinement to domesticity for life. However, despite all their progressiveness, Bala is adamantly resistant to a higher academic career at Oxford for her younger daughter – ‘It was honorable to be a good wife, a good mother’ (BIM 7). Although her father Thani too believes in this ‘code of honour’, Sister Catherine makes him think twice over. She reprimands him, pointing out to him his own wife’s predicament on giving birth to innumerable children – “What will Shanthi’s future be, if she stays here? To marry a stranger, to serve him as wife...to have a dozen children like her mother?” (BIM 7) It is, however, difficult to cajole Bala, orthodox and reactionary in her ideas of womanliness. Thani is astonished when she advises their elder daughter Chellamani to return to her abusive husband and try to work things out with him (BIM 9). She accuses Thani of allowing Shanthi too much freedom; interestingly, she refers to the ill effects of buying her a bicycle, just as Philomena, in *Cinnamon Gardens*, takes Louisa to task on discovering Annalukshmi riding a bicycle to school. Riding a bicycle is indecorous and disgraceful that spoils prospects of finding a good match – “You should never have given her that bicycle...I’m not going to have an easy time finding a husband willing to put up with her wild ways” (BIM 13). Breaking away from such a traditional home is difficult for Shanthi, as it is for Annalukshmi. But in Shanthi’s case, the task is easier, for she has a doting father who convinces Bala into agreeing to send her off to England. However, even the apparently liberal father is beset with deep anxieties apprehending Shanthi’s possible affairs with white men, which will bring shame upon the family (BIM 18). What becomes evident in these endless family conversations, anxieties, and apprehensions is the Ceylonese woman’s extreme subordination to socially approved gender roles and social demands for maintaining racial purity in marriage. Although Shanthi eventually makes it to England and obtains a doctoral degree in Physics, she is never really liberated.

Interestingly, Mohanraj intersperses Shanthi’s story with that of Sita, the female protagonist of the *Ramayana*, a story which many South Asians grow up on and are often tutored to revere as a moral guide. While deploying Sita’s story as an archetype of female subordination has now become commonplace in South Asian feminist literature, *Bodies in Motion* significantly departs from conventional narratives of oppression and victimhood. Shanthi’s story, ‘The Princess in the Forest’ (set in Chicago, 1955), problematises the notions of patriarchal oppression: Aravindan, Shanthi’s husband, is no wife-beater, nor is he in anyway

domineering. In fact, Shanthi's mother Bala beseeches her to be grateful to Mother Mary 'for such a saint of a husband' (BIM 51). But Shanthi fails to appreciate his saintliness, and takes a vicarious pleasure in ill-treating him. Mohanraj offers an engaging psychological dissection of Shanthi's character – the oppression of which Shanthi is at the receiving end does not seem to have an identifiable face; but Shanthi's feelings of misgivings in marriage are so intense that she herself turns into an oppressor, and surprises herself for being so. The following episode underpins the complexity of the situation: while leaving the house in the morning, she tells Aravindan – "You'll have to reheat the rice and curries from yesterday" (BIM 51). Aravindan, unlike a typical husband, would not protest, and she knows it. But she is not grateful of Aravindan's co-operation as her mother would like her to be. And, the narrator intervenes to problematise this apparently mundane domestic discourse:

Instead of feeling grateful, Shanthi takes a small, petty pleasure in making Aravindan eat old food, a pleasure somehow more intense because she knows he would not have noticed if she hadn't pointed out. (BIM 51)

A little later, Shanthi reflects on this 'petty pleasure' she derives in inconveniencing Aravindan – 'Perhaps this is why she hates Aravindan most of all – because he has turned her mean and spiteful, bitter and old' (BIM 56). She reveals that Aravindan despite his endless show of kindness and care has not really been faithful to her – 'She doesn't know who the woman was, but she knew when it started, and when it ended' (BIM 56). The trial by fire which Sita is subjected to in order that she proves her chastity if carried out on Aravindan might have marked him out as a sinner.

Mohanraj delves deeper into Shanthi's psychological disposition, her bitterness and her increasing hatred for Aravindan, which is sometimes replaced by intense self-deprecation – 'Sometimes, she only hates herself' (BIM 56). Growing up in Ceylon and listening to her father's narration of Sita's story every night, Shanthi seems to have built tremendous faith in the model of a happy family – a brave husband, a devoted wife and a loyal brother-in-law. She learns to see the phoniness of it all as she gets married, gives birth to six children, and grows irritable. Fuming over Aravindan's infidelity, Shanthi is tempted to work her charm on another man, the father of one of her white students. She surveys her body, which is now sagging under the intense labour of giving birth to six children and acting as a care-giver to them: 'After six children, she is no longer slender, but her breasts are full, her broad hips

might seem appealing' (BIM 53). But this body is tied to tradition and to certain codes of conduct which are blasphemous to transgress. The sexual desire for another man, other than the husband, is severely curtailed by her conscious adherence to 'respectability' – 'Shanthi is a respectable woman, a professor's wife, a Catholic. She would never accede to any invitation' (BIM 53). However, she believes that it would have been 'satisfying' to be desired again 'by hot and feverish eyes' (BIM 53).

Mohanraj does not take a moralistic stance in her judgement of Aravindan; in fact in a later story, 'Other Cities' (Chicago 1962), she allows Aravindan his perspective on the marriage. Despite his deep love for his wife, Aravindan develops a tremendous sexual desire for Carol, one of his students. Feeling rejected by Shanthi, Aravindan finds solace in Carol, and the affair goes on for months. Aravindan steps across the line of marital fidelity in a manner his wife cannot. But the sense of guilt remains embedded in his mind for years, for his daughter Leilani discovers him with Carol in a physically intimate moment. Shanthi never finds out though; she only speculates and fails to forgive Aravindan. In Shanthi's story, Mohanraj brings to light the complex discourses of respectability, virtue and chastity within which Ceylonese/Sri Lankan women are interpellated; not only Sri Lankan women, Sri Lankan men as well. Only that the woman is more severely stigmatised for being adulterous, than a man usually is. But, both are equally shackled with the moral baggage attached to fidelity and faithfulness at the expense of complete negation of the body and bodily desires. The social emphasis on the preservation of the purity of the body in monogamous heterosexual coupledness is very subtly mocked at; the question is not whether Shanthi is right in maltreating Aravindan or Aravindan is wrong in cheating on Shanthi. What comes through is how men and women are discursively produced within a culture, and how certain notions of morally appropriate behaviour often end up destroying families and affective ties. Shanthi and Aravindan never separate; the family sustains its perceived image of perfection. But the silence that sits heavily between the couple grows over time, and neither could connect despite lifelong physical proximity.

The second generation diaspora of which Kuyila and Raji are representatives is slightly more progressive than their parent's generation. However, the moral template of social behaviour within which they are expected to function does not quite change, although they change location from Massachusetts to Colombo to Vermont. Kuyila and Raji, daughters of the Sundar and Sushila Vallipuram, are initially pitted against each other as good and bad

daughters. Their father Sundar is proud of Kuliya, the ‘dutiful child’, and equally embarrassed of Raji, for ‘her shameful behaviour’ of dating boys and leading a sexually active life (BIM 138-139). Sundar almost wishes Raji to ‘end up ugly and alone’, a just retribution for not being obedient enough, for having ‘betrayed’ her father (BIM 144). He has been saving up for Raji’s dowry since the day she is born, but now it seems useless: ‘Raji will find her own path, away from her family, and the jewelry (*sic*) will go to Kuliya instead’ (BIM 141). It is Kuliya, her good daughter, who deserves that ‘beauty and security’ the jewellery symbolises. Rosemarie Tong (1984) writes:

According to the common mythology, there are two sorts of women – bad girls and good girls. The bad girls meet men’s need for sexual objects; the good girls meet men’s need for nurturers. (38)

The bad girl is often equated with the sexually active prostitute of the streets, someone who can be laid ‘with carefree abandon’ (Tong 38) as against the good girl, the mother or the wife who needs to be respected. Sundar’s treatment of his daughters gives away this anxiety – Raji might end up being the quintessential bad girl, who no self-respecting man would ever marry. Kuyila, on the other hand, with her soft, delicate, demure nature, will bring him happiness. In a dramatic moment in the text, when Sundar gives Kuliya a present wrapped in a foil on her birthday and asks her to open it, Raji urges her to “tear it” off. But,

Kuliya continues slowly, though slipping the foil off and then letting it fall to the fresh-mown grass. She opens the box, slides the frame out of it, unwraps the tissue paper. (BIM 150)

The discipline Kuliya shows in her act of unwrapping the gift is precisely what Malathi de Alwis (1999) calls abiding by the codes of womanly respectability. As mentioned earlier, de Alwis shows how sewing was made compulsory on the school curriculum for girls in colonial Ceylon, for, ‘the plying of the needle involved the very embodiment of the Christian virtues of piety, industry and docility’ (1999: 181). Kuliya’s extreme care in unwrapping the gift, as against Raji’s ‘tear it’, underscores the exhibition of that docility which is appreciated by men as observance of decorum – the marker of the quintessential good woman.

The gift Kuliya unwraps is the photograph of a Colombo-based young doctor who Sundar has selected as her husband, without consulting anyone. Raji is infuriated, confronts her father, and enrages the latter by her insolence – “[Kuliya] doesn’t need to be taken care of, Appa – she needs to learn to take care of herself!” (BIM 152). Strangely, and to Sundar’s surprise, Kuliya does not protest. She agrees immediately despite Raji’s insistence that she need not do this (BIM 156). It might appear that Kuliya is afraid to witness the image of the ‘good girl’ that she is crumbling down. But in agreeing to her father’s proposal she exercises a choice nonetheless, for this is what she wants. Raji fails to appreciate Kuliya, because for her, freedom of choice has a different definition altogether. What for Raji appears incarcerating, seems liberating for Kuliya, who cautiously plays up the image of a ‘good wife’, just as she is the ‘good daughter’, and ‘grows’ to love her husband (BIM 169). Although apparently she continues to maintain the image of the ‘good wife’, the good daughter-in-law, Kuliya could not bring herself to accept motherhood. She destroys the baby once she discovers her pregnancy, by gulping down ‘whatever repulsive concoctions she could think of’ (BIM 163), when no one is looking. However, she cannot avoid getting pregnant a second time, and the family keeps her under strict vigilance, a caring and loving monitoring, until Minal is born. Motherhood is not exactly blissful as she has been told a number of times – ‘breast-feeding, for example, wasn’t the wonderful experience she’d heard about’ (BIM 165). Yet, her husband’s happiness surrounding the baby, makes her happy too and even centred – ‘She had finally found her role, her place in the world’ (BIM 165). While Mohanraj also seems to celebrate Kuliya’s idea of a meaningful life, she immediately afterwards brings about a turn of events when Kuliya’s happy home comes crushing down. Himali, her husband’s pre-marital love interest arrives with their son, as the civil war breaks out, leaving Kuliya devastated. In this dramatic turn of events, Mohanraj collapses notions of security, love and happiness in which women develop a strong faith, despite being cautioned. Even when one chooses to abide by conventional ideas of womanhood, this choice does not necessarily guarantee happiness. This loss of faith is again conditioned by profound belief in the absolute necessity of the purity of the body and of monogamy.

Raji’s life takes a different turn altogether when she marries Vivek, another Colombo doctor, when she discovers her white boyfriend cheating on her (BIM 166). Kuliya is astounded, for this is exactly what Raji criticised: marrying someone she does not even know. But again, Raji exercises her choice as always. However, she does not become the ‘good wife’ like Kuliya; and Vivek seems to adjust to her life more than she adjusts to Vivek’s. Raji often

leaves the house not to return for days and Vivek has no idea what she is up to. There is a nagging feeling that she is seeing other men, but Vivek never demands an explanation: ‘He didn’t say, *Were you really alone?* She had had lovers before him. He’d known that before they married. He hadn’t thought it mattered’ (emphasis in the original; BIM 187). He does question her when he discovers her taking anti-pregnancy capsules, right after copulation. Vivek feels hurt, for he has been expecting a baby, but Raji refuses to have one. She remains that ‘bad daughter’ her father has always been dismissive of. Unlike Kuliya she cannot grow up to be a ‘good wife’. Vivek does not judge her, nor does he question her of her occasional disappearance. But he does something drastic, something he never thinks he is capable of doing. He succumbs to the invitation of a colleague nurse and makes love to her. He is not particularly attracted to the woman, yet he engages in the act because he has a different agenda in mind – ‘he had sex with her because he could tell his wife’ (BIM 188). He does; but Raji is not as flustered as much he wishes her to be. She simply asks whether he would have sex with that woman again; when he says he wouldn’t, Raji turns her back on him with a nonchalant, “Okay, then” (BIM 189). Vivek, overcome by his ego, has sex with another woman as if to take revenge on Raji who he suspects of being disloyal to him. Yet a profound sense of guilt overwhelms him and it seems ‘his heart is about to explode’ (BIM 189). What Vivek fails to accept is Raji’s indifference to what he considers a sinful act of betrayal. Maybe for Raji, the more liberal of the two, having sex with another woman does not matter as much as Vivek imagined it would. What Vivek fails to comprehend is that a marriage does not always ‘go perfectly right’ (BIM 189) only when strictures of monogamy are fiercely abided by. Mohanraj deconstructs the binary opposition of the good woman/bad woman constructed by patriarchy, while also underlining the fact that perceptions about female sexuality barely ever change.

The primary intervention of this chapter is a review of the cultural construction of womanhood within the Ceylonese/Sri Lankan nationalist imaginaries, both before and after decolonisation. Detailed textual analysis of eight contemporary expatriate novels, interestingly, generates a discourse that reveals women’s lack of agency within heteropatriarchal families; this is most evident in the family’s fierce urgency in invisibilising female sexuality, which often leads to an over-valuation of heteronormativity. Women, who dare to

cross the threshold of 'respectability', resisting hetero-patriarchal domination, are often demonised by or ostracised from the family. Incidentally, they become part of family secrets, carefully hidden from family histories. The good mother or the good wife, each role demanding of women stringent adherence to certain normative codes of behaviour, is the only register through which women are recognised. Any deviation from these preset roles is severely castigated. And in each of these roles, the female body is sufficiently desexualised – her sexuality is recognised only in her capability of reproduction, a social duty which she must perform. The woman's body is then reclaimed as it were from the realm of sexuality and reinstated in the moral-emotional paradigm of motherhood, as underscored by the mobilisation of the Mother's Front during the civil war, to cite one instance. Single women, working women, women with no children, women with rebellious children, sexually active women, women who marry outside her caste or marry into rival ethnic communities, women who rebel against their subordinate status – all of these 'categories' are disparaged countertypes to the imagination of Sinhalese or Tamil ideal womanhood. Any form of rebellion, however muted, is often put down violently; for, women's assertion of rights is viewed as detrimental to the sustenance of the family, the home, 'the unit of the nation'. The novels I analysed in this chapter while recognising the importance of women's resistance to the various ideological strands – such as, nationalism, religion, homophobia, parochialism, and territorialism – that contain women within a normative framework, also reveals women's inextricable interpellation within these ideologies. In fact, almost all the novels discussed have women characters which perpetrate violence on other women or act as moral police to women who step across the line of 'respectability'. These women conforming to hetero-patriarchal notions of respectable womanhood justify their action as a precautionary measure against social humiliation, of being shamed in society; the larger concern is of course the disintegration of the family, women being its binding force.

In *Cinnamon Gardens*, set during the colonial period, the arrival of modernity and the increasing possibilities of women's liberation from hetero-patriarchal domination are dramatised in its projection of Annalukshmi who rebels against an extended family which desperately seeks to contain her free spirit by finding a suitable match for her. However, Annalukshmi's success story is just one of its kinds; for, Shanthi's life which almost runs parallel to hers in Mohanraj's *Bodies in Motion* is shackled with marital responsibilities and her gradual descent into meanness, unable to put up with a husband who she cannot love anymore. Yet, she has to maintain the facade of a happy family, no matter how emotionally

distant she becomes from both her husband and her six children. The same novel underlines the predicament of generations of individuals subscribed to certain ideologies of female sexuality, monogamy and purity of the body. Projecting the female body as sexual and desirous, Mohanraj dismantles the national urgency to conceal her sexuality by circulating her essentially asexual image. In *If the Moon Smiled*, Manthri's marital life turns into a lifelong compromise for her deviation from a sexual code of conduct – the necessity to preserve one's virginity before marriage. Her 'disrespectful' sexual behaviour on bed and the confirmation of having lost her virginity before marriage, degrade her in the eyes of Mahendra, who does not let go of a single opportunity of shaming her. In both *The Hungry Ghosts* and *Funny Boy*, the question of womanly respectability is further problematised as questions of dissident sexualities and ethnic purity intervene with the former. *When Memory Dies* unravels the violence perpetrated on women who cross the line of respectability by marrying outside her own ethnic group, while inaugurating a debate on how desirable is women's active involvement in war. *Love Marriage* complicates the question even further by showing how women's unquestioning interpellation in ideologies of homogenous ethnic nationalism can be devastating to the nation itself – the larger family supposed to be imagined in syncretic terms. Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* in its delightful representation of Lalla, however, breaks several norms and registers through which Burgher women have been imagined so far; while reclaiming the morally degraded image of the Burgher woman, Ondaatje questions the various ideologies that seek to disempower women by taking away from her, her sexual agency. All these novels, while acknowledging the importance of the sustenance of the family or affective ties, also reveal the cultural politics of emotions that hold together kinship models. The family is both liberating and incarcerating for mothers, daughters and wives – while most of them try to preserve it, they also realise the political bindings of role-playing which are often overwritten with an emotional rhetoric.

Queer Sons and Daughters: The Family's 'Other'

We want to urge queering to extend itself beyond the "sexy streets" to the home and hearth.

----- Malone & Cleary³¹

Family, Sexual Minorities and Postcolonial Sri Lankan Society

Queerness is generally looked upon as anathema to the heteronormative family, the foundational unit of the State. Although queerness appears to be largely irreconcilable with the family, the affective ties that are formed within the family at times make way for the accommodation of queer sons and daughters, even if politics of 'othering' might continue to operate in myriad forms. The heterosexual family's normative pre-eminence is well-established, and any departure from it is looked upon with suspicion, so much so that 'each generation comes of age having internalized a heterosexist model of intimacy and personal relationships' (D'Emilio 109). Capitalist economy being the material base of its ideological evolution, the family is burdened with the responsibility of reproduction, and whoever violates the condition of reproduction is considered a threat against which the family must be defended:

It is this narrative of coupling as the condition of reproduction of life, culture and value that explains the slide in racist narratives (xenophobia), the fear of queers (homophobia) and the fear of miscegenation (as well as other illegitimate couplings). (Ahmed 144-145)

Non-reproductive sexualities have become a threat to the survival of the heteronormative family, a threat that needs to be eliminated: 'Thus, while capitalism has knocked the material foundation away from family life, lesbians, gay men and heterosexual feminists have become the scapegoats of the social instability of the system' (D'Emilio 109).

³¹ See, p. 275.

But, with the rise of the free market and increasing recognition of the queer as potential consumer, queerness has begun to find a greater acceptance within the capitalist economy. Simultaneously, in most developed countries, queer families are being legalised through state endorsement of same-sex marriage or civil union. But, queerness and capitalism, as D'Emilio argues have always shared an extremely ambiguous relationship: capitalism while promoting the heterosexual family, has also brought in its wake greater freedom in expressing and pursuing individual choices, including sexual choices. One way of reconciling queerness to the family is to recognise the consumerist potential of the queer and include them into the mainstream by promoting the queer family. As Eng (2007) writes:

If the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the significant emergence of gay identity and visibility as a function of the free market, along with the development of a political movement for rights and recognition (especially in relation to the AIDS pandemic), it also marked the simultaneous consolidation of Right-wing ideologies under the sign of “family” and “family values”. (40-41)

However, several radical queer theorists and activists are in favour of rejecting the family altogether. Judith Halberstam, for instance, advocates a complete dismissal of the family and calls for new modes of relating, belonging and caring:

The Oedipal frame is particularly damaging and inappropriate when applied to queer culture if only because it presumes a heteronormative frame (a frame in other words that sees older and younger people as parents and children only) for a community which is resolutely NOT structured by parent/child relations. (317)

Yet, many members of the queer community, in the countries where homosexuality has been decriminalised, are demanding access to the nuclear family for the associated rights and privileges it entails. This is not without reason. Halberstam herself quotes Duggan and Kim who uphold the importance of same-sex marriage and legal recognition of queer families:

The net-effect of the neo-liberal economic policies imposed in recent decades has been to push economic and social responsibility away from the employers and government and onto private households. The stress on households is intensifying [...] household stability becomes a life-and-death issue. On whom do we depend when we can't take care of ourselves? ... In more and more cases, the sole remaining resource is the cooperative, mutually supporting household or kinship network. (qtd. in Halberstam 316)

Therefore, homosexuality, which was once treated as ‘anathema to family and marriage’, in this ‘current political moment is being legally and ideologically reconciled to its normative mandates’ (Eng 2007: 41). By ‘current political moment’ Eng refers to a specific American

context; but, such a view is also applicable to current the Sri Lankan context as well, particularly after the liberalisation of the economy.

While in some parts of the world, debate rages over the fact whether assimilating queerness by promoting homonormative models of coupledness is at all desirable, in other parts, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are still persecuted by the state, tortured by family members and alienated by society. Hostility towards accepting same-sex relationships is most pronounced in the former colonies of Europe, where, despite rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, certain moral templates, largely shaped by colonial worldviews, have not changed or are changing very slowly. Sri Lanka is one such country, where LGBTIQ people still do not have any legal rights; let alone legal rights, they are under the constant vigilance of the state, which is still obdurately disinclined towards accepting any form of deviance from heterosexual templates of love, sex, romance and coupledness.

The South Asian LGBTIQ Movement and the Sri Lankan Nation-state

The LGBTIQ movement which has gained considerable momentum in the past one or two decades³² in the former European colonies in South Asia is primarily focused on decriminalization of homosexuality through a reading down or complete removal of a draconian colonial law that has been retained post-independence. An LGBTIQ activist and lawyer, Aditya Bondopadhyay writes:

With the exception of Nepal, which follows the civil law system adopted from the code of Napoleon, the legacy of criminalisation in South Asia is a consequence of the British enacted Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (Act XLV of 1860), which became the template for criminal law of the British Empire and thereafter was exported to all the countries of the British Empire. This changed the legal environment for most countries of South Asia as far as LGBT people were concerned, for it was the introduction by way of law of Judeo-Christian values, when none of the countries of South Asia had a history of criminalisation. What complicated matters was the mixing of religious values of the South Asian region with this imported value and even after the fall of the empire and after the British themselves had decriminalised sodomy in the 1960s, the active criminalisation continued in South Asia, justified in the name of local cultural values. (9-10)

But, homosocial bonding between men or between women is widespread and fully accepted in South Asia even today; in pre-colonial times the attitude towards homoerotic bonding was

³² It was in 1995 that Companions on a Journey, run by a group of gay men, was founded by Sherman De Rose. Four years later, a few queer women joined them, whereby Women's Support Group was formed. In 2004, Equal Ground, whose mandate extends to all LGBTIQ persons, came into existence. More recently, two more informal groups, DAST and Sakhi have been founded.

presumably more tolerant as evidenced by religious and literary texts, folklores, *ghazals*, erotic frescos and sculptures on temple walls and other forms of art.³³ Commensurate with the spirit of neo-liberalism, the LGBTIQ movement, drawing largely upon these ancient cultural evidences of more tolerant attitudes towards homoerotic bonding, has garnered political impetus in South Asia.³⁴ Homophobia is quite rampant though; in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the State still remains obstinately opposed to legalizing or for that matter even recognizing the existence of non-normative sexualities. India presents a unique case of first repealing the colonial law, the infamous Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, and again reinforcing it in December 2013, instigating strident protest from civilians across the country. Since then, the law has been reportedly misused to harass sexually non-conforming people, without much valid reason.

Narrain and Dutta, in ‘Male-to-Male Sex and Sexual Minorities in South Asia: an analysis of the politico-legal framework’, show how wider political factors (particularly when countries are troubled by civil war or are under military dictatorship) shrivel the space for the articulation of issues of sexual minorities. That is to say, democratic space along with conditions of peace creates a more favourable environment for the emergence of sexuality activism (19-20). This applies perfectly to the Sri Lankan situation. Vashist writes:

[T]here is the overwhelming context of the war that looms large over LGBT activists in Sri Lanka. Like most other activists, they live in constant fear of being branded as security threats to the current regime leading to intimidation and hurt to them and the groups they represent. Heightened surveillance and the presence of security personnel in everyday life make this work doubly hard. Further, much of the work on LGBT issues has happened almost entirely in Colombo or in and around in southern Sri Lanka where the Sinhala majority lives. It has been impossible to even the raise the question of sexuality in the war torn northern and eastern region of Tamil speaking Sri Lanka. There are barely any activists from within the Tamil communities who are out

³³ See Vanita and Kidwai’s *Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History*, first published in 2000, for a spectrum of texts spanning more than two thousand years of Indian literature. These texts, emerging from Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic cultures, evidence that same-sex love has always been there, and has been celebrated in various forms since prehistoric times. Also see Naphy’s *Born to be Gay: A History of Homosexuality* (2004) which traces in painstaking detail positive attitudes of bygone generations and cultures towards homosexuality, and pits such attitudes against homophobia which is a more recent phenomenon.

³⁴ However, Indian queer activist and writer R. Raj Rao holds a counter opinion in this matter. He believes because there is no ‘first-hand accounts by ordinary homosexuals and lesbians of the time’, it is not quite advisable to accept unquestioningly the evidences in available cultural texts regarding the tolerance towards deviant sexualities. It would be erroneous to hold imposition of Victorian moral templates on the colonies as the pioneering reason behind the ostracization of the queer (145). See, R. Raj Rao, “Dangling Men, Nowhere Women: The Identity Crisis of South Asian Queers”, in *In Diaspora: Theories, Histories, Texts*, ed. Makrand Paranjape (2001), 141-147. Actually, sexually deviant behaviour is still tolerated or overlooked in the most notorious of homophobic societies, as long as it is clandestine or invisible, and does not intimidate heteropatriarchal power structures by gaining political currency and demanding recognition.

as queer persons due to the enormous danger to their lives just by the fact of being Tamil, leave alone queer. (n. pag.)

Notably, among South Asian countries, Sri Lanka presents a special case: the colonial law (Section 365A of the Penal Code of 1883 No. 2, Cap. 19) that criminalizes homosexuality was amended to include lesbianism under the Penal Code (Amendment) Act No. 22 of 1995; on the other hand, the *hijras* and transpersons have no law protecting them. This is because, as Bondopadhyay notes, ‘Sri Lanka never had an established Hijra population and therefore the law there is blind to TG issues’ (9). This evidently points towards a bleak situation, as far as articulation of the issues of sexual minorities is concerned.

Colonial Morality, Postcolonial Sexual Anxieties

While LGBTIQ activism has begun acquiring political status, family and marriage have gained tremendous importance globally. As discussed in the Introduction, films, television serials, insurance companies, and audio-visual and billboard advertisements for consumer products, from soaps and air-conditioners to foreign holiday packages promote the monogamous, heteronormative family as given and incontrovertible. The monogamous family, composed of the holy trinity of man, woman, and child, however, as Vanita and Kidwai contend, is a rather recent phenomenon in the social history of South Asia, thanks to the inculcation of Victorian puritanical values with its deep anti-pleasure and anti-sex bias in the colonies, after the official inclusion of the Indian subcontinent into the British Empire in the second-half of the nineteenth century. Polyandry, polygamy and matriliney were rife in South Asia previously. Simpson writes:

Polyandry formerly existed in Sri Lanka under the Kandyan Law. Kandyan Law was the indigenous system of customary law that existed in the central regions of the island until this region came under the British colonial rule in 1815...It has been suggested that the resulting legal system was strongly influenced by the patriarchal ideology at the heart of the English and Roman-Dutch law. Thus, aspects of the Kandyan Law that allowed women particular marital rights and allowed for the recognition of multiple paternity were replaced by exclusive male power within the marriage and new definition of “legitimacy”...Although polygamy was outlawed by the British Government in 1859, the practice appears to have continued, albeit with lesser frequency for another hundred years among peasant cultivators in some parts of the Kandyan Highlands. (166)

Richard Gombrich in his much acclaimed book, *Theravāda Buddhism*, notes how the Dharmapāla inculcated into the middle classes of Colombo certain Protestant values,

underscored by his widely circulated Sinhala pamphlet under the title *Gihi Vinaya*, first published in 1898, running through 20 editions since then. This book also marks the Protestant revolution in Buddhism, as Gombrich terms it. In so doing, Gombrich notes:

Dharmapāla and the other early Protestant Buddhist lay leaders preached a sexual puritanism to such effect that not only has monogamy become the norm of the Sinhalese bourgeoisie³⁵; it is believed, quite incorrectly, to be the traditional norm. The bourgeoisie have adopted western Victorian morality, and the contemporary West is considered lax and corrupt in falling from that standard. (191)

Besides, conversion into Christianity was rampant; and if not direct conversion, the urban bourgeoisie, in particular, was significantly interpellated into Christian values and worldviews, owing to their access to western education through missionary schools which were set up across the country, the first of which was established as early as 1814.

Among the bourgeoisie, which Fanon refers to as the ‘neo-colonial class’ that has comfortably stepped into the shoes of the former colonizer, monogamous heterosexual marriage came to be idealized as ‘the only acceptable form of sexual coupling’ (Vanita and Kidwai 223). Currently, in the popular consciousness, the family is ‘the only form of social security and old-age insurance available to most people’ (Vanita and Kidwai 226). While the family’s function as an emotional asylum is irrefutable, it is equally indubitable that its overwhelming pre-eminence lies in the fact that its primary function is procreation and legitimate transmission and inheritance of property. In this sense, the family remains largely indispensable even to homosexually inclined people, and it is difficult to think beyond the family. It is, therefore, not hard to comprehend debates in favour of attributing legal sanction to same-sex marriage or to the homonormative family, notwithstanding the fact that a large number of LGBTIQ people remain implacably opposed to the idea of appropriating a heteronormative model of coupledness. Of all South Asian countries, it is only Nepal that has legalized same-sex marriage very recently. However, no such possibility seems available to the Sri Lankan queer³⁶ citizen, who is, practically non-existent in the national register.

³⁵ This is true of the Tamil bourgeoisie as well.

³⁶ In Sri Lanka, for LGBTIQ activists, Q stands for ‘Questioning’, and not ‘Queer’. However, they are not particularly reserved about using the term ‘queer’ as it is used globally. See the ‘About Us’ page of Equal Ground, a non-profit Sri Lankan organization fighting to obtain human and political rights for the LGBTIQ community: <<http://www.equal-ground.org/newweb/aboutUs.php>>.

One significant outcome of the economic liberalization in South Asia is that LGBTIQ activism and the sexual identity politics which had its origin in the west also travelled to South Asian countries, parallel to the accelerated pace of transactions of western-style production and consumerism.³⁷ Consequently, queer lives have become more visible, owing to the emergence of the LGBTIQ movement manifested most visibly in the annual Pride March, discussions about the rights of sexual minorities in both print and visual media and representation of sexually deviant people in popular culture. As Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV write in the Introduction to their edited volume, *Queer Globalizations* (2002), the increased circulation of images of queerness and commodities for queer consumers have been liberating to a certain extent, for it has remarkably facilitated a global coalition building, which in turn, has reinforced international recognition of queer rights. As writer Shyam Selvadurai in a personal interview (2014) with me, said:

[T]hings have changed here [Sri Lanka] ...There is much greater awareness much greater tolerance and acceptance in the wider progressive community. In *The Hungry Ghosts*, Shivan accurately notes that even within the human rights community he finds himself in, there is homophobia and silence around the issue. That was in 1989. Now those very people also take up the cause and champion change to the law and make sure they attend Pride events. Pride events here by the way have become very fashionable and popular and tons of people who are not queer turn up for the events. When I used to first go to talk to university students about *Funny Boy* I used to get a lot of challenging questions about the queer content. Now the students are never puzzled or intimidated or angered by it. I think they actually think it rather cool and pose questions in a way that shows they have an understanding of issues of queer identity. More and more, the gay and lesbian people I meet are out in safe circles and don't think there is anything wrong with them, but rather the fault lies with society and government.³⁸

The situation is perhaps not as copacetic as Selvadurai makes it sound. However, Selvadurai is quick to add:

³⁷ The economic liberalization has not benefitted everyone equally. While the consumerist elite, to use Spivak's term, has been the most willing beneficiary of the liberal economic policies, the rural bourgeoisie, which has consistently relied on the state for its sustenance and socio-economic advancement, has been adversely affected. Liberal economic policies have also resulted in greater unevenness in the distribution of income and opportunities, causing distress to many who have not at all benefitted by the changes. In Sri Lanka, therefore, the open economic policies, could not remedy the political instability. One significant outcome of this is that, as Hettige elaborates, '[T]he educated youths belonging to this social stratum [the rural bourgeoisie] have played and continue to play a significant part in post-independence politics, they are likely to resist developments that subordinate and marginalize them' (332). The LGBTIQ activism which is largely confined to the urban bourgeoisie class is therefore, likely, to face obstinate opposition.

³⁸ Personal interview with the author, via email, 2014.

What has become more troubling in recent years is the rise of Buddhist Fundamentalism. I think that the LGBT organizations here have recently in the last year faced a lot of pressure and problems.

It seems that the increasing visibility of the LGBTIQ movement has been both liberating and incarcerating for the queer Sri Lankan citizen: on the one hand, LGBTIQ activist groups, insistently fighting for equal rights, have opened up the public domain for articulation of different sexual desires and identities, thereby abetting urban queer people to 'come out'. But the 'coming out' is not easy for those who are located outside the metropolis. In an interview, the founder member of the Sri Lankan LGBTIQ support groups such as Women's Support Group and Equal Ground, Rosanna Flamer-Caldera said:

'[U]rban areas tend to have more out and open LGBTIQ persons whilst the rural areas tend to have a more hidden population of LGBTIQ. And again of this variation, lesbian and bisexual women and FTM transmen are more invisible than gay and bisexual men and MTF transwomen in both settings.'³⁹

On the other hand, homosexuality, often regarded as a western import⁴⁰, is being disparaged even more acerbically, as evidenced by the inclusion of lesbianism as criminal offence in the Sri Lankan Penal Code, and the opposition against legalisation of homosexuality led by Buddhist fundamentalists. Again, as Spurlin, analyzing the disadvantages of adopting a Euro-American queer identity politics, observes:

By remaining otherwise narrowly Eurocentric in perspective, the discipline helps to underwrite nationalist strategies at work in many colonial and postcolonial contexts that read homosexuality as foreign to non-Western societies. (186)

Understandably, therefore, the increasing visibility of LGBTIQ people has brought them under the policing gaze of the state; and the untiring attempts of the movement to sensitize the government and the people to LGBTIQ issues has led to, what Foucault describes as:

...the constitution of the [non-heteronormative] individual as a describable, analyzable object...in order to maintain him in his individual features, in his

³⁹ See, Flamer-Caldera, Interview, *The Orinam Blog*.

⁴⁰ Vanita and Kidwai write: 'Arabs argue that Persians introduced the vice and Persians blame Christian monks...many believe that the idea and practice of same-sex love were imported into India by "foreigners"-Muslim invaders, European conquerors or American capitalists' (xxiii). This blame game on homosexuality is played in all South Asian countries, not just in India. When Flamer-Caldera was asked whether they face any religious opposition to gay rights, she replied: 'The Nationalistic Sinhala Buddhist movement thinks that homosexuality is a product of the West. So, no matter how hard you try and prove to them that homosexuality is natural and indigenous, they will think and act according to their will.' See Flamer-Caldera, Interview by Udayan.

particular evolution, in his own aptitudes and abilities, under the gaze of a permanent corpus of knowledge. (1975: 190)

The creation of this ‘corpus of knowledge’ has rendered the queer individual disruptive, therefore, necessarily eliminable in the eyes of the state. This is a major reason behind amending and reinforcing Article 356A of the Sri Lankan Penal Code in 1995.

The reinforcement of this penal code can be further elucidated by the fact that decolonization and globalization have had contradictory impact on the assertion of individual rights; while postcolonial cultures seek to build nations to avow their newly won sovereignty, globalization renders the nation-state increasingly irrelevant. Therefore, nation-states resist dominant globalizing powers, and in doing so, end up suppressing internal differences. Sexual dissidence, in particular, is remarkably disruptive to such nation-building cultures with pathological homogenizing tendencies. Consequently, the sexual ‘Other’ is discriminated against and given the status of social outlaw, as it has happened in Sri Lanka. As Hardt and Negri observe, ‘...the nation-state is a machine that produces Others, creates racial difference and raises boundaries that delimit and support the modern subject of sovereignty’ (114).

In an ethnographic research (2010-2012) conducted by Women’s Support Group, a Colombo-based non-governmental organisation, the plight of Sri Lankan lesbian and bisexual women and transgender people became apparent in the personal stories they share. The two key inferences that were drawn from this research are: most queer people are subject to emotional violence, “non-verbalized/silent contempt, invisibilization, emotional manipulation, gender norm enforcement, religious condemnation, invasion of privacy, restrictions on socialization, neglect, severing of relationships between family and friends and controlling behaviour” (8). Second, in most cases, family members have been identified as perpetrators of emotional violence. (8) Outside the home, queer men and women are constantly under the controlling gaze of the State. The country’s police force, armed with Article 365A, is almost always severe on anyone who displays visible signs of sexual dissidence in public. (24) Besides that, the interviewees reported facing other forms of harassment from state service providers:

Some of the violence took the form of being forcibly taken to religious institutions, hospitals, medical services, and mental health services to “be cured,” often accompanied by a parent. One interviewee even stated that her partner’s family had used electro-shock therapy on her partner in order to “cure” her. (25)

Same-sex coupledness is either unrecognised or fiercely discouraged as evidenced by the experiences of several interviewees who revealed the impossibility of securing state services such as pension schemes and bank loans on the basis of a shared income with their same-sex partner. (24) As the ethnographic research reveals, LGBT people live a rather ‘precarious life’ on the fringes. To quote Judith Butler:

The performativity of gender has everything to do with who counts as a life, who can be read or understood as a living being, and who lives, or tries to live, on the far side of established modes of intelligibility. (iv)

As acknowledged by queer theorists and activists across the globe, the most obvious reason for not accepting gay and lesbian lives is that they considerably destabilize the family, the basic social unit on which the nation-state is founded, a theory which is faithfully practiced by the Sri Lankan state: ‘[G]ay and lesbian life emerges as a symptom of the household’s decline as an economic center, and as a lever to undermine its fading hegemony’ (Freeman 296).

In Sri Lanka, it is extremely difficult for a queer individual to resolve the paradox: while they desire the family, they know they will remain perpetually outside it, living ‘on the far side of established modes of intelligibility’. Yet, the family cannot be abandoned. Resolution of family feuds, recognition of differences within the sameness of the family, and buttressing the cohesive force of family ties are important in a nation-state ravaged by opposing, but nonetheless, equally jingoistic and territorialist ethnonationalist ideologies that refuse to acknowledge heterogeneity. Sankaran Krishna analysing the question of nation-building in postcolonial India and Sri Lanka observes:

[W]hat is striking about various ethnonationalist movements in South Asia is that they replicate the homogenizing logic of the nation-state to the point where, far from being progressive alternatives to the nation, they constitute its reduction ad absurdum. (221-222)

This homogenizing tendency, as we have already discussed, delegitimizes the sexual minority, in a hysterical pursuit to ‘even out’ differences. Interpersonal relationships and kinship ties are the only asylum available to such an individual who is legally non-existent in the national register or is oppressed by the nation-state; this is because, the family, as a social

unit, while replicating the coercive force of the nation-state⁴¹ might also resist its exclusionary tendencies, for blood-ties and emotional bonds are, if not always, but often, hard to cede. What becomes evident in this discussion is that, for the Sri Lankan queer subject migrating to a more queer-positive nation is more desirable, for it seems to promise freedom from the repressive and ideological state apparatuses of the nation and the family. Yet, experiences as charted by the fictional narratives I propose to look into, do not really celebrate queerness in diaspora as an ideal way of being. However, before going into the diasporic realities, I would like to turn my focus on an important aspect of queer lives in Sri Lanka at present.

On the fringes: Precarious queer lives, state hypocrisy and an emerging middle to upper class queer literary (counter)culture in contemporary Sri Lanka⁴²

A quick survey of tourism sites providing trip advices to Sri Lanka would reveal that one of the primary attractions or detractions of Sri Lankan beaches are ‘beach boys’. There are two contradictory approaches to the ‘beach boys’ – exoticisation of their beauty or disparagement of their many tactics of extracting money from unsuspecting foreigners. Sometimes, there is a cautionary note of how foreigners often exploit young Sri Lankan boys by filming pornographic videos with them, against the payment of a small amount. These beach boys, as Butler would say, have a remarkably ‘precarious’ life on the edges of society. In 1994, the *Independent* came up with a shocking article about German visitors forcing two very young boys, 11 and 14 years of age, into shooting pornographic videos, when child rights activist Maureen Seneviratne confronted them. The *Independent* put the incident in a global perspective:

One United States study estimated that more than 250 million copies of videos on child pornography are circulating world-wide, and most were filmed in the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka. One raid, on a home in a Stockholm suburb in July 1992, yielded stacks of letters between paedophiles sharing descriptions of children's bodies and sex organs. Found in the haul were 300 hours of child pornography videos, mostly filmed in Sri Lanka with titles such as Boy Love in Negombo and Hikkaduwa - the Child Sex Paradise. (1994: n.pag)

⁴¹ Louis Althusser shows how the family acts as one of the strongest ideological state apparatuses in all societies.

⁴² I have deliberately refrained from talking about other forms of art – such as theatre and cinema – and their association with queer countercultures.

The article went deeper into the issue revealing that Sri Lanka was becoming the go-to site for paedophiles, because the children and their parents, owing to their financial crisis, willingly gave in: 'Even more shocking is that some Sri Lankan parents condone it and rent out rooms in their shacks where their children satisfy the paedophile' (1994: n. pag). Because no consciousness of safe sex or sexual hygiene exists among these children, child rights activist Seneviratne told *The Independent*, that the children often end up contracting incurable sexually transmitted diseases, not to mention the trauma many suffer from on being sexually abused. Criminologist Jody Miller's work (2002) on Sri Lanka is the most frequently cited research on sex trade involving underage boys, along with women. Miller advocates strict measures for putting a stop to this malpractice, though she also acknowledges that this flourishing sexual network cannot always be read in terms of more powerful and moneyed foreigners exploiting unsuspecting young men and women. Those who are usually perceived as victims of sex trade often entice visitors into having sex with them against money.

While child rights activism and other forms of social resistance to prostitution call for rigorous laws to stop exploitation of children by foreign visitors, 'beach boys' and male prostitution have become a reality, which could no longer be denied. Oftentimes, the boys are young adults and enter the trade willingly, and it is common sight on the beaches of foreigners, white or non-white, negotiating prices with them. Not only men, these boys also have a potential female clientele, as one report in the *South Asian Magazine for Action and Reflection* states:

In general the male prostitutes are aware of the short term nature of the relationship and try to make the most money during that time. Some have succeeded in striking longer liaisons with the much awaited foreign trip at the end. Many young males have been taken along by older women, some have got married to the women and others return after long sojourns. The homosexual partnerships operate in much the same manner. The difference may be that they seem to be relatively longer-lasting relationships. (Samasuriya n. d: n.pag)

But, these 'beach boys', no matter how much they are moralised against or sympathised with for having to trade their bodies in order to fight abject poverty, are disruptive to the Sri Lankan Puritanism associated with sex and sexuality. While male-to-male sex is a criminal act in Sri Lanka, this very criminal act is performed in broad day light, and is a proverbial 'open secret', which is usually ignored by the state. Although 'beach boys' are looked down

upon and the practice is condemned by social activists, the economic currency of these boys, actually, indirectly, facilitate the tourism industry in Sri Lanka to flourish. The website lankalove.com enlists a host of young boys, advertising themselves as good masseurs or 'long term boy', mostly targeting foreign visitors, while also providing an online cruising site for local queer men. A visit to the site reveals its connection with the tourism industry attracting foreign, especially Euro-American, travellers. As Samasuriya rightly observes:

Macro evaluations of tourism usually stress the economic gains it has brought the country, leaving out the social and cultural effects of disruption to value systems and life patterns. Socially, the problems posed by tourism are complex. In Sri Lanka, tourist resorts have come up in areas where people have been living in poverty. Luxury hotels are suddenly opened in front of their eyes with consumer articles never before seen by them. They see people sunbathing or strolling in the shopping areas, buying expensive trinkets. It is natural therefore that they are tempted to take part in it and make some money out of it. They are also aware that employment opportunities through official channels are limited and have to seek other illegal and demeaning means to profit from the industry. The fact that female and male prostitution is increasing and children are being pushed into sexual slavery proves that other means of livelihood within the tourist industry are unavailable to them or are not as profitable. (n.pag)

Whatever maybe the undeniable contribution of these 'beach boys' to the sustenance of the tourism industry, culturally they challenge the sacrosanct notions of compulsory heterosexuality. In Gayle Rubin's (1984) sexual hierarchy (as elaborated in the Introduction), these 'beach boys', occupy the lowest rung, beyond the reaches of social sympathy and acceptance. All of them may not be necessarily 'gay' as the West understands the term; but, the very fact that they 'please' male clients, by default, situates them within queer cultures of the island.

In fact, the 'beach boys', as they are widely known today in tourism industry parlance, are not new in business. Although Samasuriya and others feel that the proliferation of prostitution is a consequence of the opening of the market and Sri Lanka becoming the centre of tourist attraction in South Asia, Sri Lankan 'beach boys' had always been a major reason for European travellers to visit and spend time on the island. During the colonial period, as

Robert Aldrich (2014) claims, homoerotic relationship between local Ceylonese boys and white travellers was rather commonplace:

Some men who visited or sojourned in Ceylon felt more evident erotic and emotional attractions to other men. Those who were inclined could find partners, young fellows whom we would now term ‘men who have sex with men’, and who might have erotic relationships with other Ceylonese as well. They might become houseboys, gardeners, studio assistants or live- in mates for Europeans; they provided sex, affection and companionship, and an introduction to the cultures and daily life of the island. Not all of these relationships were lasting or meaningful, but they could be mutually enriching. (2)

Aldrich, while delineating these relationships, also points out how these involved money and power, no matter, how emotional some turned out to be – ‘Relationships were not difficult to contract, with poverty on one side, money and power on the other, but other things came into play as well’ (1). Therefore, the phenomenon which has now come under serious public scrutiny is not new. Aldrich also devotes a considerable number of pages on the contemporary ‘beach boys’, showing how they are important links in the tourism network of the country (192-196). Aldrich’s meticulous archival research reveals several European travellers who had had long lasting homoerotic relationships or brief sexual flings on the island. He names English authors such as Edward Carpenter and G. F. Green who found the island fascinating in terms of male beauty. While Carpenter’s friendship with the influential political figure Poonambalam Arunachalam became the subject of Selvadurai’s second novel *Cinnamon Gardens*, Green’s coming of age novel, *In the Making*, narrating a school boy’s gradual awakening to his sexual differences, seems to be one of the pre-texts to Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* (See Bakshi 2015). The French novelist, Marie-Noelle Seignolles’ *Beach Boy: illusion tropicale* (2006) realistically depicts the relationships foreign men developed with poor local boys on the beach, and the series of emotional entanglement such liaisons produced. Selvadurai touches upon the subject of male prostitution in both *Funny Boy* and *The Hungry Ghosts*. In the chapter, ‘Small Choices’ in *Funny Boy*, while on a visit to their beach hotel, Arjie and Jegan notice how foreigners exploit poor boys, but, it is barely ever intervened upon by the authorities. There is a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ kind of silence surrounding such activities on the beach, and the hoteliers, of which Arjie’s father is one, are blissfully nonchalant about it. The boys, as one could understand, add to the business of the

hotels, indirectly. In *The Hungry Ghosts*, the network is shown more explicitly, when Shivan and his boyfriend Mili begin to visit one of the houses on the beach which secretly runs a gay resort of sorts. Shivan, in order to find access to the resort, has to switch to English and produce his Canadian citizen card. On entering it, Mili exclaims – “Yes, a bloody whorehouse” (HG 221). The two Selvadurai novels, which I am going to analyse in detail below, pit this homoerotic sex trade against the struggles a Sri Lankan citizen have to brave in order to find acceptance in society. It is a paradox – the morality associated with flesh trade and the necessity to accept homosexuality – which appears almost impossible to resolve. In Rubin’s hierarchy Shivan and Mili – two gay men in a monogamous relationship – would occupy a more respectable rung compared to those involved in commercial sex. The disparagement for the latter is unambiguously evident in Mili’s voice when he sees the resort as a horrible whorehouse. These two rungs could never come under the same canopy, if not through the social necessity to prevent AIDS. While homosexuality and prostitution come together in the figure of the much vilified beach boy, it is also noteworthy that the State barely interferes in the trade in order not to negatively affect their flourishing tourism industry. While there is endless moralising against the annual Pride March, as discussed in the introduction, this sex trade, involving older foreign men and younger Sri Lankan boys, is carried out under every civilian’s gaze. As long as one has an identifiable commercial ‘value’, his gayness, it seems, is fine by the State.

Talking of commercial value, one may also read emergence of queer novels in Sri Lanka during the last two decades, as a consequence of the capitalist market’s identification of the queer consumer and the power of, what is known as, ‘pink money’ – more precisely, Pink Pound in the United Kingdom and Dorothy Dollar in the United States. Sri Lanka does not have an equivalent term, but, the buying power of gay men and lesbian women, especially without family and having considerable disposable income, has been recognised. It is not difficult to see why so many queer novels (as part of queer countercultures) got published in the last two decades – they certainly underline the need for such narratives in the public sphere, when the consumerist power of queer individuals was identified as a guaranteed resource in the sustenance of capitalist economy. Queer texts, although mostly produced within the diaspora, also have local counterparts – for example, *The Limits of Love* (2005) by Rajiva Wijesinha, a Oxford educated member of the Sri Lankan parliament, and *Bevis Bawa’s Brief* (2011) by the well-known architect. The first is a biographical novel on the life of Richard de Zoysa, a well known political figure with a flamboyant queer life, and the

second is an autobiographical account which reveals many unsettling details about the author's personal life. Wijesinha, a close friend of de Zoysa, hints at this sexuality and his many relations as one of the reasons behind his sudden murder. Two other novels which I would mention are Visakesa Chandrasekaram's *Tigers Don't Confess* (2011) and Channa Wickremesekera's *Walls: A Novel about a Sri Lanka Family in Australia*, none of which are, however, easily available in the global market. *Walls*, much in the lines of Chandani Lokugé's *If the Moon Smiled* dramatises life in the diaspora and traditional Sri Lankan parents' consternation regarding their daughter's sexuality; but *Tigers Don't Confess* boldly addresses hidden sexual lives of Tigers – the relationship between two men, Kumaran and Naveen, the former being actively involved in the Tamil struggle for Eelam. Apart from these novels, *Rainbow News*, published regularly by the Equal Ground since 2006, has often published several short stories based on queer love. All the writers, as mentioned earlier also, belong to a privileged class, are English educated and have a consumerist capital, mostly unavailable to the larger masses of the island. Local narratives in the vernaculars are yet to find a global market. The novels I deal with in this chapter are produced within the Sri Lankan diaspora, and have as their protagonist middle to upper class Sri Lankan men and women.

The Queer as Diasporic or the Queer Diaspora

I'm a mixed brown girl, Sri Lankan and New England mill-town white trash, who grew up alone and starving hungry for a sane home. I grew up with my dad being the only Sri Lankan in Worcester, Massachusetts...I grew up with my white mama who called him, laughing, her "houseboy", and told me to not repeat her mistake and marry anyone dumber than me, while she ripped my hair straight and bloody scalped. I was a brown kinky-headed full-lipped girl in apartheid Massachusetts...with browning colonial family photos locked up in trunks, simmering electric heat lightening silences exploding whenever I asked the obvious questions. I wanted to run away. Revolutionary change happens through laws and guns, tear gas and tablas, but it also comes through the families and communities we build to replace the dead life we want to flee. (Piepzna-Samarasinha 4-5)

The Sri Lankan queer poet, teacher and cultural worker, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, currently based in Toronto, encapsulates the perennial discontents of the queer diaspora in an explosive article, 'browngirlworld: queergirlworld organizing, sistahood, heartbreak' in *Colonize This: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism* (2002), an edited volume

by Daisy Hernández and Bushra Rehman. On the one hand, while it is impossible to totally abandon the biological family, on the other, alternative families and communities formed on the basis of sexuality, within a diasporic space, cannot be as liberating as it is imagined to be. As Piepzna-Samarasinha rues: ‘No more Queer Nation, those whips and chains are a white thing’ (5)

The insertion of queer subjects and desires within the diasporic experience problematises the very concept of the nation-state which is in any case under constant threat due to random transnational movements. Recent scholarships identify the diasporic queer as an exemplary subject of globalization: queerness, as observed by many (Eng and Hom, 1998; Muñoz, 1999; Patton and Sánchez-Eppler, 2000), harbours in it the potential to collapse national coherence itself, by challenging the nation’s ideas of legitimate registers of belonging, coupledness, copulation and family. The term “sexile”, for example, made fashionable by Manolo Guzmán (1997), is now used as a descriptive term for those who have been forced to leave their homeland on account of their non-normative sexual choices. The sexile, who is now outside the purviews of the demands of nationalism, duties, and conformation to certain enforced gender roles, as Guzmán argues, is paradoxically *liberated* into the transnational space. Sanchez –Eppler and Patton in *Queer Diasporas* furthers this argument by identifying the queer diasporic subject as the paradigmatic body of a mobile, transitory postmodernity. They define the queer as a particularly peripatetic mode of sexuality, a ‘mobility of sexuality across the globe and body’ (2000: 3), challenging both the repertoire of localized categories of desire and the stability of national identity itself. Most of these theorists recognise migration as liberating, the state of being in diaspora as analogous to being queer. As the American-Italian lesbian author Mary Cappello (1998) suggests that the diasporic home is always already queer, given that it’s located somewhere in-between, between ‘here’ and ‘there’. Meg Wesling (2008), summarising this line of argument, observes:

[Q]ueerness constitutes a mobile resistance to the boundaries and limits imposed by gender, and that resistance *is the same as* the migrant’s movement through national and cultural borders. Put simply, the analogy is this: queerness disrupts gender normativity like globalization disrupts national sovereignty. (N.pag.)

Shyam Selvadurai, for instance, celebrates his hyphenated identity as the Sri Lankan Canadian: ‘My creativity comes not from “Sri Lankan” or “Canadian” but from the space in between, that marvelous open space represented by the hyphen’ (2005: 1). But he is also plagued by his ‘day-to-day interactions with the world outside’, which, makes him aware of

‘the occasional danger of this visible otherness’ (2005: 2). However, Wesling goes on to point out that the projection of queerness as its own diasporic category

...misses the ways in which queer desire is necessarily constituted in relation to such categories and can offer us no assurance of their disruption. The point is not to deny the power of mobility as a condition of modern existence, but to resist its epistemological centrality in contemporary scholarship and, in so doing, mark the specificity of forms of rootedness and movement as coincidental, not oppositional categories (N. pag.)

The inclination to link the queer to the diasporic as exchangeable categories risks the engendering of binary oppositions such as global/local or the transnational queer/localised queer. What is inevitably elided in this unproblematic analogy is the inescapable presence of the national *within* the transnational; in other words, it is impossible to transcend the national through geographical relocation. In addition to that for the queer individual, the desire for home and family, coloured by profound nostalgia, is sometimes difficult to cede. As David L Eng writes: ‘[D]espite frequent and trenchant queer dismissals of home and its discontents, it would be a mistake to underestimate enduring queer affiliations to this concept’ (1997: 32). Alan Sinfield’s call to abandon the heterosexual home/family in search of an alternative kinship model, which he identifies as “the culture of the minority community” (103), may not entail an emotional movement away from home/family. In fact, the Sri Lankan novels which I would be examining in the subsequent sections, the queer individual is faced with other challenges in order to be sheltered in the new “home” or a queer “subculture” (or “counterculture”) as Sinfield calls it; and in most cases, reconciliation is achieved through a journey backwards, in resuscitating broken bonds with the biological family and the home left behind. In these family narratives, assertion of one’s queerness and freeing oneself from an always already heteronormative site of the home and the family, do not inevitably mean abandoning the latter for alternative arrangements.

In several instances, the pre-eminently heteronormative sites are interpolated with queerness. The home and the family are not always localised in a given geographical territory, but rather scattered across the globe. For the Sri Lankan queer individual, the challenge is not to move away from the home and the family, but to discover a way to return to it without sacrificing one’s queerness. The Sri Lankan novels, as we shall see, are mostly informed by ‘homing

desires', to use Brah's famous term. It's not just about literally moving away from the childhood home, or the home of origin, but also, as Fortier notes:

'[H]oming desire' is not only about leaving the ordinary home behind, fixing it into a distant past, and seeking hominess elsewhere. It can also be part of returning 'home' to re-member it differently ... Re-membering the childhood home at once empties it of any definitional and absolute status; it is a space of belonging that proceeds from remembrances of beginnings that attach 'home' to places (the hometown in Scotland; the house, garden and neighbourhood in Philadelphia), faces and bodies (the mother in the Isle of Man; the other outsiders in a Scottish town), and emotions (feeling at home in a network of dispersed friends; feeling the loneliness and fear of the immigrant). (10)

Although Fortier is looking at immigrants moving from one western city to another in search of more queer-positive spaces, her argument is applicable in case of South Asian immigrants as well. Fortier further observes how queer migrations always betray 'desires to feel at home achieved by physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the context of migration' (1).

The State versus Queer Radicalism in the Diaspora

The host country's queer-positivity does not always guarantee complete freedom. Queer radicalism is barely supported by the state, be it the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada or Australia. Despite a strident counter-discourse promoting queer politics as anti-family, irreconcilable with any form of normativity, most of these countries, which apparently seem to provide an environment favourable for queer desires to thrive, uphold an aggressive homonormativity as the only possible way in which queerness might be assimilated into the mainstream. British Prime Minister, David Cameron's reason for endorsement of gay marriage encapsulates the raging debate on whether gay marriage is at all desirable, or whether that is something differently oriented people want. At the Tory party conference in October 2011, Cameron perhaps made the most 'conservative' case about gay marriage:

"Conservatives believe in the ties that bind us; that society is strong when we make vows to each other... So I don't support gay marriage in spite of being a Conservative. I support it because I am a Conservative." (qtd. in Morgan, n. pag.)

The then Cultural Minister Maria Miller seemed to shore up the necessity of reviving marriage as the only binding force that could keep society together, by supporting gay marriage:

“What marriage offers us is a lifelong partner to share our journey, a loving, stable relationship to strengthen us and a mutual support throughout our lives. I believe this is something that should be embraced by more couples.” (qtd. in Morgan, n. pag.)

Both Cameron and Miller echo Sullivan who believes:

It’s perfectly possible to combine a celebration of the traditional family with the celebration of a stable homosexual relationship. The one, after all, is modelled on the other. If constructed carefully as a conservative social ideology, the notion of stable gay relationships might even serve to buttress the ethic of heterosexual marriage. (112)

In the United States too, the recent Supreme Court ruling (June 2015), that legalised same-sex marriage across the country, was coated in the more or less same rhetoric. Justice Anthony Kennedy who authored the majority’s opinion on legalising same-sex marriage wrote:

No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. ... [The challengers] ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right [...] The limitation of marriage to opposite-sex couples may long have seemed natural and just, but its inconsistency with the central meaning of the fundamental right to marry is now manifest. (qtd. in Imbert 2015: n. pag)

Reacting to such blatant celebration of marriage as the only desirable form of life, the radical queer activist, Jordan Alexander Stein (2015) rued:

I have always wanted to live in a world that’s committed to queer people’s thriving, and today’s Supreme Court decision almost certainly will help. And that is wonderful. But it’s not without ambivalence. The thriving I’m imagining for the future isn’t the same thriving we imagined when we were young. There is no Revolution. Property and identity aren’t abolished. The institution of marriage looks, to paraphrase Justice Kennedy, strengthened. Our love is recognized legally, but in that sense we love with more rules, not fewer. (n.pag)

Eight years back, David L Eng (2007), analysing the world-historical shift from industrialism to late capitalism vis-à-vis queer identities in the United States, noted:

[Q]ueer family and kinship increasingly emerge as an *affective* social unit, now absorbed into what Lauren Berlant, analyzing the conservative regulation and privatization of family, heterosexuality, and good citizenship during the

Reagan/Thatcher era, has called the “intimate public sphere”. The practice of transnational adoption – the affective labor provided by the transnational adoptee to shore up the idealized boundaries of white middle class nuclear families (straight or gay) in the global North – might be considered one particular example of this contemporary phenomenon. (emphasis in the original; 43)

Jasbir K Puar, in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, corroborates Eng:

...homosexual sexual exceptionalism does not necessarily contradict or undermine heterosexual sexual exceptionalism; in actuality it may support forms of heteronormativity and the class, racial, and citizenship privileges they require. The historical and contemporaneous production of an emergent normativity, homonormativity, ties the recognition of homosexual subjects, both legally and representationally, to the national and transnational political agendas of U.S. imperialism. Homonormativity can be read as a formation complicit with and invited into the biopolitical valorization of life in its inhabitation and reproduction of heteronormative forms. One prime mechanism of sexual exceptionalism is mobilized by discourses of sexual repression – a contemporary version of Foucault’s repressive hypothesis – that are generative of bio- and geopolitical global mapping of sexual cultural norms. (9)

This perspective on queer rights is not just specific to American citizens. It is applicable to all ‘first world’ countries, which are taking the apparently progressive step of legalising same-sex marriage. The problem is such hegemonic (and populist) discourses of homonormativity which undermine queer radicalism, constrict the social space available to the single queer person and those who are unwilling to marry. While many sexually non-conforming individuals happily embrace homonormativity, especially with the motive of enjoying state benefits extended to families, or because of emotional reasons, many find it incarcerating.

The diasporic lesbian woman of colour, compared to her male counterpart, faces larger difficulties in ‘letting herself in’. Notably the social, cultural, political discourses on equal rights for sexually deviant individuals are dominated by the queer male, replicating the same power structures of hetero-patriarchy that often look through queer women. It’s undeniable that the diasporic lesbian encounters a greater resistance compared to her male counterparts. Gayatri Gopinath (1997, 2007) observes that gay male and liberal feminist frameworks may be complicit with dominant nationalist and diasporic discourses in eliding queer female diasporic subjectivity. Given that the ‘woman’ is looked upon as a repository of nationalist culture and of moral values of the nation left behind, the lesbian is looked upon as her binary

opposite, signifying everything the ‘woman’ *does not* within nationalist and hetero-patriarchal discourses. Gopinath writes:

Indeed the “lesbian” is seen as “foreign”; as a product of being too long in the West, and therefore is annexed to the “host” nation where she may be further elided – particularly if undocumented – as a nonwhite immigrant within both a mainstream (white) lesbian and gay movement and the larger body of the nation-state. (2007: 19)

In this sense, Sri Lankan queer citizen’s migration to a queer-positive nation might appear emancipating, but, the new home might not be exactly as liberating as imagined from a distance. Rani Kawale, in an ethnographic research carried out in London (1999-2000), arrives at the conclusion that most South Asian lesbian women are not allowed access within white lesbian and bisexual women’s community, for they are not even perceived as lesbians in the first place:

White women often stereotype South Asian women according to stereotypical notions of traditional Asian family life, and therefore regard them as being unable to construct lesbian or bisexual identities or lifestyles in the same ways as white lesbians. (185)

Queer liberalism is made available through the adoption of certain alternative normativities. As one of Kawale’s South Asian interviewees tell her: “. . . white women . . . don’t believe that I’m a lesbian because they identify ‘lesbian’ as being white . . . especially if they’ve got long hair they don’t believe they can be lesbian . . .” (185). Expression of one’s sexuality in queer-positive spaces in the ‘first world’ countries is often faced with obstinate racial prejudices, which pre-empt any possibility of community formation or one-on-one bonding based on similar sexual choices or practices. A good example could be Shivan in Selvadurai’s *The Hungry Ghosts*. In Canada, despite the fact that he does not have to repress his queerness and pretend to act straight, Shivan feels rather alienated at gay clubs, where people treat him as an outsider:

The very intimacy of the gathering, the fact that we were supposed to share our lives, only made me feel more lonely (*sic*). These men knew nothing of Sri Lanka, and their earnest interjections of “cool” and “neat” when I found myself having to explain the world I had come from grew tedious and produced a bleakness in me. (HG 107)

Shivan also discovers that there are certain body types that are fetishised within the community, for example the black man. Dating is forbidden in the group he joins; yet, he

finds that sex appeal plays an important role in getting assimilated: ‘The black man had slipped through the *tight fence* into the world of the charmed and the happy. I did not know what he had I lacked...’ (HG 107; emphasis added). A comparatively average looking Shivan is further pushed to the periphery within the community which, as his first queer acquaintance in Canada, Ronald describes as “cruisey” – ‘a word he explained meant men constantly searching for sex with other men’ (HG 101). In this ‘meat market’, as Shivan terms it, he is ‘not prime steak’. Although his ‘foreignness’ is often his appeal, with older white gay men ascribing a ‘feral sexuality’ to him (HG 106), Shivan continues to feel alienated, sensing an invisible fence keeping him out from the ‘mainstream’ of the queer community. Shivan realises that the South Asian queer migrant finds himself constricted within several hegemonic power structures, which are hard to negotiate with. Besides, in the majority of cases, for the queer migrants, the symbolic re-territorialisation of the homeland in the host country often turns out to be an impediment impossible to overcome. Therefore, migration to apparently queer-positive places is not all about unconditional emancipation; other kinds of unforeseen walls are erected constantly at every step.

In the case of Sri Lanka, migration has been mostly instigated by ethnic riots. However, in a recent “Situation Analysis” entitled *Strengthening of Legal Protection for LGBT in Sri Lanka: Road to Decriminalization*, by Priya Thangaraja (2013), it is revealed that several Sri Lankan gay men have fled the country to seek asylum in the UK, USA and Canada. Although there has not been any proven case of persecution in case of any of these gay men, two Muslim men from East of Sri Lanka have reportedly migrated elsewhere after they were abducted, tortured and had a Fatwa placed on their lives. As pointed out earlier, in Sri Lanka queer people need to deal with insurmountable hostility and constantly live in the fear of being persecuted. But the situation is not as unfavourable as it is in Iran or Nigeria, where anti-queer persecution is notoriously public, carried out in broad daylight so that everyone, who is non-conforming as regards to their sexuality, can learn a lesson. However, that is certainly no consolation. For instance, as Sherman de Rose, founder of ‘Companions on a Journey’, suggests that levels of suicide among LGBT people in Sri Lanka are alarmingly high, because they have literally ‘no support from their families, from their community and from the state’ (1995: n. pag). For the Sri Lankan queer citizen, although the persecution is more muted, it is extremely difficult to survive. While LGBTQ politics in Sri Lanka harp on a comparatively more tolerant attitude towards same-sex bonding in pre-colonial times, and cite names of several European queer men who travelled all the way to the little island in

search of love, questions are also asked about this paradisiacal projection of queer lives in the “pre-lapsarian” era of colonial laws that arrived to mark the fall. Even if we assume that the queer enjoyed an Edenic bliss in such times, the question, we may ask now, is it at all possible to regain the lost paradise? In this chapter I would examine five novels (set in Sri Lanka or in the West) by expatriate authors, which seem to provide interesting insights into the question raised. It’s worth noting here that three of these novels, *Funny Boy*, *Cinnamon Gardens*, and *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*, mostly set in Sri Lanka, do not deal with the queer diaspora per se. But, in these novels the queer, to reiterate what I have already stated at the beginning of this section, is its own diasporic category, not in a celebratory sense, but in the sense Sara Ahmed sees it:

...one’s body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled...the sense of out-of-place-ness and estrangement involves an acute awareness of the surface of one’s body, which appears *as* surface, when cannot inhabit the social skin, which is shaped by some bodies, not others. Furthermore, queer subjects might also be ‘asked’ not to make heterosexuals feel uncomfortable by avoiding the display of signs of queer intimacy, which is itself an uncomfortable feeling, a restriction on what one can do with one’s body, and another’s body in social space. (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 148; emphasis in the original)

***Cinnamon Gardens*: Homosexuality and the Empire**

I would start with Shyam Selvadurai’s second novel, *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998), for this novel, set within an emergent metropolitan culture of upper class Colombo during the late colonial period, is an interesting documentation of how colonial discourses of sex and sexuality had begun to be adapted by the Ceylonese colony, resulting in the breeding of pathological homophobia, best evidenced by the inclusion of a colonial law criminalising homosexuality in the constitution of independent Sri Lanka. The predicament of the queer character in this novel in a way anticipates the predicament of a future generation of queer men and women who appear in novels set in contemporary times.

As mentioned above, there seems to be a fairly queer-positive environment in the colonies, before Victorian Christian values and morals began to be imposed on them. As William Naphy observes:

This globalisation of ‘Christian’ and western values is most obvious in changing attitude to homosexuality in societies whose deities, historical heroes, mythological figures and common people had previously been largely benign about same-sex relationships. (196)

While there seems to be a consensus on this view among sexuality studies experts, it is also important to note that what is understood as ‘queer’ or ‘homosexual’ today, was never looked upon as such before the cultural imperialism of the West began to have a definite impact on shaping the worldview of the colonised. In order to protect their self-image as a hypermasculine race of powerful rulers, the Europeans were determined to wipe sodomy and sodomites out of their histories and even consciences, and punishments, particularly, in Britain and the US (this was not the case in all the European countries though) became more stringent. Apart from Oscar Wilde, several other men were sent to the gallows, in order to spread the message that no form of sexual deviancy would be tolerated. Although death penalty for sodomy was abolished in England and replaced by ten years’ hard labour in 1861, at the turn of the century, the message that men with same-sex desires would be incarcerated or destroyed in public was made unambiguous across the colonies. By that time, the term ‘homosexual’ had already entered in medical parlance: in the year 1848, the psychologist, K. M. Benkert coined and defined the term, explaining it thus:

‘in addition to the normal sexual urge in men and women, Nature in her sovereign mood has endowed at birth certain male and female individuals with the homosexual urge...This urge creates in advance a direct horror of the opposite sex’ (quoted in Naphy 206).

The irony was that although sodomy had been prosecuted in the past, the emergence of the term ‘homosexual’ marked the birth of a new category as it were, dangerous, disruptive and therefore, needed to be eliminated (See Foucault 1976). Although several European countries, including Britain, decriminalised homosexuality by the middle of the twentieth century, ‘it was this image and hatred of the homosexual that were firmly planted across the world by the forces of European – especially British – colonialism’ (Naphy 205). *Cinnamon Gardens*, partly based on the lifelong friendship between Ponnambalam Arunachalam and Edward Carpenter⁴³, looks back on those times when this monstrous image of the homosexual had begun to be adapted by the Ceylonese colonial elite, who were trying their best to model their lives on the white European colonisers, at the expense of sacrificing their indigenesness (see Fanon 1961).

⁴³ Coming of an influential political family in Ceylon, Arunachalam met Carpenter in England, during his days in Christ’s College, Cambridge. They had a lifelong relationship, which however, cannot be directly interpreted as sexual or erotic. Carpenter visited Ceylon and toured the country under the guidance of Kalua, a native man, with whom he seems to have fallen in love. See, Robert Aldrich, *Cultural Encounters and Homoeroticism in Sri Lanka: Sex and Serendipity* (New York, London, etc: Routledge, 2015).

As discussed in greater detail in the preceding chapters, certain counter-discourses began to threaten the edifice of hetero-patriarchy at the turn of the century. In order to thwart these counter-discourses, countertypes to conventional signs of masculinity began to be generated and constructed as immoral, vicious, or even monstrous. One such countertype was the homosexual or the sodomite. As Foucault (1976) writes, in the nineteenth century, the emergence of the 'homosexual' as a species owed to the proliferation of medical and social sciences dedicated to accurate description, delineation and labelling of individuals, discrete social groups and entire population. Psychology, anthropology, sociology, and analytical history provided perspectives on social subsets, such as non-white races and ethnic groups, women, working classes, non-Christians, criminals, insane people and homosexuals, to name a few. All these 'categories' were judged or valued vis-à-vis an idealised 'norm' of white, bourgeois, Christian, law-abiding, heterosexual men. All other 'categories', catalogued above, were treated as deviance or even *abnormal*, and the medical and social sciences were determined to pinpoint the causes of such deviancy. All human beings, as Freud observed later, ended up becoming 'case' histories. Of these the 'homosexual' was one of the most dangerous species which needed to be eliminated. Although the sodomites always existed, they had not assembled into a group demanding rights or flaunt their difference; the homosexual subculture which began to make its presence felt towards the turn of the century could not be ignored.⁴⁴

Medical science emphasised on a healthy mind in a healthy body, and physicians set about labelling those as sick, those who did not fit into this category. In this analysis, the homosexual was dubbed as diseased, and therefore, in need of vigilance. Interestingly, homosexuality began to be associated with 'corrupt classes' and even with the Jews. Mosse writes:

⁴⁴ To quote Mosse: 'The homosexual scandals at the *fin de siècle* involving the highest levels of society, such as the Eulenburg affair in Germany or the Cleveland Street scandal in England, were taken up greedily by the new mass media. That such scandals involved, above all, members of the aristocracy fueled the fears of the middle classes that decadence had successfully infiltrated the core of government and society. Homosexuals themselves were aware of the opportunity to redefine masculinity that the decadence provided—not those who attempted to assimilate to normative masculinity but men and women such as Jean Lorraine and Nataly Barney, who were proud to take the label decadence as their own and to exploit it as much as possible. Oscar Wilde provides another example, refusing ... to clothe himself in the respectable mantle of the Greek tradition, summoning instead a so called higher philosophy to his defense. This has been aptly paraphrased by one who knew Wilde well as "dare to live as one wishes to live, not as the middle classes wish one to live; to have the courage of one's desires, instead of only the cowardice of other people." Such sentiments were repeated among those Parisian homosexuals and lesbians who equated decadence with individual freedom.' (91)

Jews were at times accused of being homosexual, There was no doubt a certain hesitation, except for the most fanatical anti-Semites, to make overt use even for polemical purposes of a love that dared not speak its name. Respectable people were not supposed to know about such sexual practices. (68)

In other words, homosexuality began to be associated with the non-bourgeois and the non-Christian. This was of course extended to the colonies, *supposedly* populated with immoral, unethical, corrupt, uncivilised, hypersexual, non-Christian, non-white men and women. The colonial bourgeoisie, interpellated in these western discourses, went to every possible extent to dispel this image. One way of doing that was to deny the existence of homosexuality and a stringent monitoring and elimination of the same. In *Cinnamon Gardens*, which spans a timeline charting the emergence of the Ceylonese elite, the Mudaliyar's attitude towards homosexuality, as discussed in Chapter 2, bears testimony to the colony's unquestioning adoption of the notions of the countertypes which threatened the very foundation of heteropatriarchy. For a colonial stooge, such as the Mudaliyar, embracing of such western discourses was the only available means to improve his lot, sufficiently emasculated by the colonial master, the model of manliness, who proved his virility by enslaving an incredibly huge mass of people across the globe.

Cinnamon Gardens traces a troubled emotional journey of Balendran or Bala, the younger son of the Mudaliyar, an important political figure in 1920s Colombo, now bound to a double life, on being forced to give up on his love, Richard Howland. Completely co-opted by his father's abhorrence for homosexual relationships, Bala wastes his life, before realising what he has sacrificed. Selvadurai, who begins every chapter of the book with a quotation from the Tamil epic *Thirukkural*, introduces Bala in Chapter 2, prefaced with Verse 68: 'A wise man gives joy not only to his father/But to all the world.' While the chapter unfolds to reveal the author's ironic treatment of the dictum, Chapter 4, beginning with verse 351 – 'Of the folly which takes the unreal for real/Comes the wretchedness of birth' – delves into Bala's 'folly' of taking 'the unreal for real', at his father's behest, and entering into a lifelong misery. The novel moving back and forth in time reveals in flashback the traumatising experiences Bala goes through, unable to confront his father's wrath and demand of complete obedience. It takes years for Bala to retaliate and settle scores with his father.

Same-sex bonding is allowed as long as it is sufficiently invisibilised so as not to upset the hetero-patriarchal setup. Few pages into the novel, Bala, the obedient, dutiful son of the Mudaliyar, now apparently happily married, is shown cruising in the fringes of the city, under the pretext of an after dinner walk. Bala meets Ranjan on the beach, under the cover of the night, pays him money, and enters into a sexual intercourse. But once the act is over, Balendran regrets it, and he regrets it every time: ‘Balendran liked to take his time with Ranjan to prolong his bliss as long as possible. For once it was over, he knew he would be visited by a terrible anguish’ (CG 82). The double life he leads is risky, for it may put everything in jeopardy, ‘his marriage, his family name’ (CG 82). His homosexuality to him is an anathema, something which can completely destroy a happy life, social prestige and everything else that counts to him and his family. The problem with Bala is that he is himself ashamed of his homosexuality, unable to accept this innate desire for men. This appears strange given that Bala has spent his formative years in England, where he was sufficiently exposed to a homosexual counterculture which had begun to make its presence felt in the nineteenth century.

Balendran’s introduction to this counterculture was facilitated by his friendship with Richard. In fact, Richard took him to meet Edward Carpenter whose *Intermediate Sex* revealed to him a whole new world:

There for the first time he learnt that inversion had already been studied by scientific men who did not view it as pathological, indeed men who questioned the whole notion that regeneration was the sole object of sex. (CG 58)

When Bala visited Carpenter in Millthrope, he was exposed to and intrigued by the different life which Carpenter lived with his partner George Merrill, ‘the comradely manner in which they existed, the way they had carved a life out for themselves, despite such strong societal censure’ (CG 59). Bala’s sojourn in England coincided with the gradual coming out of several homosexual men, publication as well as secret circulation of literature on same-sex love.⁴⁵ It was also the times when homosexuals were treated with abhorrence, leading, for

⁴⁵ Another path-breaking work of Carpenter that historicised homoerotic love affairs was *Ioläus: An Anthology of Friendship* (1902) which was a collection of excerpts by eminent men such as Plato, Pindar, Plutarch, Byron among others; these excerpts, culled from world literature, were about male friendship with strong homoerotic overtures. He named the book after Ioläus, Hercules’ love interest. What makes this book an important contribution to the homosexual counterculture is laconically summarised by Mark Mitchell and David Leavitt in their Introduction to a similar anthology published in recent times: ‘*Ioläus*...is less a collection of homosexually themed writing than of homosexually themed reading’ (xiii).

instance, E M Forster to withhold the publication of his homoerotic romance *Maurice* during his lifetime. Oscar Wilde's imprisonment (1895) and his subsequent alienation from the polite society of London, had already earned homosexual men the derogatory label, 'Friends of Oscar' (CG 111). Embracing an alternative life that challenged heteronormative ideas of family, love and coupledness, was extremely difficult. As Richard says, "Our lives are so fragile. One word to the law can shatter our lives into a thousand pieces" (CG 141).

Bala's friendship with Richard and their love affair reflect several such relationships which proliferated in British public schools and universities. It was indeed an open secret that all-male boarding schools were breeding ground of homoerotic relationships, some of which were sustained lifelong. ⁴⁶ Writing about the social and legal harassment of sodomites in the nineteenth and twentieth century Britain, Naphy observes:

The simple fact is that most of the politicians and judges sending men to the gallows and hard labour for sodomy had, during their schooldays, engaged in genital contact and passionate, emotional relationships with other males. (201)

Although Bala was amply exposed to this counterculture, he saw no meaning in leading what Butler calls a 'precarious life'. As discussed above, while this phase was marked by an increasing visibility of homosexual men and women, homophobia was also generated as homosexuality was identified as a disease, an abnormal disposition which could be cured. It was not just the Mudaliyar, Bala's father, who thought his son had to be rescued from this unspeakable vice, Bala too did not have the courage or integrity to challenge his father and sustain his relationship with Richard. He returned to the comforts of the heteronormative family, by satisfactorily performing the roles of an obedient son, a dutiful husband and a caring father. Now when he looks back on those days of his youth, Bala never tires of counting his blessings for having abandoned that uncertain life, full of risks and harassment,

⁴⁶ There were, in these public schools, endless discussions on these same-sex love affairs which proliferated on the campus, and even role-players in the sexual act came to be identified by different labels: Bloods and Tarts. C S Lewis, the famous literary figure and Christian apologist, in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy: Shape of my Early Life* (1955) explains what these epithets stood for:

A Tart is a pretty and effeminate-looking small boy who acts as a catamite to one or more of his seniors, usually Bloods. The Tarts had an important function to play in making school [what it was advertised to be] a preparation for public life. They were not like slaves, for their favors were [nearly always] solicited, not compelled. Nor were they exactly like prostitutes, for the liaison often had some permanence and, far from being merely sensual, was highly sentimentalized. Nor were they paid [in hard cash, I mean] for their services; though of course they had all the flattery, unofficial influence, favor, and privileges which the mistresses of the great have always enjoyed in adult society. That was where the Preparation for Public Life came in. (qtd. in Bullough and Bullough 264)

in favour of domestic bliss approved by society: ‘How foolish to have imagined that the world would change over [him and Richard]. Balendran knew, now that he was a father himself, that his father had done the right thing.’ (CG 59)

Bala settles down into domesticity with Sonia, happy to be considered *man* enough, as the Mudaliyar showers upon him his affection by attributing to him important responsibilities. Bala’s colonisation happens by consent as it were, as the Mudaliyar wins him over by ascertaining Richard’s exit from his life. Years later Richard tells him: “Did you know that your father threatened to call the police and have me charged? It was horrible. So I had no choice but to leave.” (CG 161-162) Bala is grateful to his father for having secured his life, and then rewarding him with enough responsibilities of the family and the estate. Bala is undoubtedly self-deceived, as he ponders over his father’s reaction to his relationship with Richard: “The Mudaliyar’s terrible anger at the time had been the roar of a bear protecting its cub. It had been out of love for him”. (CG 59)

Years later, when Richard returns to Bala as a ghost from the past, Bala realises what he has probably lost by submitting to his father’s dictates. Richard arrives in Colombo as a member of the Donoughmore Commission, and it dawns upon Bala, for the first time in life, that he has been used as a pawn, in a political game of chess, his father wants to win. His wife Sonia informs him that the Mudaliyar wishes Bala to take up an active role in influencing Richard to convert Dr. Shiels, the head of the commission, into denying Ceylon universal franchise and self-governance. (CG 53) While Sonia is outraged, and tries hard to dissuade Bala, who she knows never confronts his father, Bala is shocked to discover how the Mudaliyar is using him to further his own interests. (CG 54) When the personal and the political merge in a dramatic way, the Mudaliyar shows his true colours, taking the blind off Bala. What matters to the Mudaliyar most is power, whether in the public sphere or the private, a power which he exercises over everyone – his wife, his sons, or anyone socially inferior to him.

Despite an emotional encounter with Richard, and a brief sojourn with him on the plantation, Bala fails to go back to him. It is not an option he could even consider, being tied to domesticity, a wife, a son, and above all, his image of a law-abiding citizen of the colony. Richard returns, eventually satisfied that Bala does love him. But this relationship can only remain a secret, it has to survive. For ‘a love that dare not speak its name’, as Wilde famously put it, can never be brought out into the open. Yet, Richard’s return and some truths about his father which are revealed to him slowly attribute to Bala an agency which he has lacked so

far. While Bala is profoundly disconcerted at how his father disowned his elder son Arul, for having refused to yield to his demand to give up on his lover who came of a low class, he is flabbergasted to discover how he has also been deceiving his mother all along, by engaging in an adulterous affair with his secretary (CG 313) As the Mudaliyar's pretensions fall through, as his ideas of right and wrong appear warped, Bala decides: 'He would not let his father triumph over all of them' (CG 314).

The final encounter takes place in the confines of his father's study, when Bala stands up to the Mudaliyar for the first time, toppling over his hegemony. Dismayed with his father's detestation of Arul's son, Bala eventually confronts him to secure for his nephew his rights. Bala knows he will be mercilessly punished, but, takes the bold step for his nephew who is about to begin his life; but in the process, he ends up securing his own freedom from the despotic patriarch: "Why didn't you leave me alone in London? I was content then...I might have been truly happy...I loved Richard. That would have been enough" (CG 367). The Mudaliyar is bewildered at Bala's uninhibited articulation of the unspeakable, and demands of him an apology. Bala does not relent. The moment marks Bala's 'coming out', 'unashamed' and 'assured'. (CG 367) By pronouncing the truth, Bala seems to cast off a spell that had bound him so far. Although Bala cannot afford to go back to Richard, he achieves freedom from a lie in which he had so far wrapped his life. Notably, the final showdown with the Mudaliyar takes place at night, within the privacy of the latter's study, in the presence of no one. Bala's 'coming out', therefore, remains a secret, for, it is impossible to survive as a sexual invert in the broad daylight.

Cinnamon Gardens, looking back on the early twentieth century Ceylon, historicises the predicament of queer individuals in postcolonial Sri Lanka, where queerness, family and the State are still irreconcilable with each other. The queer remains its own diasporic category, homeless, yet, pursued by a strong homing desire. *Funny Boy*, *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*, *The Hungry Ghosts* and *Bodies in Motion* set in contemporary times, mark a continuing struggle of queer men and women, which might appear less agonising due to a worldwide movement in favour of LGBT rights, but at the personal level, each battle fought is equally arduous as it was with Bala, more than half a century earlier.

Funny Boy: Queer Love in the Time of the Civil War

A coming of age novel, Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* (1994), now considered a queer classic, traces young Arjun or Arjie's gradual awakening into a harsh reality of sexual and

ethnic differences that increasingly make him feel ‘out of place’ within his own family and the nation-state at large. Arjie’s awareness of his sexual difference and minority status dawns upon him through his everyday negotiations with an extended hetero-patriarchal family consisting of parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and siblings, and his eventual exile from the nation-state in the wake of violent ethnic riots. The destruction of his house and his forced exile from Sri Lanka become metaphorical of his always, already ‘outsider’ status within the home and the family, and by extension the nation-state. A memory novel, *Funny Boy*, as Arjie puts it, is a documentation of a ‘remembered innocence of childhood...now colored in the hues of a twilight sky’ (FB 5).

Selvadurai plays around with the symbol of the home and his queer protagonist’s relation to it, underscored by increasing politicization of the ‘lived’ space of the two houses, around which the story mostly revolves. It is interesting to note how Selvadurai brings to his demographic imagination of the two houses an intense painful consciousness of the two coordinates along which the nation-state is severely fragmented: one ethnic, the other sexual. Written from the perspective of a queer Tamil boy, *Funny Boy* delves into a layered discourse of minority politics, whereby the home and the family become highly politicized sites, at times, mirroring the repressive and ideological state apparatuses that stringently monitor difference or dissidence. Yet, like other queer protagonists, despite the strained relationship with the home and the family, Arjie finds it difficult to abandon it completely.

It would be interesting to juxtapose two incidents in the text, which very tellingly bring to light the queer protagonist’s otherness vis-à-vis the space of the hetero-patriarchal family which is apparently a symbol of refuge and security. In his attempt to explore how everyday geographies regulate and *normalise* carnal desire in a predominantly homophobic society in *Funny Boy*, Tariq Jazeel observes:

In highlighting the sexual marginalisation and discrimination Arjie faces in the refuge of his own family home during a period of heightened racial tension ... *Funny Boy* reminds us that the geographies and spaces of inclusion for some also constitute geographies of exclusion for others. (234)

This is most apparent in the episode in which Arjie is ‘caught’ playing Bride-Bride, dressed in improvised bridal finery, with his female cousins. One of his aunts is shocked to discover him cross-dressed in the kitchen porch, and leads him by the hand to the family living room

to make a show of his strangeness. Arjie is exhibited as something to look-at, much to the embarrassment of his parents; one of his uncles, spitefully provokes his father: “Eh Chelva...Looks like you have a funny one here” (FB 14). Arjie is thereafter forbidden to play Bride-Bride, but none could explain to him why. When he demands an explanation, his mother elusively replies: “Because the sky is so high and pigs can’t fly” (FB 19). Arjie is forced to play cricket with the boys, but then, he is dismissed as unfit, not manly enough for the game. His cousin Sanjay nicknames him ‘girlie-boy’ (FB 25) evoking everyone’s laughter. Arjie’s struggle thereafter is to reclaim the epithet, ‘funny’, stamped on him by his uncle, and turn it to his advantage.⁴⁷

The space of the ancestral home in which this incident takes place projects a territorialist division in terms of gender and sexuality: the field in which the boys play cricket is located in the front of the house, while the game of Bride-Bride dominated by girls is played in the kitchen porch, at the back. This strategic sexualisation of the domestic space is further problematised by Arjie’s overwhelming presence as the cross-dressed bride within the girl’s territory. Unknowingly, Arjie transgresses a social code for which he is sufficiently punished. Arjie is sent on exile as it were when his parents, deeply consternated by this ‘shameful’ act, decree that Arjie is to join the boys in the game of cricket henceforth.

Interestingly, while the game of cricket is played openly, amid much ruckus, there is a certain degree of secrecy in the game of Bride-Bride, as evidenced by Arjie’s getting ‘found out’ by an aunt, who happens to chance upon the children at it. Rahul K Gairola (2015) writes:

In the drawing room, the word ‘funny’ and his howling relatives indict Arjie’s gender insubordination, foreshadowing his impending exile from the feminized space of the back garden and the cricket field in the front yard where the boys perform athletic masculinity. Here, hegemonic masculinity masked as athletic prowess is codified through a ‘game’ that stands in stark contrast to the one played by the girls as the back of the house. In other words, its highly visible spatial articulation is normalized through public performance as it inevitably pushes queerness and other non-heteronormative gender performances into hidden spaces in the inner abode of domesticity (the back yard, kitchen, and, later in the novel, Radha Aunty’s bedroom).

⁴⁷ Selvadurai’s deployment of the term “funny” is intriguing. The term functions as a synonym for “queer” in its political implication. The term “queer”, which was once a term of opprobrium or even hatred, was reclaimed in the 1980s as political term of radical coalition building by the AIDS activists. Similarly, in the novel, the term “funny” which is a mild abuse, is reclaimed by Arjie in the end, when he deliberately mangles the two poems given to him for recitation on the Annual Day celebrations of the school. He evokes laughter, succeeds in humiliating the Principal, who has been mercilessly tortuous towards him and his boyfriend Shehan, and shames his family members. But in so doing, he exhibits an agency, denied to him earlier. By intentionally exhibiting his funniness (read, queerness), Arjie triumphantly projects his difference from the all those who continuously demanded of him to conform to certain normative codes of behaviour.

However, the boys also recognize Arjie's transgression of normative masculinity and quickly deploy a gendered pejorative against him – 'girlie-boy' (72)

That Arjie plays the main role of the bride in the girl's game, a role which should have been essayed by one of the girls, attributes to the game a certain disruptive potential which needs to be hidden in order not to upset heteronormative expectations of gender roles. This secrecy is metaphorical of cautious invisibilisation of queerness that tends to dismantle the heteronormative family. This game, in certain other ways, shakes the very foundation of the hetero-patriarchy, primarily by shoving to the margins the groom, who seems to have no role in this game revolving around a hyper-feminine performance associated with adorning the bride and the bride *herself*. The game's title, according to Gopinath, is loaded with meaning. While 'Bride-Bride' seems to dispense with the groom altogether, it also underscores the potentiality of a female homoerotic bonding that takes place over decking up the bride. To quote Gopinath:

...the game not only speaks to a particular mode of queer male femininity and cross-gender identificatory pleasure but also suggests the possibility of a female homoeroticism located within the home that works through the absence and irrelevance of the groom. (172)

The word 'pleasure', however, demands some mulling over. The pleasure which Arjie derives from cross-dressing is discomfoting to the other heterosexual members of the family, and is therefore, decreed 'unnatural' or 'funny' and penalised. The enforcement of compulsory 'straight' behaviour on Arjie engendered by his family members is the first instances of de-homing which Arjie suffers. As Ahmed notes: '[T]he display of queer pleasure may generate discomfort in spaces that remain premised on the 'pleasures' of heterosexuality' (165); and, therefore, needs to be suppressed or eradicated altogether.

In another episode, where Arjie has the first sexual encounter with his classmate Shehan, Arjie's status as an Other becomes much too evident. Interestingly, the first encounter takes place not within the family home, but in the garage, detached from it. The very site of the sexual encounter becomes symbolic of the act being 'alien' to the heteronormative family and its ways of being. The point is driven home by following the encounter scene with a dining table sequence, in which Arjie goes through a tremendous sense of discomfort of not

belonging there anymore. It's another instance of being de-homed which Arjie finds difficult to accept initially. Gopinath makes an important observation about this encounter:

The literal and figurative remove of queer sexuality from the family scene is forcefully brought home to Arjie as he and Shehan rejoin his parents for lunch after their encounter in the garage. As he looks around the table at the faces of his parents, he realizes with horror that the act in the garage has opened up an unbridgeable distance between him and the rest of his family... (172)

In the first episode where Arjie is 'found out' by his aunt and dubbed 'funny', and his subsequent punishment of being forced to play with the boys, takes place across very subtly defined territories mapped in terms of gender. The ancestral family home is demographically imagined as marking out spaces in terms of biological sex, and anyone who refuses to conform to the socially expected performance demanded of their sex, is symbolically incarcerated into a correctional cell. In case of Arjie, this cell becomes the playground, located in the front of the family home, in which he is forcibly pushed into by his parents. The 'girl's territory', that is, the kitchen porch, the bedroom and the dresser, etc., becomes out of bounds to him.

This family policing continues, as his father gets him admitted to Victoria Academy eminent for its stringent disciplinary mechanism to keep the boys under control. When Arjie protests, his father snubs him declaring, "The Academy will force you to become a man" (FB 210). Diggy, his brother, wilfully partakes on this family responsibility of keeping a vigil on Arjie: on discovering his intimacy with Shehan he warns him, that he better let go of him or else he would be reduced to a 'laughing stock' in school (FB 232). Arjie almost literally finds himself locked in a panopticon in which every move he makes is monitored and reprimanded mercilessly. The family, therefore, operates as a repressive apparatus that creditably performs its function of controlling and disciplining apparently disruptive forces within the micro-spaces of the home in which the state cannot always directly intervene.

Yet, the triumph of *Funny Boy* lies in Arjie's ability to resist domination and retribution and carve out for himself a niche in which he could be his own self. Selvadurai attributes to Arjie a voice of protest, and an agency with which he tries to reclaim his place within the family. Rather than feeling humiliated of his alleged 'funniness', Arjie turns it to his own advantage

and uses it as a weapon to combat the forces that police him and make an attempt to reform him. But despite all his courage, Arjie is eventually expelled from the nation, not because of his sexual identity, but because of his ethnicity – a Tamil family could not survive in a Sinhalese-dominated territory. What happens in the end underlines Arjie’s complete alienation from his homeland: his family home is burned down, and as Arjie goes back to have a last look at it, before leaving the country forever, he observes, ‘I didn’t bother to close the gate as I left. There was no reason to protect it against the outside world anymore’ (FB 312). The sense of security is lost forever; what he knew as home is now literally lost. Arjie has a greater battle to fight. While his ethnic identity marks him out as alien to the nation-state, his sexual identity which is emergent, is another marker of his being an outsider, both to the nation-state as well as his family. Quoting Patton and Sanchez-Eppler’s view that ‘[W]hen a practitioner of ‘homosexual acts’ or a body that carries any of the many queering marks moves between officially designated spaces – nation, region, metropole, neighbourhood [. . .] – intricate realignments of identity, politics and desire take place’, Minoli Salgado observes:

Selvadurai’s foregrounding of the mobility of “funny boy” Arjie when set within the context of Sri Lankan ethnic conflict not only enables, but, perhaps, requires the reinforcement of constructed, essentialized ethnicities and the clear demarcation of “officially designated spaces”. (13)

Arjie’s queerness, apart from his status as an ethnic minority, results in a double marginalization, the implications of which are most clearly visible within the familial spaces of the home. While the family protects him against the violence of the state, it continues its policing as far as his sexual identity is concerned. The novel ends with the suggestions of a lifelong battle which has just begun.

Swimming in the Monsoon Sea: Family Values and the Queer ‘Other’

Another coming of age novel, Selvadurai’s *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* (2005) is also set in Sri Lanka. The protagonist’s gradual coming to terms with his sexuality happens through an agonising sense of ‘out-of-place-ness’ in a pathologically homophobic environment. Just like Arjie, Amrith de Alwis’s struggle begins early in life, when he undergoes a self-anagnorisis of sorts that he is sexually attracted to men. Unable to comprehend this ‘strange’ inclination, Amrith feels devastated. Unlike Arjie who at least has Shehan to share and

reciprocate his feelings, Amrith suffers all by his own, terribly confused about himself. Amrith's sexuality, his perplexities about it, and his gradual coming to terms with it, are again posited vis-à-vis the heteronormative family. Currently in the custody of the Manuel-Pillais, after the untimely demise of his parents, Amrith metaphorically represents the struggle of a queer migrant, caught between an intense 'homing desire' and an equally intense urge to escape from the bindings of the family within which he is always already an outsider. The title 'Swimming in the Monsoon Sea' is also symbolic of this struggle.

Orphaned at a very young age, Amrith's biological family now consists of an estranged uncle and his son Niresh. As far as he could recall his parents too had a strained relationship; he remembers how his mother was always unhappy. When he comes to know of his past, his despotic grandfather and an equally self-aggrandizing uncle who used to torture his mother, and how they completely disowned her when she eloped and got married, Amrith is devastated: 'When Amrith had heard all this, he felt as if the ground had opened up under him and he was falling through darkness, helpless in the face of his past, about which he could do nothing' (SIMS 69).

Amrith knows that he has to live with the burden of having come from a broken family all his life. The bourgeois Sri Lankan society to which he belongs is tremendously conservative about marriage, divorce and lineage. Arranged marriage is still preferred; pre-marital dating is approved after sufficient maturity, and only 'if the partner was vetted to be of the right caste, class, religion, and race, with good education and prospects' (SIMS 36). His mother had, therefore, transgressed a social convention, and brought shame upon the family. Divorce is still a social stigma, and is generally, unthinkable. Amrith's school-friend Peries' parents are legally separated; but, 'they never spoke of it, often pretending their parents were still married' (SIMS 75).

The fact of the matter is that heterosexual marriage, preferably with parental sanction, is the only universally accepted form of coupledness; any deviation from it is socially vilified. What might be inferred from this is for a queer person it is an enormous task to survive in such a social ambience. In a society where heterosexual coupling is so closely and ruthlessly monitored and marriage is treated as sacrosanct, homoerotic relationships would be treated as no less than an abominable sin. Amrith has a colossal battle to fight, and he cannot be too hopeful of success: 'He would have to learn to live with this knowledge of himself. He would

have to teach himself to be his own best friend, his own confidant and guide' (SIMS 205). In this sense, Amrith seems to fit into the delineation of the queer as its own diasporic category, unable to find for himself a true home.

It is indeed a challenge for a queer individual, such as Amrith, to resolve the paradox: while he desires the family, he knows he will remain perpetually outside it. This is more so, because, in 1980, the time around which Amrith realizes and comes to terms with his sexuality, no other alternative kinship models, or cultures of a minority community, as Alan Sinfield calls it, were available to him. The LGBTIQ movement and queer communities, both virtual and real, were unknown. At this moment, however, the only form of security available to Amrith is to re-establish the oedipal bond with his mother, which was severed when she forcibly sent him away with Auntie Bundle, and then, died soon after to explain why she did so. Amrith must also embrace the Manuel-Pillai family that sheltered him after her accidental death. He must also resuscitate the broken bond with his 'real family' (SIMS 27), now comprised of his maternal uncle and his son. Uncle Lucky insinuates the necessity of such a reunion, as he emotionally reminisces how his own family was ruined by a tiff over property rights, and was never restored:

Families hold on to things for too long, nurse grievances until they corrode their hearts and ruin their lives. How much better is to forgive old wrongs, to let things go. It frees you up to get on with your life. (SIMS 66)

While romanticizing about familial ties, Uncle Lucky, however, does not fail to recognize how family feuds can devastate lives beyond redemption: 'People say family-family, but the courts are jam-packed with children suing parents, brothers suing sisters, sisters suing brothers. Disgusting' (SIMS 66). Yet, resolution of family feuds, recognition of differences within the sameness of the family, and buttressing the cohesive force of family ties are important in a nation-state ravaged by opposing, but nonetheless, equally jingoistic ideologies that refuse to acknowledge heterogeneity.

From the very outset, Selvadurai plays around the very idea of a 'proper' family: Amrith is brought up in a broken home; his parents are emotionally estranged since Amrith can remember. He is literally oblivious of how his father looks. To him, his father is a

disembodied voice showering invective on his mother in a drunken state at night. Terribly anxious of these late hours, Amrith would pray each evening that his father's raging may cease forever:

When the night sounds did occur, Amrith would sit up in bed, his knees drawn to his chest, his eyes squeezed tight, trying to persuade himself that his father's shouts were actually sneezes, that the rising inflection of his mother's voice was tinkling laughter as she tickled his father's nose with a feather. (SIMS 10)

When he is around six years old, his parents die in a road accident and the Manuel-Pillai family adopts him. That he doesn't have a family is rubbed into him the hard way more often than not. Although Aunty Bundle, Uncle Lucky and the girls are overprotective of him, insensitive visitors bring up the topic, much to Amrith's misery. He overhears Ratna, Aunty Bundle's friend from Australia, telling someone how she harbours deep distrust for him, given his father was an alcoholic and his parents died a mysterious death. She is much too anxious that one of her girls might fall for Amrith, thereby bringing shame upon the family: '...his relatives have rejected him, so he has no social standing. And don't forget the scandal surrounding his parents' death. Would you want something like that trailing your daughter?' (SIMS 29). Ratna's acrid diatribe against his family leaves Amrith crestfallen. Till this moment, he was unaware of the humiliating gossip about his family that circulated in their social circle. Consequently, he becomes very conscious of the policing gaze of the people around him: '...he also began to notice that mothers tended to be watchful when he was talking to their daughters, at the club or after church...he...felt sure that...part of their watchfulness had to do with his flawed past' (SIMS 30). Simultaneously, however, Amrith also arrives at the realisation that he is not really interested in girls and marriage. This is the moment when Amrith's struggle to come to terms with his sexuality and his 'flawed past' commences. At this juncture, he starts feeling a profound shame, both for his 'flawed past' and his sexual preference.

Introverted and self-effacing by nature, he has always maintained a very low profile in school: 'Like all invisible boys, Amrith had kept as indistinguishable as possible' (SIMS 41). After overhearing Ratna's take on his family, he becomes all the more self-conscious and withdraws into a shell. He presents a classic example of being in shame: 'One is visible and

not ready to be visible' (Erikson 244). The rest of the novel charts his emotional odyssey of reconciling his queerness with his desire for a family.

Amrith, who is barely fourteen, doesn't understand how he should handle this 'strange' desire he feels for men. He almost feels compelled to adore the gay architect Lucien Lindamulagé around whom he 'felt that he could simply be himself' (SIMS 59), but, what is exactly so 'scandalous' about him that causes consternation in the Manuel-Pillais is beyond his cognizance. He curiously eavesdrops on Uncle Lucky voicing his concern for Lucien to Aunty Bundle, the latter's colleague: '...that Lucien Lindamulagé should leave his secretaries at home when they went on business outstation; that what the old man did was illegal and could get arrested' (SIMS 59). That men with same-sex desire have been omitted from history and therefore, from the collective unconscious of the people is underpinned by Amrith's ignorance of Lucien's sexuality and his failure to grasp the nature of the rumour. Having been interpellated in dominant heteronormative notions of love, romance and sexual desires, Amrith is absolutely unaware of the possibility of the existence of same-sex desire. This is precisely why he can neither accept Lucien nor his own erotic desires for Niresh and feels ashamed of himself. On the other hand, the anxiety that Uncle Lucky and Aunty Bundle share regarding the niggling rumours about Lucien making the rounds throws into relief the homophobic disposition of the citizens of the nation-state. The queer individual's (in this case Amrith's) discomfort and self-deprecation largely stem from this everydayness of compulsory heterosexuality. As Ahmed rightly observes:

Heteronormativity also becomes a form of comforting: one feels better by the warmth of being faced by a world one has already taken in. ... Queer subjects, when faced by the comforts of heterosexuality, may feel uncomfortable ... Furthermore, queer subjects may also be 'asked' not to make heterosexuals feel uncomfortable by avoiding the display of signs of queer intimacy, which is itself an uncomfortable feeling, a restriction on what one can do with one's body, and another's body in social space. (148)

Later, when Amrith discovers Lucien's sexuality and his innumerable affairs with young men, he develops a deep antipathy towards him. Almost simultaneously he realizes his own sexuality and his abhorrence for the man deepens: in Lucien he sees his alter ego, the hidden self he wishes to suppress and annihilate altogether. Such a strong feeling of hatred is

strangely but intelligibly contradictory to his initial liking for the man. Amrith's coming to terms with his sexuality would also involve warming up to Lucien, besides returning to his mother.

Whereas it is true that Amrith's class position which enables an exposure to a more liberal culture and his intimacy with Mrs. Alagama who teaches English Literature and spearheads the Drama Society in his school would eventually prove conducive to his understanding of his sexuality⁴⁸, he does often become a victim of homophobia in the social circle he moves. For instance, when his feelings for his cousin become quite apparent, the hypermasculine bully in school, Suraj teases him: 'Ah, Michael Cassio, waiting for your darling Iago to pick you up?' (SIMS 173). Mrs. Alagama, who is well-connected with 'the artistic, bohemian circles of Colombo' (SIMS 45), and is well versed in Greek and Roman civilization, comes to his rescue. She rebukes Suraj: 'Wanigasekera, I have friends in the theatre world who are *that* way inclined, and it's no laughing matter in this country. I don't like such things being ridiculed. Don't ever do that again (SIMS 173; emphasis in original).

However, it takes time for Amrith to appreciate Mrs. Alagama's queer-positive disposition. Initially, he cannot but feel totally disgusted with himself on discovering his sexual desire for men, having internalized the homophobia he himself is a victim of. This is perhaps most palpable in his self-reproach on being aroused at the sight of Niresh's private parts. He rushes to the bathroom, terribly embarrassed at his reaction, and ends up 'reciting "If" by Rudyard Kipling', but 'When that failed he tried the prayer "Hail Holy Queen" (SIMS 129)'. The very mention of Kipling and the Christian prayer underlines Amrith's complete interpellation in the colonial discourse of heteronormativity, which has been adopted, unaltered, by his independent homeland. Kipling was one of the most significant figures who produced new myths to consolidate such cultural ideas of empire-building based on the division of the world into masculine/effeminate, aggressive/passive, etc. "If" which seems to address his son, and by connection, all the children of the Empire, is a didactic poem upholding a set of values that one must embrace to 'be a man'. The poem may be interpreted as an oracle of a colonial

⁴⁸ Although reserved about non-normative expressions of sexuality, it is the urban bourgeois class which would later produce the pioneer LGBTIQ activists of the country. On the other hand, the 'all boys' Catholic school to which Amrith goes, though apparently homophobic, has teachers like Mrs. Alagama. Besides, the novel, if not unequivocally, but obliquely recounts the vibrant homoerotic energy that underscores the camaraderie the boys share in school. In *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai is more explicit about the possibility of homoerotic relationships on school campus; in *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* it is more suggestive, particularly in the rehearsal room antics of the boys. See *SIMS*, pp. 45-55.

sage carefully deleting softer emotions from the mental makeup of children of the Empire, and urging them to exercise absolute self-control. Interestingly, Selvadurai, by making his protagonist recite the poem as a ‘remedy’ to ward off deviant sexual feelings, attributes to it a new meaning altogether. However, neither the poem nor the prayer works for Amrith and ‘he tried to stifle a feeling of shame that welled up in him’ (SIMS 129).

Amrith’s shame, his discomfort, and his everyday embarrassment, that Selvadurai dramatizes, are stock feelings of queer individuals. Both Judith Butler and R. Braidotti have discussed at length the psycho-social conditioning responsible for such feelings. Ahmed summarizes them thus:

...to refuse to be compelled by the narratives of ideal heterosexuality in one’s orientation to others is still to be affected by those narratives; they work to script one’s orientation as a form of disobedience. The affects of “not following” the scripts are multiple. We can consider, for example, the psychic as well as the social costs of loving a body that is supposed to be unlovable by the subject I am, or loving a body that I was “supposed to” repudiate, which may include shame and melancholia. (145-146)

In Amrith’s case, the situation is further complicated by the implication of incest in his growing desire for Niresh, his cousin. Amrith is in a double-bind: he neither should have loved a man nor should he have loved someone who is a close blood-relation. He is, therefore, overcome by a profound sense of guilt.

The rest of *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* dramatizes how Amrith rises above this sense of guilt and accepts himself. However, Amrith can only accept himself when he is able to confess his deepest secret to his dead mother. The memory of his mother continuously haunts him, mostly in strange dreams; in one such dream, which occurs to him most frequently, he sees himself running up the estate path, in through the gates, and around the side of the house, where he has spent many happy hours with her. This dream which has always ended abruptly, finds a destination once he comes to realize that he is ‘different’: ‘This time, however, he found his mother seated in a chair. She smiled at him and shook her head, as if to say, “Now what were you so worried about, son?”’ (SIMS 204-205) For the first time, Amrith discovers the implication of the dream: he must return to his mother.

His father, on the other hand, has always been a distant and despotic presence to Amrith: he has always remained in his memory as a terrorizing force that arrives only to separate him from his mother. The last time he sees his dead father is in a dream, where the latter's face 'was contorted with hatred, his lips pull back in a snarl' (SIMS 192). He struggles to run away from him, but is impeded by 'the grass [that] was suddenly higher than him' (SIMS 192). Entangled in the grass and in the danger of being caught by the tyrant, he lets out an agonizing cry, when he is awakened. He feels rescued. Amrith has always felt happiest in the absence of his father, and wished he was always away, which, in psychoanalytic terms, may be interpreted as a hidden desire for patricide. He has always deeply identified with his mother in the sense that he has seen himself as a passive recipient of his father's oppression. The bond he shared with his mother had abruptly broken when both his parents died in an accident. In the literal absence of the father, this bond could now be resuscitated without impediment.

After much reflection, Amrith eventually visits his mother's grave and strikes up a conversation with her imaginary spirit, which takes up a confessional tone. Amrith has to share the most fundamental truth about himself with the person he has loved the most. Earlier he has arrived at the realization that like Lucien, he is also a *ponnaya*⁴⁹, but 'did not know what to do about this thing within him, where to turn, who to appeal to for comfort...' (SIMS 204). But now he knows where to seek catharsis: "'I am...'", but he could not continue, for he did not know a decent word to describe himself. And he refused to use *ponnaya*. Finally, he leaned closer and whispered, "I am...different"⁵⁰ (SIMS 205).

⁴⁹ Interestingly, Selvadurai does not introduce any term (current in the West and of late in South Asia), that marks out identities: gay, lesbian, intersex, transgender, and so on and so forth. By not categorizing his protagonist in conformance with the Western script of sexual identities, Selvadurai acknowledges the necessity of an alternative rhetoric of identity politics, encapsulated in the local term *ponnaya*. Controversy rages over the appropriation of Western terms to delineate South Asian identities among activists in these countries. And such resistance is relevant simply because neither the umbrella term 'queer' nor the generic term 'gay' can appropriately articulate nuances of local sexual identities, saddled with local cultural histories. Selvadurai steers clear of the controversy by using the term *ponnaya* (and by using no term at all in *Funny Boy* or *Cinnamon Gardens*), which also, in a way, sustains the writer's realism: written from the point of view of a young boy completely ignorant of the sexual identity politics, employment of any global term by the novelist would have been questionable. More importantly, however, in 1980, the year in which the novel is set, the LGBTIQ movement had not begun in South Asia. It must also be mentioned that the increasing emphasis on reclaiming local terms (in order to establish the difference of South Asian non-normative sexualities from the Euro-American concepts of the same) might go against Selvadurai's rejection of *ponnaya* as an indecent term. See Spurlin.

⁵⁰ It is important to mention that Selvadurai's final choice of the word 'different' over the local term *ponnaya* is politically charged, although the political ramification of the word is unavailable to Amrith. A basic point of contention in queer politics is whether identity-based models of sexual dissidence tend to subordinate the

Before this final reunion is accomplished, another significant moment in the text occurs when Amrith is introduced to a particular statue of Lord Buddha by Aunty Bundle. Belonging to the Gupta School of art, this statue is a fine example of:

... amalgamation of two styles. One from Greece, which came through Afghanistan...represented in the classical folds of the Buddha's robes. The other style was borrowed from Kushan dynasty of Mathura, from which came the rounded – even slightly female – body of the Buddha, derived from a tradition of male fertility spirits.' (SIMS 187-188)

The androgynous statue of the Buddha, inspired by male fertility spirits, acquires new meaning in Amrith's imagination. The statue by merging the male and the female in the same body destabilizes rigid gender categories based on biological sex. Amrith's warming up to this statue is particularly interesting, for till this point, he does not seem to have much faith in the divinity. Generally unruly in the church on Sunday mornings, Amrith, quite surprisingly, takes off his shoes 'as a sign of respect' before entering the temple; he sits at the feet of the Buddha, and gazing up 'at the serenity of its face', he makes an earnest appeal: "Help. Please help me" (SIMS 188).

Amrith's sudden introduction to this statue, thanks to Aunty Bundle's exhaustive knowledge of South Asian schools of art, shows him (to recall Barthes' 'Myth Today') a way of being in this world. Though not explicitly spelt-out in the text, discovery of this myth, in a way, helps Amrith to accept his sexuality and shed the overbearing sense of guilt which has been haunting him so far. At another level, this moment in the novel also sees its protagonist crossing over the ethnic divide: a Tamil Christian seeking solace at the feet of an androgynous statue of the Buddha.

Finally, Amrith returns to his mother, finds his 'real family' in his cousin Niresh, acknowledges to himself that he has been unnecessarily distant from the Manuel-Pillai family despite their unadulterated affection for him. However, he is still to resolve a small difference: he must reach out to Lucien. When the old man calls on Amrith next and holds his

question of 'difference' to that of 'identity'. The question is whether to celebrate myriad sexual 'differences' without naming them, or to subscribe to a specific identity-category. By rejecting the word *ponnaya*, Selvadurai opens up the possibility of such a debate. However, the resolution of the same is beyond the scope of this paper.

arm for support, he is surprised to notice that he ‘did not shudder at his touch’ (*SIMS* 206). The barrier has collapsed; Amrith cannot tell when. But he is, nonetheless, pleased. Having recuperated the emotional bonds with people who are consequential to him, he is no longer troubled by a sense of alienation; however, he does not seek assimilation either. This is remarkable in the sense that:

Assimilation involves a desire to approximate an ideal one has already failed; an identification with one’s designation as a failed subject. A choice of assimilation – queer skin, straight masks – is clearly about supporting the violence of heteronormative distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate lives. (Ahmed 150)

It is important for a queer subject to debunk the heteronormative distinction between legitimate and illegitimate lives; or else, s/he cannot survive. Although Amrith knows he has to wear a ‘straight’ mask for the time being, a time would come when ‘there would be somebody else he could share his secret with’ (*SIMS* 205). Perhaps the realization of such a dream is not too far away. The global economy is on the threshold of a paradigm shift to be largely facilitated by the revolution in information technology. Earlier in the novel, Uncle Lucky insists on Amrith’s learning to operate the computer: “Evidently, in ten years, computers will be running everything”, he asserts (*SIMS* 23).

Parallel to the transformation in global economy a revolution in sexual identity politics would also take place. A global community of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people, providing an alternative model of kinship, would emerge soon; the rudiment of such a community is unmistakably discernible in the sealing of the bond of friendship between Amrith and Lucien. For the time being, however, Amrith must keep to himself his deepest secret. His choice to remain ‘silent’ is a simple survival strategy in a predominantly homophobic society. What is important at this moment is that he has found a way of being.

The Hungry Ghosts: Queer desires, assimilation and insatiable apparitions

Shyam Selvadurai’s fourth novel, *The Hungry Ghosts* (2013), moving between Sri Lanka and Canada, is a bildungsroman of a queer man who struggles endlessly to accommodate himself within the family, dominated by a despotic matriarch. The novel charts a circular journey: away from the hungry ghosts of the past followed by a return to them, to exorcise them forever. Early in the novel, the narrator explains the myth of the *peréthaya*, the hungry ghost:

In Sri Lankan myth, a person is reborn as *peréthaya* because, during his human life, he desired too much – hence the large stomach that can never be filled through the tiny mouth. The *peréthayas* that appear to us are always our ancestors, and it is our duty to free them from their suffering by feeding Buddhist monks and transferring the merit of that deed to our dead relatives. (HG 24-25)

Shivan, the protagonist and the first person narrator, has a few appalling *peréthayas* to deal with: his regressive maternal grandmother, Aachi, who is difficult to satiate; the ghost of his dead lover, Mili, whose death could not be mourned as the loss of a queer life; and, his own status as a *peréthi*, the one who escapes from a horrifying past to an illusion of happiness, in the process ruining a life. While abandoning the homeland was an easy way out for Shivan, *The Hungry Ghosts* ends with an intense ‘homing desire’ which entails a reconnection with the childhood home, looking for remedies for the wrongs done in the past, in an endeavour to bring together a broken family. It is also a return to half-done deeds, the completion of which seems necessary in order to free the hungry ghosts from their suffering.

This ‘homing desire’ is articulated and mediated through Buddhist tales and philosophy that intersperse the narrative. Most notable among the Buddhist tales Selvadurai deploys as a subtext is that of the Naga King Manikantha who takes an instant liking for a young hermit, visits him every day in his human avatar, but before leaving reassumes his serpent form and coils around him in a deep embrace. This tale has been often interpreted by sexuality theorists and activists as symbolic of homoerotic desires, and has been often alluded to in arguments in support of naturalising such desires. Selvadurai seems a little too self-conscious in locating his text in the discourses of queer diaspora and sexuality identity politics that have gathered unprecedented momentum across the globe. This self-consciousness is not so conspicuous in his earlier novels.

As in the other three novels, the trope of the family is central to *The Hungry Ghosts*, and the broken family functions as a metaphor of a fractured nation, split along ethnic, class, political and gender lines. Once the family moves beyond the borders of the homeland to settle abroad, the fault-lines deepen, and the dream of being ‘liberated’ into a transnational space, beyond the reach of repressive apparatuses of the Sri Lankan nation-state (metaphorically personified by Aachi), is shattered, despite other kinds of freedom that are won in the process of migration. While the family partially learns to adjust to differences, owing to the new social exposures, Shivan realises with dismay, with each passing day, that things keep falling

apart. Torn between his love affairs and an authoritative matriarch, Shivan finds it difficult not only to transcend his past, but also to reconcile his queerness with the expectations of his Aachi, who had once been the centre of his life. The inability to give up on the past is the primary contention of the plot, the Sri Lankan-Canadian gay man finding it impossible to erase his roots, and set up home with his partner. The queer family Shivan and Michael set up is constantly haunted by ghosts from the past that jeopardise an otherwise perfect relationship.

Shivan's queerness is posited vis-à-vis the family's (mainly Aachi's) demand of him to carry forward the family name. Early in the novel, Shivan's sister Renu banter at him for being their grandmother's favourite, and points out how because of him they too have been lent shelter, after the untimely demise of their father: "The grandson is most important. So you better be nice to Aachi, otherwise we will get thrown into the streets" (HG 26). Aachi's disgruntlement at Shivan's being gay is more to do with the fact that she wouldn't have a bloodline to preserve not only her own name, but the immense wealth and property she has accumulated in her lifetime. She spies on him with the aid of her henchman and comes down on him so hard as to destroy his love life forever. The primary motive behind this terrorising intervention is unambiguously articulated in what Aachi tells her doctor: "See, Dr. Navaratnam, what a blessing my grandson is in my old age. Like rain soaking a parched land" (HG 180). The fertility metaphor that cannot be missed spells out why Shivan's being gay disappoints her, and the extent of her dismay is testified by the measures she takes to restore him to, what she calls, 'normalcy'.

On his first return to Sri Lanka in 1988, four years after they left in the wake of the ethnic riots, Shivan reconnects with his childhood crush Mili, and falls in love. A human rights activist, Mili too comes of a broken family of separated parents, but Aachi is happy to see Shivan befriending someone from Cinnamon Gardens which houses the richest and the most powerful of Colombo's citizens (HG 169). However, it does not take Aachi long to discover the nature of the relationship, and she entrusts her henchman Chandralal to teach Mili a lesson. But Mili is murdered, his body thrown into the ocean. Shivan is left devastated. What he realises is that what he thought was home isn't home anymore, and makes his way back to Canada. When Aachi tries to hold on to him, as a last straw, Shivan discloses a truth, which leaves her shattered. Shivan cannot think of a better way to take revenge on her: "There is something you should know, something I have been meaning to tell you...It wasn't Amma's idea to go to Canada. It was mine" (HG 259). Aachi had all along blamed her daughter for

having migrated to Canada, taking along with her, her grandson; this disclosure shocks her, and Shivan knows there wasn't possibly a better way to sever all ties.

After some initial disappointment at the dominance of white queer people, a few rejections, a few random sexual encounters, Shivan gradually starts feeling at home in Canada, when he finds a life partner in Michael. He settles with him into domestic bliss, setting up a family, with the approval of Michael's parents. His mother and sister too accept him, although initially, the former is terribly disconcerted on being informed of her son's sexuality: "Can you imagine Michael, she said she would rather have aborted me, rather strangle me at birth, than have a gay son?" (HG 312) However, everything seems to fall into place in a way Shivan has never dreamed of before:

I had never been with a man long enough to know what happened once the initial edge of physical passion wore off, and I was surprised, then delighted, to experience how that sharpness of early desire softened and spread its goodness through every part of our lives so that I floated through the routine of my days in a warm haze of well-being. (HG 314)

Although Shivan thought that he should tell Michael about his past, the place he came from, the ethnic riots, the countless deaths, and the feeling of insecurity which forced them to migrate to Canada, he tells him only half the story. (HG 312) What he does not realise is that the other half he cautiously suppresses would return like those *peréthayas*, the hungry ghosts, and stand between them. The presence of the *peréthayas* soon become too conspicuous, when Michael asks him: "...I beg you to tell me the truth. The truth that you have, I know now, for as long as we've known each other." (HG 336) Perhaps, Shivan too did not realise till this moment, the cause of the deep melancholia that keeps him from enjoying the moments of happiness with Michael. Michael unearths the cause:

"You brought your grandmother, and your fucking lover into my life, into my apartment...I don't even know what they look like, and I've been living with them for the past two years." (HG 341)

Shivan realises at that moment that it is impossible to move on, if these ghosts of the past are not put to rest. He needs to settle scores with his grandmother: 'The true question is how I will deal with her refusal to admit culpability in Mili's death, her impenetrable self-righteousness.' (HG 363)

Returning to Aachi and to make her confess her culpability in Mili's murder is the only way in which Shivan could free the hungry ghosts. Shivan's unending melancholia and his inability to give up on Mili or forgive his grandmother who was part of the conspiracy leading to his murder, provides a classic example of his initial inability to grieve Mili's death as a loss of a queer life. Shivan could never mourn Mili's death as his lover, for their relationship was never acknowledged. At Mili's condolence meet, Shivan feels humiliated on being treated just as a school friend, who might have some memories to share:

They were trying to draw me in without acknowledging the nature of my relationship with Mili...I was furious at them for failing even to hint that my suffering might be keener for having been in love with him. (HG 249)

This inability to mourn Mili's death as a loss of a lover hardens into a lifelong melancholia, which later ruins Shivan and Michael's home. As Sarah Ahmed notes:

As such, the failure to recognise queer loss *as* loss is also a failure to recognise queer relationships as significant bonds, or that queer lives are lives worth living, or that queers are more than failed heterosexuals, heterosexuals who have failed 'to be'. Given that queer becomes read as a form of 'non-life' – with the death implied by being seen as non-reproductive – then queers are perhaps even already dead and cannot die. (156; emphasis in the original)

As in *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai links queerness with the minority status of the Tamils in a Sinhalese dominated nation-state; while the Tamils are being forced to migrate, or are eliminated as alien to the nation, so are queer lives. Neither Shivan nor Mili is recognised as queer, and the latter's untimely demise is not acknowledged as an irredeemable loss to Shivan. Queer theorists are increasingly turning attention to queer losses which are elided in national registers of death, as are queer lives. Basing their argument on the Freudian distinction between mourning and melancholia⁵¹, but deviating from Freud's analysis of the two, Eng and Kazanjian (2003) observe that melancholia is preferable as a way of responding to loss; they hold up melancholia as an enduring devotion on part of the ego to the lost object,

⁵¹ Freud, in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1934), observes that while mourning is a healthy response to loss, a process through which an object of desire is let go, melancholia is more pathological, a condition in which the ego refuses to let go of the object of desire, and preserves the object inside itself. According to Freud, 'letting go' of the lost object or loved one is a healthy response to the alterity of the other. Melancholia is unhealthy. Queer theorists hold melancholia as a more preferred response to the loss of queer lives because it is an ethical response to loss: they suggest that the desire to maintain a bond with the lost other is enabling, rather than blocking new forms of attachment.

and as such is a way of keeping the other, and with it the past, alive in the present. To let go is to kill again.

This is precisely what Shivan refuses to do; he does not let go. He clings on to the agony of losing Mili, even when he has entered a secure life, away from the dictates of the nation-state he has left behind. As mentioned earlier, this melancholia becomes unbearable for both Shivan and Michael, the latter feeling cheated by the ghostly presence of Mili in between them. Perhaps, Shivan's *nirvana*, if one may call it so, could be arrived at by encountering this melancholia, the cause behind it, and mourn Mili's death as a loss of a queer life.

Shivan's final decision to return to Sri Lanka is not only to reunite with his grandmother, he has abandoned long back; it is also a duty which sits like a burden on him – the duty to mourn Mili's death, as it was deserved to be mourned. Mili, like the other mythical *peréthayas*, is still standing at 'crossroads or even outside the walls of [his] own home(*sic*)...wanting to be let in' (HG 335). Here 'home' stands in as a metaphor of the nation-state also, within which Mili was never recognised as queer. The relationship he had with Shivan was always outside socially approved registers of love, romance and coupledness. As Eng writes:

The rhetoric of the loss of "fathers and mothers", "sons and daughters", and "brothers and sisters" attempts to trace the smooth alignment between the nation-state and the nuclear family, the symbolic of blood relations and nationalist domesticity. (2002: 90; qtd. in Ahmed 157)

This is exactly why Shivan could not mourn Mili's death as his lover, but had to pretend to be just a childhood friend, or else, he would have brought shame upon both his and Mili's family. Shivan's final decision to return to his ailing grandmother is to complete this act of mourning. Shivan realises he too has become one of those hungry *peréthayas*, whose eventual salvation lies in giving up on this happy comfortable life with Michael. The ghosts of the past have tainted the relationship and ruined it forever, and also brought upon Michael a terrible change. Shivan wonders:

My past has tainted Michael, changed him from the man who opened his door, his life, to me two years ago, wearing that ridiculous batik shirt to impress. He has become someone he does not recognize. And I, like that naked *peréthi*, will find release only by offering it to another, by putting another before myself. (HG 370)

Although a voice within him urges Shivan to turn back, he realises that as in the story of King Nandaka, ‘the road behind me has disappeared’ (HG 371). He can no longer afford to be an escapist, but fulfil his duty of releasing Mili, his grandmother and himself from this terrible existence of a *peréthi*.

The struggle to reconcile family and queerness with which *The Hungry Ghosts* begins and ends, does not really find a closure. The idea of a queer family still seems a fantastical ideal, a dream of sorts, which is constantly being threatened by traditional notions of home, romance, and family; on the other hand, many apparently normative families, pass on as normative, for having successfully hidden those queer lives that threaten to dismantle its foundation. *Bodies in Motion*, the novel I would examine next, sufficiently *queers* a family saga, calling into question notions of legitimate and illegitimate lives.

Bodies in Motion: Family Sagas and Hidden Queer Secrets

Chaya, a third generation Vallipuram, one of the two families that in *Bodies in Motion*, observes:

There were secrets in her family, things unspoken; it was the way things were, the way they had always been. But as she bent to lay roses on her father’s grave, Chaya made a silent promise to him – that she would do things differently now on. That she would tell her own story, at least, without hesitation. (BIM 227)

Peopled with an epic range of characters, *Bodies in Motion* is prefaced with two elaborate and complicated family trees which the reader has to go back to often in order to make sense of relationships. The novel reveals, as Chaya says, well kept family secrets “without hesitation”, offering an interesting investigation into queerness, not only in its representation of sexual deviancy but also in its portrayal of a range of non-heteronormative desires, which are not particularly homoerotic. The two expatriate Sri Lankan family’s journey from pre-colonial Ceylon to contemporary United States is a symbolic odyssey towards sexual freedom, facilitated through crossing of borders, disintegration of the hetero-patriarchal monogamous family, and discovery of new emotional territories in which traditional ideas of love and sexual desire could be abandoned without any moral compunction. Yet, what looms large over this saga which constantly shifts location is the shadow of the Sri Lankan nation-state and its basic unit, the family. Mohanraj’s family saga speaks back to a Sri Lankan model of family, togetherness and kinship, in which the national constantly seems to be challenged as

well as reinforced by transnational experiences. Mohanraj tells those stories which could never be comfortably “out there”, narratives which are cautiously hidden or glossed over, to preserve the hetero-patriarchal foundation of the nation-state and myths of homogeneity which are passed as incontrovertible.

Mohanraj was exposed to online erotic literature while in college, and was “startled to see how bad most of it was”, and thought, “Well, I can do better than this!” (Meet Mary Anne Mohanraj, 1) *Bodies in Motion*, a response to what she thought was ‘bad’ erotica, brings with it the disruptive potential of the genre to tell a family saga. The generic framework itself lends to the story of the Kandiahs and the Vallipurams a disturbing queerness that challenges normative ideas of the family, gender roles and sexuality. In her unabashed celebration of female sexuality, in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, Mohanraj debunks hetero-patriarchal assumptions about women, marriage, and mating and its deprecation of sex and sexuality. The diasporic space, in which the controlling gaze of the family is to some extent obscured, enables individuals a certain degree of freedom, in terms of making sexual choices in particular, a freedom which is unavailable in the homeland left behind (as evidenced by *The Hungry Ghosts*). Although concepts of acceptable behaviour, social or sexual, barely change even in the diaspora, individuals could still pursue a life of their choice, a life which can afford to elude authoritative control and disciplinary measures. Although any departure from heteronormative life is severely reprimanded, the possibility of being ‘found out’ is much lesser, for the diasporic space attributes to the migrant anonymity. The kind of family monitoring Arjie (*Funny Boy*) or Shivan and Mili (*The Hungry Ghosts*) fall prey to, could be, to a considerable extent, bypassed. Referring to their secret love affair, Sushila tells Mangai, in a remote village of Jaffna: “There’s no place for us out there. Just here in the kitchen, without words. Just you, me, and the cup full of water” (BIM 34). In the new homeland, in this case, the United States of America, a queer life need not be restricted within the confines of the kitchen, silently and secretively. There is a larger space available for the freedom of sexual expression, a space which, if not completely free of coercion, is nonetheless, less incarcerating.

In her queer narratives, Mohanraj seems to achieve what Gayatri Gopinath, referring to Joseph Roach’s study of Atlantic-rim performance culture, observes about queer diasporic cultural forms:

If, as Roach notes, “the relentless search for the purity of origins is a voyage not of discovery but of erasure”, queer diasporic cultural forms work against the violent effacements that produce the fictions of purity that lie at the heart of dominant nationalist and diasporic ideologies. (Gopinath 2005: 4)

In my analysis I will look into four stories which are extremely interesting studies of queer/female sexuality, the stories marking a circular journey from a remote Ceylonese village (1948) into a diasporic space and then back to contemporary Sri Lanka (2002) where much has not changed. All the characters are related by blood or marriage between families, and the four stories covering a span of fifty years while breaking the silence surrounding non-normative sexualities and sexual desires, also reveal how queer sexualities still remain a taboo and anti-family notwithstanding geographical location.

The first of these stories ‘Seven Cups of Water’ set in Jaffna, 1948, is a passionate tale of Mangai’s sexual relationship with her sister-in-law, Sushila. They develop an intense passion for each other the first day Sushila steps into the Vallipuram household. Mangai, plain looking and ‘unwomanly’, begins seeing in her the possibility of an alternative life. Although Sushila reciprocates to her sexual advances, she continues to give Mangai a reality check whenever she romanticises about the relationship. The fear which seems to haunt the two women is that their family might find out, which might lead to dire consequences for both: “I care for you, Mangai. But if they found us, they’d drag us back in shame. They might do worse. My friend – her husband died, and his family said she’d poisoned him...They burned her alive.” (BIM 34) Punishment would be severe in case they are caught, although Mangai, the more radical of the two, does not seem to care much. Yet, Sushila, despite herself, reminds Mangai the impossibility of sustaining the relationship, which has no place beyond the confines of the kitchen, hidden from the monitoring eye of the family. The family appears to be an alarming repressive apparatus in this narrative, which can go to any extent to ‘correct’ a sexual behaviour which is a taboo in two respects – it’s homoerotic as well as incestuous. What appears intriguing is how Mohanraj pits Sushila’s sexual relationship with her husband against her homoerotic leanings for Mangai, the former a more mechanical act for her as against the latter which ignites in her a fiery passion. She consoles Mangai that she is at least free – “They’re not even talking of arranging your marriage, yet” (BIM 35) – as against her own lifelong internment in a loveless marriage. Both Sushila and Mangai are made to compromise with a setup to which they do not belong, and let go of their passion, in order not to shame the family, and bring upon themselves unspeakable violence. Sushila

eventually leaves with her husband, while Mangai is left behind. It's 1948. The year Ceylon was officially declared independent. The very year, mentioned at the outset, acts as an ironical reminder of other registers of marginalisation and incarceration which constantly challenge this very idea of independence or freedom. *Bodies in Motion* returns to Mangai fifty years later in the concluding story "Monsoon Day". Despite the passage of five decades, what appears strange in the end is that how nothing much has changed in the homeland left behind.

From exploring homoerotic desires in the kitchen in a remote village of Jaffna, the narrative moves to Chicago in 1966 ("Pieces of the Heart"), when same-sex love is still a taboo, and can be explored only in private, away from the gaze of society. Leilani, a second generation Sri Lankan in America, finds in her roommate Sue an uninhibited sexual partner, with an "exciting", "oddly irreverent streak" in her (BIM 91). Her meeting with Sue and the sexual relationship that follows function as self-revelation for Leilani. Although her first sexual experience had been with a boy, Leilani, who always aligned herself with Rama while listening to the stories from the *Ramayana*, did not understand, till she met Sue, why she wasn't like the other girls: 'I usually ended up running with the boys, playing soccer in the far end of the blacktop. I ran fast, faster than all the girls and most of the boys' (BIM 94). Her mother, Shanthi, is deeply disconcerted by her 'unfeminine' ways and physical features: her unwillingness to grow her hair, her interest in sports, her bulging biceps. Mother and daughter often break into terrible fights with each other, as Leilani resists being dragged into marriage with an eligible Sri Lankan boy. Leilani, non-conforming and radical, refuses to yield, but cannot speak out the truth that she has had many lovers, mostly women. Unlike Mangai, confined in the Jaffna kitchen, Leilani has more freedom in the new country, which does offer alternative ways of life, no matter how much those are moralised against by traditionalists. Leilani seems to agree with her father: 'Appa loved America...This was a good country, Appa said. Full of decent, hardworking people. And even if white Americans were a little distrustful of foreigners, that was to be expected.' (BIM 93) A little compromise with the white American's racial prejudice is perhaps nothing in comparison to the freedom it offers. Interestingly, however, as her mother and sisters uphold for her the virtue of being a good wife to a worthy husband, the necessity of getting married, Leilani becomes privy to a secret accidentally, a secret which she would keep to herself all her life. It is perhaps this secret which changes her perspective on marriage, love and family – all that are celebrated as sacrosanct.

Long before she actually comes to realise her sexuality, Leilani chances upon her father in a compromising position with a white woman in his office. Father and daughter never discuss this, but they develop a strong bond between each other in the coming years. Leilani keeps this secret to herself all her life, and as a mark of gratitude her father remains her lifelong friend, defending her against the family's interference into her private life. For Leilani, the romanticism associated with monogamous coupledom crumples early in life, but that only assists her to live a life of her own choice. As she discovers her sexuality in intimate moments with Sue, she moves further away from the constricting norms of the family. An ardent admirer of adventure tales, in an orgasmic moment with Sue, she asks herself: 'Was this the adventure I'd been searching for? I was holding very still. I was flying.' (BIM 104) Eighteen years after Mangai and Sushila meet, fall in love, and are forcefully separated, Leilani discovers a sexual freedom, unavailable to the former pair. Although the transnational space of an American city liberates her, Leilani continues to occupy a marginal status within the Sri Lankan family, which looks upon her with pity or abhorrence. Queerness and family still appear irreconcilable.

Queerness and family still remain irreconcilable thirty two years later, when the narrative moves to 1998. "Challah", set in Philadelphia, tells the story of a young medical practitioner Roshan, another member of the Vallipuram family like Mangai. Roshan is pitted against Gabriel, a Jewish boy, who 'had come out in high school, so long ago' (BIM 205), for he had grown tired of lying about his interest in men. But Roshan, who he falls in love with, is still closeted, and Roshan hesitatingly tells him to guard his secret – "I am not...out. At the hospital. Or – at all, really." (BIM 205) Interestingly, the love story between Gabriel and Roshan unfolds against the backdrop of the heteronormative family: while Gabriel finds a confidant in an understanding mother, Roshan tries to physically move away from his family as much as possible. When Gabriel asks him whether he liked San Francisco where he worked previously, Roshan says: "I liked it very much...But it was too close to my parents." (BIM 203) Yet despite the physical distance from his parents, Roshan fails to abandon them emotionally; and perhaps to 'respect' their idea of a dutiful son, he adopts a strategy to invisibilise his sexuality. Gabriel, who has been blessed with a sympathetic mother, is deeply agonised when Roshan reveals to him that he is married. Gabriel feels cheated, feels that he has committed a terrible sin against Roshan's wife, who is presumably unaware of her husband's sexual escapades. When he is almost ready to give up on Roshan, the latter produces a note, which leaves Gabriel flabbergasted. Roshan is married, had indeed

undergone an arranged marriage, like many Sri Lankan men in America; but Gabriel has not probably heard of a more *queer* marriage that was ever arranged. The note which Roshan leaves is actually an advertisement:

Sri Lankan female, straight but not into serious relationships, looking for gay South Asian male for sham marriage. Let's make our parents happy. You know you want to.

--- shefali@upenn.edu

While Roshan's strategy becomes clear to Gabriel, what this note reveals is how queerness can only be accommodated within the heteronormative family as long as it is sufficiently invisible. It's a secret, which might be revealed to a more accepting world outside, but not to the family. In *Bodies in Motion*, while many other family secrets are known to the family members and are well-guarded from strangers or younger members of the family, queerness, it seems, is so strategically invisibilised that it does not even get the status of a family secret, a secret that is collectively guarded. It needs to be kept from the family, by any means. In comparison, the new homeland opens up a freer space for queer individuals to have an alternative life of their own. It is the kind of life Alan Sinfield identifies as the survival strategy available to diasporic queer individuals:

...most of us are born and/or socialized into (presumably) heterosexual families. We have to move away from them, at least to some degree; and *into*, if we are lucky, the culture of a minority community. (2000:103)

Roshan's movement away from the family is both literal and symbolic; he does not completely abandon them, yet carves out for himself an alternative space, into which the family cannot interfere. What appears strange is that nothing much has changed since Balendran in *Cinnamon Gardens* (set in 1920s Ceylon) makes a terrible compromise with his life at the behest of a despotic father, some 70 years back. Even in 1998, Philadelphia, Roshan has to work out a strategy to circumvent parental disconcertment regarding his sexuality. Both Balendran and Roshan are forced to live a double life, indulge in an elaborate lie, to reconcile their *difference* with the family's normative expectations.

While the queer Sri Lankans in the diaspora at least discover a comparatively accepting environment to articulate their sexuality, nothing has actually changed at home. *Bodies in Motion* embarks on a journey back to Sri Lanka, ending with Mangai, about whom nothing is heard since her sister-in-law left Jaffna to be with her husband in 1948. 'Monsoon Day' set in

Colombo, 2002, turns to the 71 year old woman, who has completely segregated herself from the family. Her life seems to be paradigmatic of what Bulter calls a ‘precarious life’.

Mangai is perhaps the queerest character in *Bodies in Motion*, the quintessential ‘strange’ woman, who is now a part of the folklore along the seaside. Mangai fishes to make a living, is always clad in ‘widow’s white’ (BIM 268), and has channelised all her passion into cooking. In fact, her cooking too has gained legendary fame within the fishing community and whenever Mangai cooks, mothers instruct their daughters: “Mangai Aunty is cooking. Go. Watch.” (BIM 268) When she was young, Mangai was often rebuked for being clumsy with her cooking. Her mother was particularly abusive: ‘Her mother would come and pinch the extra flesh on her arm, hard, when she did not slice thinly enough. Punishing her for two sins at once – for being too clumsy, too fat. Probably for being too dark as well, though Mangai could truly do nothing about it.’ (BIM 269) Mangai was always different. Fifty-four years back, on the night of her brother Sundar’s wedding, she joined the other girls in dancing. But she danced just for herself, while her companions had other intentions:

My sisters’ friends giggled and preened as they danced, flashing dark eyes and slim brown bellies at the young men who lounged by the door, drinking. I just danced; I had no interest in catching a man. Not that any would have spared a glance for me, too-short, too-plump Mangai with her coarse hair and flat chest. I danced for myself, not for them. (BIM 24-25)

Mangai’s sexuality has never been known. At least not in 1948, the time of the wedding. But she was already rejected for her looks: she was never feminine or graceful enough to be proudly peddled in the marriage market, and therefore, a disgrace to the family. It’s not made clear whether Mangai finds someone at all, other than that brief clandestine stint with Sushila in the kitchen. All that is known of her, and is sometimes a part of the neighbourhood gossip on the Colombo seashore, is that: she is someone ‘who had lived with her servant, Daya, for decades, in a house with only one bed.’ (BIM 273) Nobody is sure about their relationship, but Mangai, by the very choice of her life, by the sea and making a living through fishing, has turned into an *object* of curiosity. Mangai does not really leave the country of her birth, like her brothers and sisters; but she becomes a stranger in her own homeland. Mangai leaves her childhood home, unable to bear a raging mother, and settles on the seaside in a house she buys with her father’s money. Hers is an exemplary condition of queer migration, although actual border crossing does not take place. As Fortier observes:

Not only are queers forced to leave, but their entitlement to ‘home’ is questioned because of the irreconcilability of being queer and being ‘home’, insofar as ‘home’ is a function of heterosexuality. (3)

Yet, setting up of a new household does not ensure complete freedom from the oppressive space left behind. At least not for Mangai. As Fortier notes: Page | 259

The movement away from home-as-origins becomes a vector for producing ‘queerness’ as an original stranger, who is always already not-at-home in the childhood home; becoming a ‘stranger’ is not a result of leaving home, but, rather, was the cause of leaving home. This conception suggests a double-life model, where being queer and being ‘at home with the family’ are kept separate. (4)

In the case of Mangai, this migration is not really a homecoming to a more queer-positive space. For, she is never free of the reprimanding gaze of the people around her. Perhaps, it would have been easier for her to be herself, like Leilani for example, had it not been Sri Lanka. She remains the quintessential ‘other’, whose *difference* is irreconcilable to normative registers of life. Yet, her triumph lies in carving out for herself a room of her own, which can, at any time, shut the door on the world.

The liberalisation of the economy, the various forces that keep challenging territorialist exclusivity of the nation, and the worldwide movement in favour of granting right to life to LGBTIQ people seem to open up greater possibilities of reconciling queerness with the heteronormative family. In the Sri Lankan novels discussed in this chapter, queer individuals, such as Arjie, Amrith, Shivan, Roshan or Leilani seem to have come a long way from Bala’s tragic predicament. Although assimilation within the family still seems impossible, other models of kinship, debunking hetero-patriarchal ideas of love, romance and coupledness, are being formed. These kinship models or communities formed on the basis of sexual identities are new affective units which stand in for biological families in moments of crisis, happiness or death. Although these communities are fraught with divisive forces of race, ethnicity, class and caste, they wield the power to defy the pre-eminence of the heteronormative family, founded on blood relations, and change notions of legitimate and illegitimate lives.

Within the diaspora, which allows more sexual freedom, the possibility of reaching out and getting accepted within these alternative kinship models is higher than in Sri Lanka, where queer lives are still treated as illegitimate. These communities or kinship setups, virtual or real, function as a ‘third space’ which is separate from the home and the workplace (Oldenburg 1991; quoted in Sahani). What is noteworthy is the biological family is no longer as indispensable as it seemed earlier to the queer individual, for whom, a third ‘affective’ space has opened up. The radical queer, one who disrupts all forms of normative assumptions of love, sex and life itself, or the assimilative queer, who is comfortable in replicating heteronormative models, both debunk the traditional idea of the family, whose primary function is reproduction of life, as well as, reproduction of culture. As Ahmed says:

Even when queer families may wish to be recognised as “families like other families”, their difference from the ideal script produces disturbances – the moment of “non-sinking” – that will require active norms of negotiation in different times and places. (153)

In Sri Lanka queerness and family are even more difficult to reconcile, for same sex desires are still looked upon as sinful, something to be ashamed of. The State too is formidably opposed to the idea of legitimising sexual desires and lives which do not kowtow to normative ideas of love, sex and coupledness. The interminably long civil war, between the two dominant ethnic communities, the Sinhalese and the Tamil, has further shrunken the democratic space in which sexual minorities could come out and demand their rights. Queer people are, reportedly, leaving the country to seek asylum in queer-positive countries, while many have been forced to immigrate, because of destructive riots and pogroms that continued to claim innumerable lives for many years.

Both Selvadurai and Mohanraj, the Sri Lankan expatriate writers I have discussed in this chapter, locate same-sex desires within this volatile political situation at home. Not only that, both of them, stress the other kinds of difficulties of negotiating one’s queerness with the Sri Lankan family given its obsession with class, caste, and ethnic purity in matters of friendship, marriage or any form of socialisation. Besides, the Sri Lankan family’s completely non-negotiable hetero-patriarchal model, either at home or abroad, is another major obstacle to assertion of one’s sexual choice. However, both Selvadurai and Mohanraj attribute to most of their queer characters a self-determination which is strong enough to confront the family and its pathological homophobia. None of them yield to the dictates of the biological family, and,

in some way or the other, discover survival strategies. While some, such as Mangai, physically distance themselves from the family, others, such as Roshan, deceive the family by turning to his own advantage its repetitive emphasis on the importance of marriage. Still others such as Shivan are constantly haunted by a homing desire and are determined to find a place within the childhood home, while others, such as Amrith, choose to remain in the closet till times are favourable for self-assertion. What is, however, important to note is that very few of the characters (except for Shivan perhaps) actually ‘come out’ to family members. Although Arjie and Amrith are too young to comprehend the political implication of the act of ‘coming out’, Roshan or Leilani, who are mature enough, also do not perform the act. Rather they strategically invisibilise their queerness in order not to alienate the family. What becomes evident is the impossibility of abandoning the family altogether, despite its repressive nature. While queer radicals would call that a political failure, perhaps, such abandonment would lead to other forms of identity crises. More importantly, if, according to Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, the word family *needs* to be treated ‘more as an adjective or, possibly, a verb’, a practice, a doing word, a word for doing (2001: 37), then, queer could also be treated as such. There could be several ways of *doing* queerness or being queer, vis-à-vis *doing* the family, a site of affective bonds which might be difficult to cede.

Chapter 5

Ageing Parents, Grandparents and Other Older Kin: Ageism and the Family

We're supposed to deny being old; it is seen as an insulting, or at least unwelcome, self-description, unless jocular and well padded with euphemisms: senior citizen, oldie.

----- Elaine Showalter (2013)

Ageing and Ageism: Social and cultural constructions

The term ageism, connoting negative stereotyping of old age, was coined by Robert N. Butler in 1968, and in 1969, the word entered the Oxford English Dictionary. Butler described ageism or discrimination against older people, as analogous to racist and sexist prejudices:

Ageism can be seen as a systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender . . . I see ageism manifested in a wide range of phenomena, on both individual and institutional levels—stereotypes and myths, outright disdain and dislike, simple subtle avoidance of contact, and discriminatory practices in housing, employment, and services of all kinds. (qtd. in Butler 1989: 139)

Chairmaine Spencer (2009) echoes Butler:

Like racism and sexism, [ageism] is a form of prejudice or prejudgment, and a form of oppression. It limits the lives of older people who are the object of this oppression; it also shapes perceptions of young and old. Both young and old can hold ageist attitudes. Ageism can contribute to apathy towards the ill treatment of older people and tolerance of activities which would be unacceptable for other age groups. (11)

Making a transition from the discourse of 'queer' marginality within the family (Chapter 4) to that of ageing and ageism reveals the complexity of another form of power politics which govern familial spaces – the hierarchical relationship between older and younger generations.

To quote Holstein (2006): ‘Old age is not a status we choose to become; it is a status that we inherit simply by the virtue of living, not dying’ (317). Ageism, as Butler (1975) observes, is non-normative, vis-à-vis youth, since society is largely structured on the assumption that the majority is not old. This is perhaps most unequivocally manifested in the manner in which nationalist imaginaries of South Asia envisage the nation: the figure of the woman, central to nationalist and reformist discourses has been imagined as young, either as the wife or the mother – both possessing youthful bodies able to reproduce and regenerate the nation, in the form of a large number of male offspring (See Raja 2004). In Sri Lanka, during the civil war, the lactating mother, breast-feeding her son, a prospective soldier, became the face of ethno-nationalist discourses endorsing the war (as discussed in Chapter 3). Within nationalist imaginaries, therefore, the ‘motherland’ has always been pictured as young, whereby the ageing, post-menopause body prone to decay and disease has been completely eliminated.

Ageing is a social construct (Green 1993; Katz 1996), notwithstanding its biological inevitability – the fact that it is an inescapable part of life. Just as the ‘homosexual’ emerged as a pathological category in the late 19th century, the ageing body too acquired a negative signification, when 19th century science ‘reconceptualized death as an internal phenomenon of the body’ (Vincent 2006: 682). Vincent roots his argument in Foucault (1973) who observes:

The aged body became reduced to a state of degeneration where the meanings of old age and the body's deterioration seemed condemned to signify each other in perpetuity. By recreating death as a phenomenon in life, rather than of life, medical research on aging became separate from the earlier treatises that focus on the promise of longevity. (41)

Vincent moves on to examine how bio-gerontology as a scientific discipline has time and again constructed ageing as undesirable. Critiquing bio-gerontology's preoccupation with discovering anti-ageing medicines to postpone old age, Vincent makes an interesting point:

Constructed, even from an implicit perspective that science will cure death, old age becomes an unnecessary burden; it is a result of an unnecessary failure technically to control a biological process. Immortality sees the boundary between old age and death removed, leaving the boundary between youth and old age problematic. (2006: 692)

The negative stereotyping of ageing is also apparent in social prescriptions regarding how one is *supposed* to age. If masculinity and femininity are both defined by certain behavioural codes, there is also a normative way of ageing, especially in South Asian countries. Just as certain forms of gendered behaviour are regarded as unbecoming of men or women, the ageing individual, irrespective of gender, is expected to adhere to a set of performative codes in order not to violate norms of respectability. For instance, ageing is often associated with austerity, detachment from materialistic pursuits and renunciation, and any digression from this norm is often frowned upon. Both Hindu and Buddhist theological and social texts dictate renunciation and detachment as an obligatory duty of ageing individuals. This diktat is further reinforced by associating ageing with disease, decay, senility and death. In fact, the ageing body, just like the queer body which is unable to reproduce life, is often marginalised as unwanted or redundant to the family. It is, therefore, not surprising that bio-medical discourses of ageing have dominated the disciplinary development of gerontology (see Katz 1996).

Across cultures, representation of ageing is predominantly negative: from poets of every generation lamenting the temporality of youth and inevitability of bodily decay to a large spectrum of anti-ageing creams inundating the market continue to construct ageing as undesirable. Elaine Showalter (2013) in her introduction to Lynne Segal's book *Out of Time* brings out the undesirability of ageing through a striking analogy between ageing, obesity and queerness:

Like being fat, being old also has its own kind of secret closet. The late literary critic and gay theorist Eve Sedgwick gave a famous conference talk in which she came out as fat, and described her fat dream of entering a closet full of luscious clothes, all in her size, and then seeing that their label was a pink triangle... There are a hundred ways to deny, defy, or avoid the fact of ageing, from strenuous exercise and cosmetic surgery to relentless workaholism and maniacal activity. For some, there's the philosophy of agelessness, which Catherine Mayer calls "amortality" or "living agelessly". Recent polls and that most adults over fifty feel at least ten years younger, while those over sixty-five feel twenty years younger. (1)

In most cases, the debilitating body becomes the marker of powerlessness, and the ageing individual is frequently pitted against the younger members of the family; the ageing parent

or grandparent is commonly looked upon as a dependent, automatically establishing the younger kin he or she is dependent upon, as the more powerful. The idea of active or productive ageing is rarely celebrated in South Asia. In fact, the United Nations mark out increasing ageing population of the world as a severe ‘crisis’ – ‘The premise is that old persons cost money rather than produce income, and need care rather than provide care’ (Lamb 2009: 7). Within capitalist economic structures, older people are, therefore, less valued, compared to the younger generation. The youth are cultural agents or agents of change (See Dolby and Rizvi 2008), much more well-equipped to contribute to the market meaningfully, than older people. While reviewing literature of the research works on age and agency, Sarah Lamb (2009) is surprised to find nothing actually exists, suggesting age has no agency at all:

[S]earches in AnthroSource, Amazon.com, and library databases for “elder agency,” “senior agency,” “old people AND agency,” or “senior culture,” “elder culture,” etc., do not turn up anything—as if to join “elder” or “old people” with “agency” is an oxymoron. (16)

The ageing population is undesirable within the capitalist economy unless they are profitably integrated within it as potential consumers of professional care-giving, organisations encouraging more fruitful ways of ageing or even of the medicine industry.

Ageing and Power

Within South Asian joint families, elderly people also often enjoy positions of power, as heads of the household or as sources of wisdom, notwithstanding how often they are marginalised or left out. An elderly hegemonic patriarch or a tyrannical matriarch is often met with in South Asian fiction, exercising absolute control over the family, fiercely preserving tradition and resisting change. The nature of relationship ageing individuals share with younger people within familial spaces is usually twofold: one, as subordinates to the younger generation, or as absolute voices of authority oppressing the young. Therefore, ageing within South Asian joint families does not always mean complete loss of power or gross victimisation. Although in discourses of ageism, elderly people are most often perceived as victims and ageing is seen as aberration with respect to the more ‘valued group’ of younger people, it is not always the younger generation that ‘others’ the elderly. The latter

also often dismisses the youth as frivolous, inexperienced, irresponsible and morally depraved. An informant in Sarah Lamb's (2009) ethnographic research on ageing within the South Asian diaspora, for instance, reflected on the terrible situation in Indian joint families: "Elders sometimes had *too* much power," Gayatri reflected. "They were absolute dictators. They could be just and benevolent but not necessarily so" (emphasis in the original; 37).

The antipathy of the elderly towards the younger generation could be as ruthless as the younger generation's aversion for the aged. Lynne Segal brings another perspective to this mutual hostility:

Forging their own pathways, the young have always eyed with suspicion the generation preceding them. Nowadays, this suspicion may well be of the privileges or status acquired mid-life by professional men and women, or perhaps it is a hostility to what is seen as older people's attachment to yesterday's orthodoxies, or simply, and emphatically, a suspicion of the old as Other, and all that might suggest about the losses and difficulties of ageing. Meanwhile... the old have often expressed resentment, even fear, of the young, perhaps seeing in them not just the threat of redundancy, but also the source of feelings of shame, embarrassment and more, in a world that nowadays begins to eject them from its continuous recycling of the new early on. (2013: n. pag.)

But the other facet of ageing, the predilection on the part of elderly people to take advantage of their age in controlling, othering and tyrannising the youth is barely reflected upon. Since age is often associated with wisdom, knowledge and experience, elderly people, by the virtue of getting on in years, are empowered to a certain degree. To quote G. S. Hall:

Unquestionably too, there is a certain maturity of judgement, about men, things, causes and life generally that nothing in the world but years can bring, a real wisdom that only age can teach. (1922: 402)

Wisdom of the aged is indeed often sought in times of crisis, as is the practice in many cultures. One is reminded of Greek classification of elderly people – 'the "geronte"- the ridiculous old person with cognitive and other declines and the "presbyte"- the wise old

person rich in experience and wisdom'⁵² (qtd. in Spencer 2009: 11). Writing about the socio-economic implications of ageing in Sri Lanka, K. A. P. Siddhisena (2004) in one of his working papers in Oxford Institute of Ageing observes:

...the elderly are wiser and have had considerable life experience to tackle the family issues. Thus they are consulted whenever the important family decisions need to be taken especially in rural areas. Hence, in traditional Sri Lankan family, the grandparents are still highly respected and they are also consulted when important family events take place (e.g. in the marriages of grand children, ceremony of the puberty of granddaughters etc.) (22)

In addition to that, it is considered to be the *dhamma* of the younger generation to respect and revere anyone who is older in age: younger siblings must respect older siblings; sons and daughters must respect parents and grandparents, and so on. In South Asian family setups, older people, therefore, often hold a very important position, which does not fit into the victimhood narratives that dominate discourses of ageing and ageism across the globe. Conversely, as we shall see in the analysis of the novels, the wisdom of the elderly is also often dismissed as redundant, obsolete and even idiosyncratic. Rapid nuclearisation of families is one of the reasons behind the alienation of the older people and their redundancy.

Old Age Homes, Degeneration of Values and Affective Capital and Labour

Since in South Asia the concept of old age homes and care clinics is still to catch up with the average citizen, the latter often takes upon herself the responsibility of looking after elderly parents, grandparents or some other older blood relations, ailing or otherwise, out of a deep sense of duty (*dhamma*), ethics, and even obligation. Relegating an ageing parent or a grandparent to an old age home is endlessly sentimentalised on and is often reprimanded for it entails flouting of *dhamma* or duty on part of the children, no matter how much more beneficial such an arrangement might prove to be. Kaluthantiri (2014), reflecting on the changing structure of the family in Sri Lanka, writes: 'Like many developing countries in Asia, the family in Sri Lanka has been the main institution of caring for the aged' (2). Interestingly, Lamb (2009) wonders whether old age homes, often called *ashram* in the

⁵² Original Source: Robert Moulias, [Espace Ethique AP-H Paris (Paris, France)] (2009). The ethical need for a semantic consensus on a good use of the good words in gerontology. Presentation IAGG. Conference Paris, France.

subcontinent, could be a modern alternative to *vanaprastha* and *sannyas* – ‘in which persons purposefully leave their households of reproduction on a path of late-life spiritual cultivation’ (12). But, old age homes are, ironically, seen as against South Asian family culture. The Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena, on the occasion of the International Day for Older Persons (1 October 2015), condemned the practice of dumping ageing parents and grandparents in old age homes. Speaking from a moral high ground, Sirisena identified urbanisation as one of the major causes behind such predicament of ageing citizens:

Urbanization taking place in this present world has posed a serious challenge to the survival of the role of the elder. In many households today, the elderly persons are kept in elders homes, while the children spend their restless lives as machines in their homes. (n. pag)

However, interestingly, in the Protection of the Right of Elders Act, 2000 and 2011 in Sri Lanka there is a mention of the importance of training professional care-givers as there is a mounting demand for them in Sri Lankan society:

In Sri Lanka there is a great demand for caregivers to look after the frail elders. The Secretariat initiated the care-givers programme with the aim of meeting this growing need. Suitable persons to be trained as care-givers are selected by the divisional secretaries. Three-week training programmes are conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. (51)

Yet, the moral bind of the children as care-givers is endlessly sentimentalised on. The novels, I shall be looking at in this chapter, are mostly set in extended families, not in nuclear families; for in South Asian countries, notwithstanding whether blood relations stay under the same roof, the responsibility of taking care of the older generation falls on the younger kin, sons, daughters or grandchildren (as it happens in V. V. Ganeshanathan’s *Love Marriage*). The compulsion to look after ageing parents or grandparents is never recognised as labour, although in the parent-child/grandparent-grandchild relationship, the idea of paying back debts informs this apparently affective duty. Parents or grandparents can rightfully capitalise on their investment in the upbringing of children in later life (See the analysis of *The Hungry Ghosts* below). Sarah Lamb writes:

In a joint family system, old age itself is essentially a family matter, and adult children, in particular sons and daughters-in-law, live with and care for their aging parents—out of love, a deep respect for elders, and a profound sense of moral, even spiritual, duty to attempt to repay the inerasable debts they owe their parents for all the effort, expense and affection the parents expended to produce and raise them. (2009:32)

The complexity this relationship in South Asian cultures is underpinned by the juxtaposition of the terms ‘expense’ and ‘affection’ in the above extract from Lamb. Simply providing for ageing parents is not sufficient; maintaining emotional ties and sharing the same affective space with them is also integral to the children’s *dhamma*. One of the provisions topping the list in the Protection of the Right of Elders Act, 2000 and 2011 in Sri Lanka is this:

*Children shall not neglect their parents willfully and it shall be the duty and responsibility of children to provide care for, and to look into the needs of their parents.*⁵³

Conversely, ageing parents with money and property often blackmail non-conforming children threatening to disown them (as it happens in Shyam Selvadurai’s *Cinnamon Gardens*), or earn reverence and attention of children more easily, for the latter often dutifully perform their *dhamma* with one eye on the parents’ property and wealth. Lamb (2009) observes:

Descendants are supposed to serve and provide for their elders in exchange for sacrifices their elders have already made for them. That is, elders have already earned the right to be served by their juniors, because of their tremendous earlier gifts. However, it is widely recognized that, in practice, even in the past, the expectation of an inheritance frequently serves and served as a major motivator of filial service. (34)

The Language of Gerontology: A Linguistic Trap?

In his path-breaking work, *No Aging in India* (1999), the medical anthropologist, Lawrence Cohen writes that studies on old age always originate with the assumption that it is a

⁵³ Protection of Rights of Elders Act, No 9 of 2000, Part 11, Article 15, section(1)

‘problem’. But strangely, it is only ‘assumed, not demonstrated.’ As a result ‘the language of gerontology is alarmist, almost apocalyptic’ (87). The oppression of older people can be gleaned from the very language in which they are described (such as ‘old’, ‘aged’, ‘elderly’, ‘seniors’, etc.). It is by default paternalistic, as is the practice of romanticising old age as second childhood. These terms connoting frailty, weakness, disability, decline in physical health and cognitive potential are unavoidable; but they constitute a linguistic trap. They allow ‘older people to be treated as property, possessions or objects, not as individuals’ (Spencer 2009: 11). It is extremely difficult to evade these terms; yet, modern scholarship on ageing is trying its best to approximate a more neutral language. Instead of ‘old people’ and ‘old age’, modern scholars prefer ‘older people’ and ‘later life’:

Terms such as “old people,” “old age,” and “elderly” have been replaced by neutral language intentionally meant to avoid the sense of “old.” In the face of concerns about ageism, the field of gerontology has, ironically, become rather ageless. We now speak of “older people” and “later life.” This reflects a growing sense that age is something that can be defied or transcended, and the accompanying emphasis among gerontologists and in our society on successful aging and positive images of aging. (Settersten Jr. and Angel 2011: 8)

However, a contrary view to replacing ‘old’ with ‘older’ is often met with in ageism studies. Toni Calasanti (2003) writes:

While ‘old’ is socially constructed, reified and stigmatized, as are many other terms for oppressed groups, using the term ‘older’ conveys that the old are more acceptable if we think of them as more like the middle-aged. In much the same way that many would find it ludicrous to refer to Blacks as ‘darker’ and instead recognize the efforts to reclaim the word ‘Black’ and imbue it with dignity, so too I use ‘old’ to recover and instil the term with positive valuation. (16)

In my opinion, ‘older’ is a more useful term, because, ageing, as the suffix ‘-ing’ signifies, is a continuous process, and therefore, age is always relative: parents are older than children, grandparents are older than parents, and brothers and sisters are also related to each other in terms of age. Automatically, notwithstanding the real age of individuals, a hierarchy is

established on the basis of relative age. From this perspective, the relative adjective ‘older’ makes more sense.

However, the controversy over the political correctness in the use of language in ageing discourses is beset with the paradox of the social and cultural construction of ageing itself. While there is a necessity to accept ageing as inevitable, nothing to feel ashamed or scared of, the common lingo of encouragement used to egg on ageing individuals actually end up projecting ageing as undesirable, emphasising on the need to defer it as much as possible. Segal makes an interesting point: “‘You are only as old as you feel’”, though routinely offered as a jolly form of reassurance, carries its own disavowal of old age’ (2013: n. pag). On the International Day of Older Persons celebrated in Sri Lanka on 1 October 2015, the presentations at the FPA seminar included papers entitled, “Ageing with Pleasure” and “Are you Happy?”⁵⁴, operating on the apparently positive endeavour of dissociating old age from discontent, the assumption being that old age is typically distressful and unhappy. Ironically, in an attempt to eliminate the stigma associated with ageing, it is all the more stigmatised in the garb of affirmative rhetoric.

No Age for Ageing: Ageing as Personal Experience

Another important concern in gerontology is to determine an age, beyond which an individual may be granted ‘senior citizenship’ officially (or in other words, officially declared ‘old’). The determination of this official age, or, an age from which ageing may possibly commence, is contingent upon place and its socio-economic conditions. Siddhisena (2005) writes:

The definition of ageing itself is arbitrary...The widely used cut-off point of 65 was decided as the age of benefit in the first public social security legislation in Germany in 1873 and perpetuated in the retirement regulations of other countries. Generally, in most of the developing world age 60 and above is considered as the cut off for ageing. In Sri Lanka, age 60 and above is considered the demarcation age in identifying the elderly population, since the most common mandatory retirement age in the public, private as well as the corporate sectors falls between ages 55 and 60 respectively, with an extension perhaps of up to 5 years. Nevertheless, in the agricultural sector and in the informal private sector in Sri Lanka, people continue to work even beyond 60

⁵⁴ http://www.fpasrilanka.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=271:fpa-sri-lanka-celebrates-international-day-of-older-persons-at-chinthana-training-centre&catid=99&Itemid=849&lang=en

years of age as far as they are physically fit to engage economic activities. A few autonomous organizations like the Universities of Sri Lanka are allowed to continue up to age 65 for academics, and even beyond this age limit if they work actively in several private and NGO services. Thus it is intricate to rationalize a single chronological age for commencement of ageing in Sri Lanka. (3)

In this delineation of ageing what is conspicuously missing is the whole population of ageing people who are not part of the workforce. For instance, what could be the chronological age for initiation of ageing for a homemaker who never had any access to the public domain? In her case, the time of commencement of ageing is even more arbitrary, depending on several factors related to the changing structure of the family and power relations. She might end up feeling 'aged' quite early on in life, if, for example, she had married young, and had children. Ageism, in fact, might have nothing to do with biological ageing per se, for different age groups experience different kinds of discrimination. For instance, within South Asian families, it is a common practice to discriminate single women even in their twenties as too old to settle down and is often abused or pitied (as it happens with Annalukshmi in *Cinnamon Gardens*). A bio-medical discourse enlisting the difficulties women above thirty might undergo in attempting to conceive is often alluded to, in which age and sexuality are related in an extremely prejudiced manner. In this case, the model of chronological ageing cannot be fully applied – 'In fact, old age is not an empirical fact; it is a personal definition of old which affects people's behaviour' (VanHilst 1976: 13). Therefore, gerontology has identified four different ways in which ageing needs to be viewed – chronological, biological, psychological and social. The last is the most indeterminate and the most complex, for the idea of social ageing varies from one place to another, and is conditioned by class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, physical fitness, cognitive abilities and even marital or relationship status – single, married, partnered or widowed. More so in Sri Lanka, mostly because of a long civil war, moral and political subjugation of female citizens, criminalisation of homosexuality, and pathological class consciousness and ethnic puritanism.

Sri Lanka: An ageing nation?

Since the birth of a nation, especially those colonised by Europe, is usually traced back to the date of official decolonisation, Sri Lanka is indeed ageing now. This symbolic ageing, one may contend, also garners a shift in the national imaginary, within which the figure of the woman (within childbearing age) has always been central. The question one may ask is

whether the metaphorical and literal confinement of the woman, especially the middle class woman of contemporary Sri Lanka, within the precincts of the home, as repository of tradition and culture, is possible anymore. In fact, with the changing economy, especially, the opening of the market, entry of middle class women into the workforce, participation of women in war and migration, the home and the family has undergone remarkable changes. The binary opposition of *ghar/bahir* has been irredeemably destabilised, in the process of which a ‘newer’ woman has emerged – the newer woman being characteristically indistinguishable from her countertype in the nationalist imaginary. Writing about this new age South Asian woman, Ira Raja (2004) observes:

This process makes her unavailable for the purposes of signifying the nation, and necessitates her displacement by the old parent within the family as the chief signifier of the nation’s meaning. But, I suggest, even as the discursive category of age is pressed into service by the hegemonic narratives of the nation, the actual inscription of age in fiction is more disruptive than preserving of nationalist paradigms of authenticity. (26)

Lamb (2009) corroborates this view: ‘As the roles of women are shifting, anxieties over maintaining “core Indian values” in the home are placed increasingly onto old people and intergenerational relations’ (50). With the appearance of this ‘newer’ woman, intergenerational conflict has been further aggravated, given that older people, still abiding by tradition, often feel uncomfortable in accepting this more liberated woman, a working daughter or a daughter-in-law, who no longer can completely devote herself to the family or act as full-time caregiver to the elderly. In most of the novels, I shall be analysing, older characters are confronted with a challenge to accommodate themselves within the changing structure and dynamics of the family and kinship ties, and ideas of sexual liberation which are undergoing gradual but significant transformations since the arrival of colonial modernity in Ceylon. Intergenerational antagonism is an integral part of the plots.

In an anthology *Unmaking the Nation* first published in 1995, and revised in 2009, the year in which the war officially ended, Sri Lankan anthropologist Pradeep Jeganathan and literary and cultural critic Qadri Ismail ideologically distance themselves from an older generation of ‘third world intellectuals’ inspired by Frantz Fanon who in *The Wretched of the Earth* called

for unifying the nation, the newly decolonised one, 'creating it from scratch'. Declaring themselves as belonging to a different 'generation', the editors rather vehemently assert – 'Our project is different. We suspect the nation' (2009: 11). The idea of Sri Lanka as an ageing nation cannot be fully appreciated without reflecting on this ideological break from an earlier 'generation' of nationalists who had rather homogenously imagined the nation, a hetero-patriarchal elitist, ethno-centric project that has always 'suppressed its women, its non-bourgeois classes and its minorities' (2009:12). Having experienced the perils of an apparently never-ending civil war, the new age Sri Lankan thinkers revisit the idea of the nation with the belief that 'the inclusive pretences of the nation must be exposed, that not just its inadequacies but its very superfluity must be called into question; it is in this spirit, that we join the ongoing debate on the nation' (2009:12). The conflict between an ageing generation and a younger generation of intellectuals, as summarised by Jeganathan and Ismail, is exactly the kind of conflict – ideological, ideational, and political – that one encounters in the Sri Lankan English novels. Although one major shortcoming of this otherwise powerful anthology is its complete elision of queer citizen-subjects and their predicament on being criminalised within national registers, Jeganathan and Ismail expose the hypocrisies of the postcolonial Sri Lankan bourgeois class, both Sinhalese and Tamil, in propagating oppressive nationalist discourses in the garb of democracy. In this sense, one can claim that Sri Lanka has probably aged wisely – dissecting the faults of an earlier generation, the current generation of Sri Lankan intellectuals are proposing a reconfiguration of the nation and ideas of nationalism (as I shall examine in more detail in my analysis of Ganeshanathan's *Love Marriage*). But on the other hand, it is also worrying how many have aged before they have chronologically grown older. The fact that the Boys, young Tamil militants, trained to sacrifice everything for the Tamil Eelam, have been made to abandon youth and youthful pursuits. In A. Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies*, Uncle Para, the sagacious older member of an extended family in Jaffna, resents his grandchildren's complete interpellation in militant ideologies. He sees an ageing man in each of them, though they are barely past their teens: "You cannot imagine the change that has come over that boy; all that beauty of hope and youth are fled" (WMD 377). *When Memory Dies* which critiques militant Tamil nationalism brings out this distressing fact – boys losing their youth long before they were actually old – the fact that they were prohibited from pursuing any youthful desire: no smoking, no drinking, no relationship with girls. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the girls, who joined the LTTE at a later stage, were also required to abstain from sex and remain chaste.

The term ‘generation’ demands some explanation here. It has several connotations, but I am using it in the sense Karl Mannheim (1952) defines it: generations not only relate to being born in the same era, but that those who live through a period of significant social change develop a separate ‘historical-social conscience’ or collective identity, which tells them apart from preceding generations. In fact, in Sri Lankan expatriate fiction, the conflict is between different historical-social consciences, be it in the sphere of understanding kinship ties, gender relations, ethno-nationalist politics. To quote Pierre Bourdieu (1978):

...generation conflicts oppose not age-classes separated by natural properties, but habitus which have been produced by different *modes of generation*, that is, by conditions of existence which, in imposing different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa. (emphasis in the original; 78)

This conflict between consciences and ways of life, as Ira Raja (2004) observes, inscribes older age with certain disruptiveness, which is difficult to contain within simplistic discourses of ageism.

But, alienation of older people, the social inattention and oppression they suffer, cannot be belittled. Several sociological and economic surveys (related to the demography of ageing in Sri Lanka) (Siddhisena 2004, World Bank 2008, Aziz and Yusooff 2012) show that due to changing kinship dynamics, older people are often left uncared for. Not only that, statistics reveal that the problem is going to grow, with the increasing number of older people, who would comprise a quarter of the population by 2030 (Department of Census and Statistics 2013a). The World Bank (2008), reflecting on Sri Lanka’s growing population of ageing citizens, has identified a few causes behind the immense strain the family is going to encounter regarding taking care of older kin – apart from the usual cause of the middle class woman joining the workforce in large numbers, the World Bank also identifies lower fertility rates leading to smaller families, higher levels of education widening generation gaps between parents and children (which implies strong ideological differences), and both forced and voluntary migration to foreign lands due to civil war and stagnant economic conditions, as other reasons behind increasing alienation of older citizens. The problem is even more pressing within expatriate families, as we shall examine in greater detail below.

A 'feminine' way of ageing: the Sri Lankan story

Most feminist thinkers believe that women age differently from men, and experience ageing in more pathologically depressing ways than men do. Susan Sontag writes: 'Getting older is less profoundly wounding for a man . . . Men are "allowed" to age, without penalty, in several ways that women are not' (1979: 73). Featherstone and Hepworth (2000) corroborate her, observing that how women are made to compulsively 'stay' young and 'look' young, a compulsion which is not as obvious in case of men as they age. Some feminist thinkers, on the other hand, hold ageing as freedom from the compulsion of appearing sexually attractive to men. Germaine Greer's *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause* (1991) can be cited as one such book that calls for celebration of the ageing female body, which, she sees as eventually emerging free from the manacles of sexuality.⁵⁵ Although in feminist discourses there is a mocking dismissal of the saying, "Keep young and beautiful, if you want to be loved", it is upsetting how hardcore feminist thinkers, as they get on in age, find it difficult to hold on to that thought. The cultural studies scholar and a staunch feminist Vivian Sobchack, for example, highlights this monstrosity of ageing in her book *Carnal Thoughts*: 'I despair of ever being able to reconcile my overall sense of well-being, self-confidence, achievement, and pleasure in the richness of the present with the image I see in the mirror' (2004: 38). Lynne Segal (2013) is scandalised by Simon de Beauvoir's mourning of her ageing face and body. She quotes from Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age* (1972): 'It wounds one's heart to see a lovely young woman and then next to her, her reflection in the mirror of the years to come – her mother' (n. pag.). Coming from a path-breaking feminist thinker such as Beauvoir was, it is disheartening to many that she could not deal with ageing with the kind of dignity expected of her.

This is certainly not the universal feminist view about ageing, the one held by Sobchack or Beauvoir; but the point in mentioning this here is to bring home the fact that if feminists, at least some feminists, cannot bring themselves up to accepting the idea of losing youthful grace, how much more difficult would it prove for an average Sri Lankan woman, who is, anyway, handcuffed to several social and cultural taboos. As I have analysed in Chapter 3, the ideal Sri Lankan woman, the *kula kanthawa*, who is imagined in terms of perfect physical attributes only, is therefore, at the receiving end of this monstrosity – the anxiety of losing

⁵⁵ No doubt, this argument has its problems, since dissociating the ageing female body from sexual desires ends up upholding the social construction of ageing women (and also men) as asexual.

youthful beauty, an inevitability of life process. But, social perspective on ageing women is even more incarcerating in the sense that she is often imagined as asexual. Within Sri Lankan cultures, therefore, youth and age, as far as women are concerned, are extreme polarised opposites, with each category imposing on the woman a certain norm of physicality – while the younger woman is expected to be sexually desirable (as underscored by the local term *kanthawa*), the older woman is expected to transcend all bodily desires. As already analysed in Chapter 3, the way an adolescent Manthri is indulgently constructed to appear sexually enticing to prospective grooms in Chandani Lokuge's *If the Moon Smiled* provides a counter-narrative to how Lalla, the ageing widowed grandmother of the narrator of Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* is castigated for her waywardness and sexual excess, unbecoming of her ageing body and widowhood. Another striking example of how ageing, unmarried women are traditionally viewed within Tamil communities is couplet 1007 of the *Thirukkural*. This couplet which dictates that hoarding of wealth and not sharing it with anyone as an immoral practice deploys an extremely offensive simile to bring home the point:

Like woman fair in loneliness who aged grows,
Is wealth of him on needy men who nought bestows (101: 1007)

(That is, the wealth of the man who never bestows anything on the destitute is like a woman of beauty growing old without a husband.)

Although Sri Lankan society seems to have modernised sufficiently, such views are not rare even today. The Sri Lankan feminist movement, as I have analysed in considerable detail in Chapter 3, did not have a smooth run nor did it run parallel to the western feminist movement. Although inspired by ideologies of liberal, radical and socialist feminisms that emerged in Europe and America, Sri Lankan feminism has suffered a culture lag, owing to the enormous resistance to women's liberation that came from the State, interpellated in hetero-patriarchal discourses of essentialist gender roles. As discussed earlier, Sri Lankan feminist movement barely took roots before the 1980s, notwithstanding the fact that Ceylon was the first South Asian colony in which women won the rights to vote. But feminist ideas, which still appear anti-family, anti-religious to many staunch patriarchs, have not really catered to the masses. To a certain extent, feminist radicalism is still confined to English educated urban bourgeois women, who are a minority within the Sri Lankan nation-state (this is not to suggest that there has not been any progress in rural areas). The intergenerational

conflict encountered in contemporary Sri Lankan English fiction, between mother and daughter, grandmother and granddaughter, etc. is mostly conditioned by irreconcilable worldviews regarding women's lives, sexuality and liberty. The conflict is not difficult to understand if one examines the history of women's movement in Sri Lanka – what appears as rightful to the current generation of educated women, appears irreverent to ageing parents or grandparents never exposed to feminist politics. Patriarchy is under threat from the newly liberated woman, disconcerting not only men but several traditional women who never realised how patriarchy has constantly failed them. The conflict is even more pronounced in diasporic locations which, as I have reflected upon in some detail in the last three chapters, provide women with a greater freedom of choice than available in South Asian homes.

One may also note here, that the kind of intergenerational conflict one observes within western cultures, between younger and older women, is not the same in Sri Lanka. For instance as Susan Faludi writes:

I've been to a feminist "mother-daughter" dinner party where the feel-good bonding degenerated into a cross fire of complaint and recrimination, with younger women declaring themselves sick to death of hearing about the glory days of seventies feminism and older women declaring themselves sick to death of being swept into the dustbin of history. (2010: n. pag.)

In Sri Lanka, this kind of intergenerational conflict is out of the question, at least apparently. I am reminded of a homage paid to Sri Lanka's pioneer feminist thinker Kumari Jayawardena – *At the Cutting Age: Essays in Honour of Kumari Jayawardena* – a book which was published in 2007, when Jayawardena was 76. Younger feminist sociologists and anthropologists, such as Malathi de Alwis, Neloufer de Mel and Radhika Coomaraswamy, who have contributed to this anthology, are scarcely critical of Jayawardena's work; in fact, all of them celebrate Jayawardena's contribution to feminist and class studies in Sri Lanka, beginning with her ground-breaking book, *The Rise of the Labour Movement in Ceylon* (1972), followed by the award-winning *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (1986), which set the tone of feminist politics in Sri Lanka. It is intriguing to note that nothing much has actually changed since Jayawardena's first feminist book, and the younger lot seems to have grown with her, not finding the necessity to challenge her views. The older and younger feminists working in collaboration speaks volumes about the nature of

intergenerational conflicts one may encounter in Sri Lanka today. On the one hand, there is not much of theoretical or ideological disagreement between yesteryear feminists and today's thinkers; on the other hand, if any conflict that exists today is between the traditionalists and the feminists – a traditional ageing mother and a younger daughter, holding liberal views. The conflict, in other words, is not between two generations of feminists, endorsing antagonistic views; it is still between the feminists and the anti-feminists or those who are not yet aware of the changing nature of the gender equations in society. Ageing women like Kumari Jayawardena are of a rare breed; most ageing women in Sri Lanka are still deeply rooted in tradition, patriarchal ideas of feminine virtue and religiosity. The intergenerational conflict we come across in Shyam Selvadurai's *The Hungry Ghosts*, between Renu, educated in and exposed to feminist politics, and her mother, who cannot, at least initially, accept her radicalism, is exemplary. Renu, having pursued a course in women's studies, points out that Sri Lanka "is the most sexist and violent place for women on the earth"; her mother contradicts her saying that women are 'better educated in Sri Lanka than in most of Asia.' Renu is vexed that her mother's knowledge of women's progress is still caught in a time warp when educating women was considered patriarchy's most liberating agenda: "Ah, here you go, Amma. This is your internalized sexism speaking. You are so brainwashed you are now defending your oppressors" (HG 111). Hema finds it difficult to make sense of Renu's exasperation. Exposure to women's politics in the West empowers Renu with the knowledge and rhetoric of protest, unavailable to the much older Hema brought up on conservative patriarchal ideas of womanhood at home. Renu, more radical in her views, unravels the deep structures of patriarchy within which women are more often than not comfortably contained. Ageing women in Sri Lanka and within the diaspora have to put up with these new radical ideas, which have never occurred to them before. This also holds true for Manthri (*If the Moon Smiled*) who ages in a foreign land and has to live through a terrible emotional feud, between her husband and her daughter, the latter refusing to submit to oppressive patriarchal diktats which did not appear oppressive to her mother when she was her age.

However, women's lives in Sri Lanka have certainly changed. There is less resistance to women seeking higher education or marrying late or refusing to bear more children. The civil war has not only victimised women directly, it has, in an ironical way, drawn women out into the public sphere – apart from participating in the war, women have had to bear the sole responsibility of raising children, having lost their spouse in war and ethnic conflict; in addition to that, they have had to bear with the trauma of displacement, poverty and loss of

assets (see Jayaweera 2002: 363-369). It may not be empowerment per se, but it has certainly disrupted traditional notions of gender roles and the cultural and political configuration of the home and the world. And given the trauma women have had to go through, they have aged much before they actually got on in years.

Ageing and Emasculation in Sri Lanka

Within both elitist and popular cultures it is a commonplace to associate ageing and masculinity in terms of flagging sexual prowess – men’s endless agonising over erectile dysfunction and their relentless obsession with recovering their sexual potency.⁵⁶ This stereotype, which is often encountered in popular culture, is a signification of objectionable ageism (See Kenny 2013). Lewd sexist and ageist jokes revolving around sexually active ageing men often circulate in social networking sites or in social conversations. Despite a strong inclination to do so, it would be incorrect to morally endorse this stereotype and overlook the stigmatisation of the ageing man implied in such an image. In laughingly or sometimes, disparagingly dismissing the lustful ageing man, this stereotype sends out an unambiguous moral message – ageing men could not have sexual desires, or ageing men could not possibly even fall in love. Although men’s disappointment with deteriorating sexual potency if taken to an extreme is debilitating, making caricatures of them is also oppressive. In this sense, ageing men are no less discriminated against than are women, if they fail to adhere to normative patterns of behavioural propriety, which includes a complete transcendence of physical desires. In Sri Lankan society, where there is little or no sexual freedom for either men or women, the possibility of the ageing body as being sexually active is considered blasphemous. Gott and Hinchcliff (2003) write:

⁵⁶ One may cite the well-known examples of W. B. Yeats and Sigmund Freud who went under the knife to revive their sexual vitality – a surgery known as the Steinach operation. Although Freud did not seem to have benefitted much from the surgery, Yeats did: while making the lofty claim of ‘remaking’ himself meaningfully beyond the internment of ‘an acre of grass’, the 69 year old Yeats entered into a romantic stint with a 27 year old actor, Margot Ruddock, just after the surgery. In the literary grapevine, Yeats conforms to a stereotype– ‘the old fool’, the lustful ageing man chasing younger women. Interestingly, Yeats calls one of his poems, ‘The Wild Old Wicked Man’ (1938), in which he proclaims his superiority over younger men: ‘Words I have that can pierce the heart, / But what can he do but touch?’ Yeats’ obsession with declining youth and his celebration of old age, indisputably, arise from a deep discomfort with his debilitating body and sexual vitality. This is a stereotype which Yeats subscribes to and challenges at the same time (‘You think it horrible that lust and rage/ Should dance attention on my old age; / They were not such a plague when I was young; / What else have I to spur me into song?’) See, Dunsford, M. C. ‘An Old Fool: The last passions of W B Yeats’. *Boston Magazine*. Winter 2001. Web. <http://bcm.bc.edu/issues/winter_2001/ll_yeats.html>. Also see, W. B. Yeats, “The Spur”, Web. <<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-spur/>>

That societal norms determine “normal” and “appropriate” sexual behaviours becomes apparent when the relationship between sexuality and ageing is explored. Indeed, although sex has assumed a greater importance within society than perhaps ever before, old age remains outside this “sexualized world”, with the stereotype of an asexual old age pervading not only popular culture, but also policy, practice and research. The belief that sex is either not important or not relevant in later life, for example, appears to underpin both the failure to address sexuality within studies of older people and the failure to include older age cohorts within studies of sexuality and sexual health. (63-64)

I shall dwell on this in more detail in my analysis of Shyam Selvadurai’s *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* and Mohanraj’s *Bodies in Motion* in a subsequent section. In these novels, sexuality’s relation with age is further problematised for the ageing individuals are ‘rumoured’ to be queer.

In a warring nation, such as Sri Lanka has been for 30 years, it is not difficult to see how older men find themselves redundant, since the army or insurgent groups such as the LTTE depended on a younger generation for fighting battles or carrying out terrorist activities. Unless turned to for political deliberations, older men would find themselves left out in the theatres of ‘action’. The question whether older men support the war or not, is not important here. Within a political milieu dominated by the spirit of war, militarisation and hypermasculinity, older men, who are left out, would certainly feel disconcerted at the realisation that they are victims of ageing, of debilitating bodies that make them redundant to the state. The emasculation of older men can be understood from what V. V. Ganeshanathan says in an interview with Suketu Mehta:

For a long time in Sri Lanka, earlier, in the 80s – it was very risky for young men, because either the Tigers would recruit you or the Sri Lankan Army would assume the Tigers were recruiting you and harass you or kidnap you or whatever... (305)

In Ganeshanathan’s novel, *Love Marriage*, as I have analysed in Chapter 1, the narrator’s dying uncle, a former LTTE leader, while lying immobile on bed, in the throes of immense pain of a fast growing cancer, recalls his youthful days full of vitality, energy and indomitable physical strength to pursue the cause of the LTTE. The war is coming to an end,

but Kumaran, on his death bed, looks for younger faces to pass on the legacy of a political cause, he has been uncritically devoted to all his life. Hence, he arranges his daughter Janani's marriage with Suthan, a young man, dedicated to the cause of the Eelam. I shall elaborate on this in a subsequent section. While Kumaran ages as a militant warrior, fondly and sometimes despairingly, looking back on his youth, Para, a central character in A. Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies* ages through three generations of a Tamil family based in Jaffna – despite all his fierce endorsement of leftist ideas, he fails to sympathise with the growing militancy of the LTTE, in which his grandson takes active part. Uncle Para, as he is fondly referred to by the narrator, is another example of an ageing citizen-subject who feels outmoded, but in a different way. He finds it difficult to reconcile his own political ideologies with those of the Tamil militants, the terrorising presence of which is felt in Jaffna with each passing day. I shall explore this anguished feeling of vulnerability in another section below.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Sri Lankan anthropologist, Jani de Silva (2009) explores in great detail how in the wake of the civil war, both the Sinhalese and the Tamil, so far sedate and 'deskbound', suddenly began desiring and promoting the athletic and fearless body – 'the warrior practice of risking the body' as Silva terms it (88). The rising social obsession with the athletic body, therefore, certainly, by default, marginalised not only the unfit body, but also the ageing body which is perceived as incapacitated. Since within both postcolonial Sinhalese and Tamil communities, the capacity to perpetuate aggressive violence became a parameter or measure for masculinity (see Jeganathan 2000 and Silva 2009), the ageing body, the feminine male body, and the physically unfit body became all the more marginalised as undesirable – for, these bodies did not guarantee the ability to contribute meaningfully to a militant society. In this sense, the binary opposition of the youthful body and the ageing body was bound to be further reinforced. Ageing, therefore, came with an additional social burden, of being irrelevant in the macro-political scene, notwithstanding whether one believed or did not believe in the ideologies governing the ethno-nationalist conflict. Apart from the usual intergenerational conflict between traditionalists and comparatively more liberal younger generation, the ageing male body, in Sri Lanka, is also saddled with the disturbing awareness of not being utilitarian enough.

Queerness and ageing in Sri Lanka: an invisible phenomenon

No concrete data is available in the Sri Lankan census report on the queer demography of the ageing population; in fact, there is no mention of LGBT citizens in census reports, not even in

the most recent one. Surprisingly, Equal Ground, a Colombo-based non-profit organisation working for the welfare of ‘questioning’ Sri Lankan citizens, does not have anything substantial in their archive that could help make sense of the conditions of the ageing Sri Lankan LGBT population. This complete invisibilisation of LGBT Sri Lankan citizens makes it difficult to speculate how queer people age in Sri Lanka and under what physical and emotional circumstances. As discussed in Chapter 3, ‘coming out’ involves high risk within the Sri Lankan nation-state; social humiliation, accompanying violence, is something which LGBT people have to deal with once they dare to come out. Although support systems such as NGOs, sensitising people about different sexual orientations, have been formed in the recent past, the stigma of being gay or lesbian is impossible to erase. Queer activists are often targets of social predators, and hate speech against those who promote rights of LGBT people is rampant (See Flamer-Caldera 2015). Therefore it is not difficult to presuppose the invisibility of the ageing LGBT population; for, it is even harder for them to come out, having lived the greater part of their lives in a more oppressive social environment that did not even recognise same-sex desire as a possible sexual expression. In fact, it would not be incorrect to say that there was not even much awareness. As charted in Chapter 3, the emergence of sexual identity politics demanding decriminalisation of homosexuality is a recent phenomenon in Sri Lanka, which, however, has not been able to pick up sufficient momentum even in 2016, owing to severe opposition from the state and religious groups. In a recent post in the Equal Ground blog, dated 2 June 2016, a few days before Sri Lanka’s 12th Pride March, a Sunday school teacher picked up the pen in defence of the organisation, slandered by a politically motivated group known as ‘The Island Nation of Sinhale’. Such maligning and threat are common in Sri Lanka, underpinning the general hostility towards accepting citizens aligning with non-normative sexualities (see Flamer-Caldera 2015). Talking about the ageing population of the world in the American context, Fredriksen-Goldsen and Muraco (2010) write:

It was not until the 1960s, with the civil rights movements, the Stonewall Inn riots, and the start of the gay liberation movement that younger gay men and lesbians began to emerge from the closet. Because many older LGB adults have spent a majority of their lives “in the closet,” or masking their sexual orientation, their lives have remained largely silenced; thus, we are only beginning to understand the experiences and needs of these populations. (n.pag.)

The ‘coming out’ of LGBT identified citizens has not happened in Sri Lanka as dramatically as it has happened in the west. In fact, the concept of LGBT liberation movement entered the consciousness of Sri Lankans as late as the 1990s; therefore, recognising ageing LGBT identified citizens and addressing their needs have not found any remarkable mileage even within activist groups. Sri Lanka still did not have a revolutionary event, such as the Stonewall Inn riots, which could open the closet door for many. Ageing and sexuality studies in America have often examined the circumstances and conditions of ageing, by dividing LGBT identified people on the basis of their formative years – pre-Stonewall and post-Stonewall era (See Parks 1999; Rosenfield 1999). Pre-Stonewall and post-Stonewall cohorts show different patterns of ageing. In Sri Lanka, there is no such watershed moment; one can only talk about a growing awareness of parallel sexual lives since the mid 1990s, when NGOs began to appear (namely Companions on a Journey) to address three major issues – advocacy, networking and provision of community outreach services to LGBT identified citizens. But as discussed earlier, the LGBT liberation movement also, ironically, marked out the ‘homosexual’ as an analyzable category (see Foucault 1975), making him/her more vulnerable in a society obdurately opposed to accepting same-sex love.

As Priya Thangaraja’s report *Strengthening of Legal Protection for LGBT in Sri Lanka: Road to Decriminalization* (2013) reveals, since the state does not recognise same-sex couples, they have no access to any state-sponsored benefits which heterosexual married couple can avail. Because there is such terrifying hostility towards LGBT identified citizens, many of them, particularly, those who are ageing are either trapped in heterosexual marriages, or are lonely, without a partner. Even if they are partnered, the relationship is not officially recognised or approved by the state. Again, on the other hand, intergenerational conflict arising from estranging sexually non-conforming children or grandchildren is commonplace – just as a modern day daughter with liberal views about women’s sexuality and agency is unacceptable in a traditional society such as Sri Lanka, queer sons and daughters, as we have seen in Chapter 3, usually find themselves alienated within heterosexual family set-ups. As Connidis (2003) writes:

While a contentious issue, the failure to accord same-sex partnerships the same legal status as straight marriages does heighten ambivalence in inter-generational and sibling ties because personal claims for recognition are not supported by formal definitions of family. For example, a lesbian may expect her parents and siblings to

treat her partner as a daughter- or sister-in-law but the absence of legal confirmation of in-law status makes for an ambivalent relationship. (82)

However, no western model for understanding ageing and its relationship with dissident sexualities is useful in the Sri Lankan context. While much of the scholarship originating in Euro-American academia addresses issues such as ageing queer parents coming out to children or changing nature of same-sex partnership with age, in Sri Lanka, ageing queer people is still largely an invisible breed. However, fiction, as we have seen and shall see in subsequent sections, fills in this huge gap, revealing a possible way of approaching and understanding the issue.

Ageing in Expatriate Families

The experience of ageing, just like changing gender equations within the family or slow but increasing visibility of queer individuals, is to be understood in terms of the impact of modernity on South Asian cultures, as is evident in the discussion above. Owing to the arrival of modernity and the overwhelming impact of the open market, affect and intimacy holding the family together has been supplanted by more materialistic relationships. Perhaps, the worst victims of this are ageing members of the family who are often abandoned, as children migrate to developed countries of the West, or even from rural to metropolitan centres within the country. In Sri Lanka, the disintegration of the traditional family, as we have seen, was further aggravated by the civil war, which not only displaced families internally, but also compelled ethnic minorities to migrate to foreign lands. The decline of the traditional family, Cohen observes, is central to the delineation of the ‘problems’ of ageing in the subcontinent, apart from, what he calls the ‘four horsemen of contemporary apocalypse – modernization, industrialization, urbanization and Westernization’ (1999: 17). Cohen problematises this view to a great extent, but in narratives on ageing in South Asia, the ‘bad family’ (the modernised, urbanised, westernised one, given to mindless materialistic pursuits) functions as the primary villain. Transnational living which has become quite commonplace among upper and upper middle class South Asians is, however, undeniably one of the major causes behind the plight of older parents and grandparents, often left to fend on their own (See Lamb 2009). Conversely, older people when made to travel across the oceans to build a new home in foreign lands, breeds other forms of anxiety, one being the anguish of dying on alien soil: “I wonder what people must have felt dying in this country. If I die in this godforsaken country, people don’t scatter my ashes here. That would be unbearable.” In Shyam Selvadurai’s *The*

Hungry Ghosts, Hema, Shivan's mother, despairs of dying away from her motherland, on being forced to migrate to Canada in the wake of the civil war in Sri Lanka. Shivan, still young, just out of school, is deeply affected by his mother's apprehension: 'I sat down next to her, frightened by the desolation in her face' (HG 125). Transnational living is therefore not only beleaguered with the anxiety of being cut off from one's roots; for older people it is further compounded by a niggling fear of death in a place where there is no affective bonding or identification with its history. One cannot but recall Derrida's insightful 'Of Hospitality', where he points out that a displaced person has longing for two things – death and language. Derrida uses the example of Oedipus dying in a foreign country, because of a breached law of hospitality. Identifying this as a tremendous tragedy, Derrida observes that it is even more tragic for Oedipus and Antigone, since they have no manifest tomb, no visible grave; that is to say that there is no concrete place to direct the mourning.

The despair of dying in a foreign land was more intense within old diasporas, with little or no possibility of returning or connecting to the homeland; for the new migrants, thanks to evolution in telecommunication systems, the boom in information technology and development of cheaper and faster means of transport, the fear of never seeing the motherland has been alleviated to a great extent. James Clifford writing about the new diaspora in a pre-Internet, pre-mobile phone era, says: 'Airplanes, telephones, tape cassettes, camcorders, and mobile job markets reduce distances and facilitate two-way traffic, legal and illegal, between the world's places' (1994: 302). Shivan, Renu and their mother migrate to Canada in the pre-Internet era, in the mid-80s, when ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka which had been building up for decades, culminated into a bloody riot. Hema's apprehension of dying and being buried in Canada is therefore beset with the anxiety of being in exile for the rest of her life. It was a 'less global' world, than it is today.

Living away from one's homeland is often difficult for older people unaccustomed with the culture of the host country: several informants (of the new expatriate communities in the USA) in Sarah Lamb's ethnographic research (2009) mourns of loneliness, dilution of familial intimacy, and difficulties of accepting certain ways of life, which sometimes appear a little too liberal in comparison to the kind of life they were familiar back home. The 'positive charge' of the diaspora is also recognised by many, enjoying state sponsored benefits for senior citizens, and discovering a more independent life, not having to worry about medical help, or unavailability of children as care-givers. Many get used to living apart from their

families and gladly come to terms with an independent life, but, others continue to lament the lack of bonding, of togetherness, of community living and of having to adjust with a new set of values. As we shall see in the novels I shall be analysing shortly, ageing parents often lose sleep over children going astray, and they often blame it on the foreign land's liberal culture. They often wistfully look back to their original homelands, sometimes regretting their decision to migrate. In such cases, where migration is not voluntary but forced by political circumstances (as is the case with majority of Sri Lankan Tamil migrants in various countries), the permanent loss of the homeland is often mourned, although the benefits of the asylum are acknowledged. Children settling abroad, sometimes suffer from an intense sense of guilt for having left behind ageing parents they are bound by filial duty to look after; while others fret over bringing ageing parents over to stay with them, apprehending how alien they might feel within a more individuated society. Again formation of ghettos within the diaspora often compensates for the community living of South Asian cultures which ageing migrants often miss. Such ghettos, as I have already discussed in previous chapters, become sites of long distance nationalism, preservation of traditions, and reconstruction of homeliness, marked by the import of an iconography of cultural objects, rituals and practices. The family certainly undergoes major transformation and ageing members often lose the authority they would have enjoyed back home. However, ageing in a foreign land is again both empowering and disempowering for ageing migrants, depending upon their own emotional and psychological disposition, as well as their social circumstances. In the next segment, I shall be analysing a few Sri Lankan novels, each revealing different dimensions of ageing within local or expatriate families.

The Hungry Ghosts: Bigot grandmother, avenging daughter and queer grandson

Shyam Selvadurai's *The Hungry Ghosts* is an intergenerational saga that pulls apart the surface gloss of love and compassion that bind the family, to reveal a murky world of power relations among its members, undercut by misogyny, bigotry, homophobia and intolerance. Although things are partially righted in the end, the impossibility of a happy reunion underwrites the concluding pages of the novel, leaving a deep sense of unease. Daya, the ageing matriarch, Hema, the ageing widowed daughter, now settled with a new partner in Canada, Renu, the granddaughter, happy to have escaped 'sexist' Sri Lanka, and Shivan, the gay grandson who chooses to abandon the green pastures of Canada to return to war-torn Sri Lanka – all age in different ways. The migration to Canada in the wake of the state sponsored violence against Tamil minorities happens amid unsettling tensions among the family

members – the ageing Daya unable to accept her grandson's departure. As we have seen in earlier chapters, Daya rests her hopes and desires on Shivan, who she believes would take over her empire, once she dies – “[W]hat a blessing my grandson is in my old age. Like rain soaking a parched land” (HG 180). As we have seen in Chapter 3, this hope of seeing her grandson carrying forward the family bloodline and preserving the family wealth receives a serious blow when Daya discovers Shivan's sexuality. But, when Hema decides to migrate to Canada with Shivan and Renu, Daya is still in the dark about her grandson – she is devastated at the thought of seeing her empire crumbling with no heir to bequeath it on. A pious Buddhist, she blames it on her bad karma – “Ah, Puthey, Puthey...I am cursed by my karma...I am that Naked Peréthi. Am I to have no happiness in this life? Is everything I love to be taken from me?” (HG 73) Daya projects her helplessness as an ageing woman to thwart her daughter's migration to Canada, fearing complete abandonment. Shivan does not realise that he is a pawn in the mother-daughter relationship – by taking him away from Daya, her only light of hope in her old age, Hema takes revenge on her mother who had once disowned her brutally for marrying a Tamil. While Daya seems to be paying a heavy penalty for her bad karma as she thinks she is, ideas of love, compassion, nurture and reverence defining familial bonds are dismantled to reveal a hierarchical structure within which one is tyrannised by the other, depending on who holds more power at a given point of time.

Shivan is yet to discover his grandmother's tyrannical side; therefore, he feels guilty in leaving her behind in the care of the ageing domestic help Rosalind. Later, during his visit to Sri Lanka, when Shivan discovers how tyrannical his grandmother could afford to be, he, who has so far felt bad for her, confronts her: “Do you know how much I hated those afternoons in your room as a child?...I don't love you. I have never loved you” (HG 223). And later, when he calls her back from Canada, hearing of her stroke, Daya lashes out at him – “Ah, that is why you called? Hoping I am going to die soon and you will inherit my fortune?” (HG 279) When mother-daughter, grandmother-grandson confront each other in moments of emotional crisis, what becomes increasingly and unabashedly manifest is the materialistic dimension of familial ties; the economically solvent ageing matriarch does not let go of a single opportunity of reminding her middle aged daughter and younger grandchildren how munificently she took care of them, gave them shelter, sponsored them, when they were left destitute after the untimely death of Shivan's father. She unabashedly capitalises on her act of benevolence, expecting and demanding of her daughter and grandson to pay her back. The demand has a more devastating impact on Shivan than her mother, since

in order to payback, Shivan has to forgo his sexuality and love for Mili, his boyfriend. For, Shivan could only meaningfully pay his grandmother back by marrying a woman, raising a family and assuring her that her property would be taken care of by a continuing bloodline.

In fact, familial affect is often embroiled in materialism, but is never seen as such. In Toronto, when Hema's Sri Lankan friend Vasanthi accosts her for leaving Daya behind, she reminds her how she has been a beneficiary of the generosity of her mother who sheltered her family, after her husband passed away –

“Insist that it is your turn to look after her. A way to repay her kindness and love when your beloved husband died....All the affection she poured on you and your children, paying to send them to the best schools” (HG 120).

Vasanthi's officious advice on Hema's compulsory duty towards an ageing and lonely mother harps on both aspects of the relationship – it is a moral-ethical duty, the duty of love, to look after ageing parents; it is also a way of ‘repaying’ the money parents expend in raising children. While Vasanthi tries to make Hema feel guilty of abandoning such a loving mother, Hema feels awkward, not being able to react the way her advisor expects her to. The outsiders barely know the inside story, and Hema could not share with Vasanthi the real nature of the relationship she shares with her mother. She is aware of her moral-ethical duty as a daughter; but she cannot also forgive her mother for her insolence, high-handedness and bigotry. Hema's relationship with her ageing mother or Shivan's relationship with his grandmother is not founded on pure love, as Vasanthi presupposes. The love, which Vasanthi assumes exist between them, is conditional – the ageing matriarch is benign only when her power is acknowledged, her authority is revered and her diktats are accepted without defiance. Selvadurai problematises the relationship between ageing and younger generations within the family, underpinning the shifting nature of the hierarchy – the fact that it is not always the younger tyrannising the older members or vice-versa. Each has its agency which is contingent upon which party has the maximum access to power.

Ageing is not just a physical phenomenon; it happens through gathering of wisdom, repenting and expiating wrong deeds and evaluating one's karma. Shivan's coming of age involves all these, and as he returns to Sri Lanka he is a mature man, making one last attempt at resuscitating family ties. *The Hungry Ghosts*, therefore, unlike other queer coming of age

stories does not end with the protagonist's emancipation from the closet, personal as well as social. Selvadurai takes it a little further. As the family disintegrates, Shivan, who migrated to Canada in the wake of the civil war, increasingly feels the overwhelming responsibility to return home, not only to his dying grandmother, the old matriarch, who has never been sympathetic towards his sexual choice, but also to his homeland, which has degenerated into a bleak war zone, with endless killings, ethnic violence, and bigotry. Shivan ages into this self-realisation – the necessity to return and face the past, eliminating the hungry ghosts, the *perethayas*, which continue to haunt him in his newfound refuge in Canada. One of these *perethayas* is the ghost of his boyfriend Mili whose death could not be mourned as a loss of a queer life and a lover. Another is his ailing grandmother, who never took responsibility of Mili's murder in the hands of her *goyalas*. I have discussed this in detail in the previous chapter. Shivan's coming of age, in *The Hungry Ghosts*, therefore, is to be understood not only in terms of his accepting his own sexuality; but, his coming of age actually happens at the very end of the novel – the self-realisation that it is essential to free the hungry *perethayas* of his past, the necessity to brazen out all those forces that policed and ruthlessly destroyed his love. In drawing its protagonist out of his comfort zone to tread the difficult path of returning to his original home and fulfil his 'homing' desire, *The Hungry Ghosts* also qualifies as a bildungsroman – a coming of age narrative.

Swimming in the Monsoon Sea and Bodies in Motion: Queerness, alienation and ageing

Swimming in the Monsoon Sea is another coming of age story of a queer Tamil boy Amrith, whose coming to terms with his sexuality also involves warming up to the ageing gay architect Lucien Lindamulagé. Amrith's relationship with Lucien goes through three phases – fondness, disgust and friendship. These three phases correspond to Amrith's gradual awakening to his deviant sexuality, his initial revulsion at the idea of his being different, and a final acceptance of the truth. Although Lucien is peripheral to the plot of *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea*, the novel begins and ends with him. The first chapter titled 'The Silent Mynah' introduces a symbol which is best appreciated in retrospection, especially in the final chapter 'Roses and Silence'. 'Silence' is the operative word in both chapters, underpinning invisibilisation of queerness, the uncomfortable silence enveloping and devouring queer dissidence. Interestingly, this silence also becomes the language of communication for queer individuals, such as Amrith, to connect with other people like him, such as Lucien – it is a language which is not articulated but understood, and becomes the medium through which alternative kinship ties are forged. In the case of Amrith, in the absence of a real family,

Lucien, the ageing gay man, becomes a father-figure, a predecessor whom Amrith could turn to. Lucien's presence in Amrith's life gives him the confidence of being queer and the comfort of seeing himself as part of a clan. In other words, by his very existence, Lucien sanctions the naturalness of Amrith's queerness, which is otherwise ridiculed. For Amrith, Lucien is like an ancestor he takes after – this likeness is analogical to genetic resemblances between members of biological families. For instance, in V V Ganeshanathan's family saga *Love Marriage*, the narrator, Yalini, is struck by the resemblances between family members, pictures of whom she discovers in an old album – 'My mother told me later that I mistook a picture of Jegan for my father' (LM 235). For Yalini, this family album which is treasured by her mother more than any other possessions becomes a means of visual connection to her past, to her lineage, to all the aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents she has heard about but scarcely met. Her father always sees in her streaks of his sisters: 'She has Uma's brains, Mayuri's prickliness, and underneath it all, Harini's steel. She has [her father's] Heart' (LM 225). When she meets Janani, her first cousin, Yalini observes a remarkable likeness: 'Janani: from the beginning, she was uncannily like two people: her father [Kumaran] and me' (LM 223). These resemblances give Yalini a sense of belonging to a family most of which she has never been introduced to. For Amrith, this sense of belonging can only happen within a queer community (an alternative family founded on similar sexual preference), and not within the biological family. Here the nature of resemblance is not physical; the members resemble each other in their sexual choice and desire.

In the beginning, Amrith and Lucien connect through their passion for birds, and the latter helps Aunty Bundle build an aviary for Amrith's birthday. In this aviary, among other birds, Amrith keeps a mynah; he calls her Kuveni, named after a female demon of Sri Lankan folklore. Amrith likes her for her 'spunk' and 'bossiness' (SIMS 4), but fails to make her talk, despite repeated endeavours: "You're useless...I should just release you in the garden and get another mynah that will talk" (SIMS 6). Lucien too worries over Kuveni's silence, and shares Amrith's concern. He comes up with an explanation, which Amrith hopes is true: "She needs a mate...I am going outstation in a few days and I will keep my eye out for a male mynah" (SIMS 60). Till this moment, it does not occur to Amrith that it might be the lack of companionship in a colony of birds not belonging to her breed that keeps Kuveni depressed and silent. He prays that Lucien's solution works. However, it would be not be long before Amrith discovers that it would be oppressive to force her to speak. I shall return to this a little later.

Amrith, despite his liking for the ageing Lucien, finds him odd: his flamboyance and manner of conducting himself '*not at all befitting his age*' disconcerts Amrith immensely (SIMS 59; emphasis added). Lucien's mannerisms strikes Amrith as improper – 'He always applied white powder to his face, and this gave his dark complexion a greyish sheen' (SIMS 59). He also sits indecorously, in a manner unbecoming of an ageing man – 'His feet were up on the chair, tucked under his white sarong, and his knees were drawn to his chest' (SIMS 59). It is difficult to say what Amrith finds disturbing: the fact that Lucien does not behave like other elderly people are expected to behave, or is it his showiness that does not suit a man, that too, an ageing man, wearing thick glasses and leaning on a walking stick. Initially, Amrith, still very young and unaware of his sexuality, is judgemental of Lucien's queerness, unable to appreciate the rebellion the elderly man embodies. He soon discovers that Lucien has the disrepute of travelling with young male secretaries, and what he does with them is 'illegal' (SIMS 59). He gathers this information from a conversation he overhears, but fails to make sense of Lucien's perceived crime.

Lucien is in a double-bind: first he has erotic relationships with men, which is a criminal offence in Sri Lanka; and second, he has an active sex life even though he is aged and well past the socially approved age of indulging in such pleasures. Even Aunty Bundle, his closest friend and colleague, cannot accept him: she is 'deeply saddened and troubled' by the 'scandal' surrounding Lucien (SIMS 59). Lucien's story partially reveals the predicament of ageing queer men in Sri Lanka. Lucien is still empowered in certain ways, unlike many in his age group: he is a successful architect, he has access to the cultural capital, and he belongs to an urban affluent class. Even then, he scarcely has any acceptance, and inhabits the periphery of a society which is conservative, has extremely orthodox moral-ethical standards of evaluating people's characters, and is totally disapproving of any deviance from the path of morality, with homosexuality occupying an upper rung in the hierarchy of immoral acts. Amrith is still not mature enough to comprehend Lucien's plight; but, something tells him that unlike other men, Lucien Lindamulagé, despite all his apparent impropriety, makes him feel comfortable. He could be himself when Lucien is present (SIMS 59). This connection which Amrith automatically feels with Lucien becomes clearer to him as he gradually comes to terms with his own sexuality.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Amrith's realisation that he is different from the others, the fact that he is helplessly attracted to men, troubles him immensely. He cannot accept that he too is a *poonaya*, a derogatory label Sri Lankans use to shame queer men in particular. Self-disgust overwhelms him, and he feels ashamed of seeing in Lucien his alter ego. He forcefully dissociates himself from the elderly man, who has always been very affectionate towards him: 'He suddenly could not bear to be around this man, whom he had known since childhood' (SIMS 204). Amrith, brought up in a terrifyingly anti-queer environment, imposes upon himself an exile from his clan – the queer clan, represented by the elderly Lucien. It takes him sometime to return to him, when he accepts himself – "I am...different" (SIMS 205). Although he does not come out to Lucien and decides to 'remain silent' (SIMS 205) till the time is right, he resuscitates the bond with the elderly man, who is his now an alternative family to him. Selvadurai deploys a significant image in the last chapter of the novel, of Lucien taking 'Amrith's arm for support' as they walk up to the aviary (SIMS 206). The support they lend each other, without really articulating what precisely seals the bond between them, underlines the formation of an affective community of queer men, not related by blood but by sexual choice. The older Lucien leaning on the teenage Amrith for support, and Amrith finding in him a source of inspiration to live life on his own terms, lays the foundation of a family, comprising of two generations of individuals, each dependent on the other.

And, Kuveni's silence with which the novel begins gains a deeper meaning in the closing chapter, when both Amrith and Lucien decide to leave her on her own: 'She seemed perfectly content to be alone. Perfectly content to be silent. And [Amrith] realised that he had grown to like his silence. He was not sure, at all, that he wanted another mynah' (SIMS 206). Kuveni's strangeness, a mynah who does not speak, sets her apart from her clan; but Amrith seems to realise that this refusal to speak or her aversion for company might just be a choice which needs to be respected. She is simply different from the other mynahs, as Amrith is from the other boys in school. Interfering in her life would be oppressive, depriving her of the right to be herself. Kuveni's introduction in the first chapter is therefore symbolic, the import of which is best appreciated in the closing sections of the novel. Amrith is too young to express what he feels for Kuveni in so many words; but Lucien, nonetheless, understands. Both of them come to a consensus that they should no longer force Kuveni to speak or look for a male partner to pair her with: "Very well, my boy, let us leave it at that", agrees Lucien (SIMS

206). The fact that Kuveni remains unpaired, either by choice or compulsion, also insinuates the harsh reality of most queer people ageing without a partner.

Mary Anne Mohanraj's *Bodies in Motion* addresses the loneliness an ageing lesbian woman Mangai is thrust into, when she is totally ostracised by her family. The only family connection she has is her brother Sundar, whose wife Sushila was Mangai's secret lover for the brief period the couple stayed with the family after their marriage. He keeps in touch with her, worries about her, and repeatedly invites her over to the United States; but Mangai refuses and at times even returns gifts he sends her. Mangai has her own reason for not joining Sundar: she 'suspects Sundar has sent money to the guerrillas' (BIM 269). She cannot leave 'home', her own place, no matter, how alienating it has been (BIM 269). The novel ends with her, 'Monsoon Day' in 2002, when she is about 71, living all alone by the sea, after her domestic help Daya's demise.

Mohanraj induces a deep pathos in the narrative delineating Mangai's loneliness, but gives her an agency too, which is unique. Mangai has lost her rotundity, for which her mother and her other relatives often chided her: 'She has become a rail thin woman, wiry and strong from the hours on the ocean, slender from endless meals of rice and lentils' (BIM 269). Making both ends meet by fishing for hours in the ocean and selling her catch in the market, Mangai can barely afford to eat well. With no one to look after her, with all kinds of rumours making the rounds about a homoerotic relationship she possibly had with her deceased domestic help, Mangai's life is constantly under the disapproving gaze of society: 'When Daya died, Mangai went to the funeral. The priest had carefully not looked at her as she spoke the final words. She had not cried, not in front of the villagers' (BIM 274). Like Shivan who regrets his inability to mourn Mili's death as a lover should, Mangai too is forced to conceal her emotions with people staring at her. That night, she attempts suicide: 'That night, she rowed her boat out into the merciless sea; she lay down in it and let the water carry her where it would' (BIM 274). But, her attempt fails. After Daya's death, she leads a more austere life, like a widowed woman: 'Mangai gave away all her saris and began dressing in white' (BIM 275). But, unlike widowed heterosexual women who are often surrounded by unsolicited sympathisers, Mangai has nobody to share her grief with. In fact, she has to cover it up, lest she invites more social reproach. However, she grows used to this loneliness, the feeling of being abandoned: 'It was a quiet pleasure...Quiet was enough. Most days' (BIM 275).

There is one other way in which Mangai pleasures herself – it is through cooking. However, she can afford to cook elaborately only on rare occasions. The elderly woman’s cooking skills have now become a part of the seaside folklore, and mothers send their marriageable daughters to watch her cooking – “Mangai Aunty is cooking. Go. Watch” (BIM 268). The children gather at the window, for no one has access to Mangai’s hut. Ironically, Mangai has once suffered severe criticism from her mother and her elderly aunts for being a careless cook with no sense of taste: ‘After all, with her looks, it was important that she be a good cook’ (BIM 271). Although Mangai used to be glad ‘secretly’ for not being able to cook well, she gradually discovers an erotic pleasure in cooking and eating. She often remembers Sushila, Sundar’s wife, savouring her food: ‘She had made eggs for those bridal breakfasts; she watched Sundar’s bride swallow them greedily, the muscles of her slender throat shivering down. Mangai had made eggs every morning for the pleasure of that throat’ (BIM 271). At 71, with no one to share her life with, Mangai pleasures herself through cooking and eating the food. She does not share it with anyone, and punctuates the cooking with an autoerotic performance, as the girls stare at her, amazed. As she moves from one dish to another with passion and care, she gradually takes off her clothes one by one; eventually, she sits on the mud floor, naked, to enjoy the meal. Conscious of the surprised gaze of the girls, Mangai does not dither from stripping her clothes off. She knows that this autoerotic performance would fuel the rumours about her even more. But, having gained wisdom with age, she has come to a realisation: ‘They enjoy whispering...That is one reason why Mangai can live in peace in this village; she brings in more pleasure as present scandal than she ever could as a past expulsion’ (BIM 272). Mangai’s queerness, which is often passed over as lunacy by the curious village folks, is accommodated as long as she allows them to slander her. Her queerness is not just sexual; it is related to age as well. Her gustatory desires taking an erotic dimension are unbecoming of a frail elderly woman who is conventionally imagined as asexual. She remains the quintessential other who indulges in forbidden pleasures and purposely allows herself to be gazed at. This, ironically, attributes her an agency, a way to survive, despite the endless gossips and rumours about her. The ‘whispering’ that never stops is symbolic of the silence surrounding ageing queer men and women in Sri Lanka. They are not talked about, or even if they *are* talked about, their stories are passed on in subdued voices as scandalous gossip, not to be uttered aloud within polite society. Both *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* and *Bodies in Motion* address this discomfiting silence and invisibility ageing (as well as younger) queer men and women in Sri Lanka are condemned to; in so doing, they articulate the unspeakable.

When Memory Dies: Wise older men, secularism and political redundancy in a militant state

Sivanandan's *When Memory Dies* is epic in its narrative expanse, rewriting the history of Sri Lanka, through a three generation saga of a Tamil family located in the North: 'Its chief accomplishment is the manner in which it lays bare the processes of history – history *as* process – while grappling with the intimate experiences of those involved in making history' (Rao 1999: 176; emphasis in the original). In this segment I shall look at the ageing Uncle Para who has been an active participant in this history-making: from the 1920s through the independence to the emergence of militant Tamil nationalism – Uncle Para lives through different phases of Sri Lankan history, acquiring a wisdom which he fails to successfully pass on to his grandsons aggressively devoted to the cause of the Eelam. By the end of Book 2, Uncle Para is comparatively resigned. Having 'chucked up' his job in the railways, he returns to Sandilipay, to take up farming (WMD 214-215). He sees himself ageing, and feels the necessity to 'divest himself of material needs and desires' (WMD 215). Despite his conscious decision to renounce material life, Uncle Para cannot but shut out the world of politics. His sharp mind, his ability to critically assess political moves and state policies make him a favourite with the politically conscious younger generation, who turn to him in the times of crisis. But, Rajan, Lali and Vijay – those who turn to Uncle Para and value his wisdom acquired through a deep emotional engagement with leftist politics, are either exiled or killed. Uncle Para is eventually alienated; for his vision of nationalism no longer appeals to the majority of militant nationalists devoted to eliminating the nation's heterogeneity.

In the 1920s, a young Para travels to Colombo to find a job where his half-brother Saha is already working. These naïve men from the North get involved in the anti-colonial working class movement. Though Para has a peripheral role in the leftist political struggles of the times, he observes from a distance, extremely intelligent as he always is, the fault lines within this movement which soon begins to fork out in different directions. The first major blow comes when the movement is colonised by the British Labour Party: A. E. Goonesinha, the self-styled leader of the Ceylon Labour Union, sides with the colonisers with an eye on the political benefits he is going to reap from this association after independence. S.W., Para and Saha's mentor, abrasively criticises Goonesinha's opportunism, and Para comes up with a telling observation – "If that isn't riding two horses – in opposite directions – I don't know what it is" (WMD 84). However, S.W.'s political views are also not as emancipating as they

initially try to believe – his militancy and syndicalism also do not provide a better alternative. Both S.W. and Goonesinha, at the end of Book 1, disillusion their protégés – the first by refusing to take part in a general strike alienates his allies; the latter befriends the British Labour Party leaders and fails the local working class movement. Uncle Para is a wise middle-aged man by the end of Book 1, who, in Book 2, is the voice of wisdom, anticipating a terrible future, as the Left as well as the Sri Lanka Freedom Party capitulates to communalism. Lali, exasperated at the retreat of the LSSP and the Communist Party in the face of the belligerently right-wing SLFP, turns to Uncle Para for hope, looking upon him as one of the “real custodians of our history and our culture” (WMD 217). Uncle Para is certainly not exceptional; there are many like him. But, their political insight, their sympathies towards leftist politics based on class solidarity cutting across religious and ethnic divides, and their understanding of the danger of emerging racist prejudice among the Left, are barely perceived as useful. Lali’s reverence for Uncle Para is rare among the younger generation of revolutionaries who have begun treading the dangerous path of communal politics. In any case, the constitution, by default, allows for communal politics to erupt – “one man, one vote” (WMD 221) – an electoral system in which the Sinhalese majority will always have the upper hand. Lali is disconcerted – “I asked Uncle Para where all this was going to end, and he answered: ‘war’.” She elaborates – “Communal war, between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, that is what he said. He said it was already there, written into the constitution” (WMD 221). Uncle Para holds up the mirror to the devastating politics the SLFP is up to, changing the comparatively younger Rajan and Lali’s perspective of things; he unravels how the SLFP is simply redeploying the divide and rule policy of the British, now more ‘democratically’. Although Rajan is initially hopeful that the Sinhalese government could not possibly condemn the pact signed with the Tamil minority, Uncle Para’s prognosis makes him feel less optimistic – ‘I had grown up under his aegis and remembered only too well that his judgements, often delivered offhand, were seldom wrong’ (WMD 222). Uncle Para is again proved right, much to the discontent of Rajan – ‘On April 9th it came: there was going to be no pact with the Tamils, the country belonged to the Sinhalese. Official’ (WMD 222). What neither Rajan nor Lali foresees is the devastating effect of this declaration – of Lali losing her life to Sinhalese thugs who rape and murder her for having dared to marry a Tamil. The ageing Uncle Para too does not anticipate the penalty his own family has to pay for being syncretic and secular in their political outlook. But given his age and wisdom, he does apprehend a never ending war, which, by the end of Book 2, is still in the offing.

In Book 3, Sivanandan presents Uncle Para as a sage, addicted to toddy, sometimes a bit inebriated but with a profound political insight which never ceases to fascinate Vijay, Lali's son. Uncle Para is in his eighties, slightly maladjusted to the recent development in the village – 'Electricity, pah. Well it had to come I suppose...' (WMD 328). Still deeply attached to the land, he believes electricity is of no use in Sandilipay, for the land is incapable of yielding much; plus, families owing small bits of land cannot benefit from the coming of electricity – "We can never feed ourselves till we have large-scale farming and regular labour, but all our lands are broken up and scattered", rues Uncle Para (WMD 332). He sheds light on the underdeveloped economy of the villages, the state's inattention to farming and tilling of lands, and the poor living conditions of those who have to depend on an agrarian economy. His grandson Ravi too does not seem to have much to look forward to, having to depend on a small piece of land for livelihood: "The Colombo Tamils can go abroad, the town Tamils can go to the Middle East, but the village boys can only go back to their little bits of land..." (WMD 334). Uncle Para, however, notes that a change has come over Ravi – "He is his own man now, does what he wants, goes where he likes, tells no one where he goes" (WMD 333). He suspects that Ravi might be involved in something dangerous, but cannot make out what it is exactly. It would be soon revealed to him that Ravi is one of the "Boys". The scarcity of job opportunities, a stagnant economy, and lack of education in the Tamil villages were instrumental in the rise of militant Tamil nationalism – it is no surprise that Ravi would soon join the Boys. 'Then one day, Ravi disappeared for good' – this is the reality with which hundreds of Jaffna family had to put up with (WMD 392).

When Uncle Para learns about the Boys, he is, at first, elated; for, he believes that they 'brought back legend to a people starved of heroes and fed on fear...' (WMD 394). But the promise of revolution that Para sees in the activities of the Boys is soon lost, as they get involved in a nasty power game – 'they had begun to fight each other over who could serve the people better, which faction, which dogma, till the people mattered no more' (WMD 394). Revolution is replaced by aggressive militancy, and Uncle Para is alarmed at what his grandson and his friends are up to. He tries to make them see reason: "You are destroying everything you built. You must unite" (WMD 394). Yogi, Ravi's friend, fails to appreciate Para's point of view; he is all set to take revenge on those who have betrayed them. Uncle Para's advice seems naïve and useless. Exasperated, Para asks – "What happened to your socialism?" Yogi is slightly disconcerted by the question; it finds him off-guard. He fumbles – "Once we take power..." Uncle Para cuts him short, cynically – "You'll keep it" (WMD

395). But Para knows he is too old to be taken seriously; especially, his views, his political wisdom, are of no use to the nationalist militants. Even if they see reason in his endless pleas to unite, to give up in-fighting, it is too late for them to go back. What lies ahead is devastation – friends killing friends, brothers killing brothers. This is precisely what happens when Ravi, now an aggressive Tamil nationalist leader kills his cousin Vijay. Uncle Para is saved by death from witnessing this ultimate tragedy. His death, as Rao observes, ‘symbolises the passing away of an older, secular, cultural ethos’ (1999: 186). Vijay, who inherits grandfather Para’s vision, is also killed. *When Memory Dies* ends with a sense of deep pathos, of utter hopelessness – the impossibility of restoring the young Tamil militants to the secular vision of an older generation. In contrast, *Love Marriage* is slightly more hopeful as Murali, the ageing father, is successful in passing on his secular vision to Yalini.

Bequeathing a history: Intergenerational bonding and conflict in *Love Marriage*

When Yalini’s grandmother Tharshi passes away in Sri Lanka, she leaves her a pair of diamond earrings which her uncle Neelan passes on to her a few years later when he visits the United States – a token of memory, a talisman through which Tharshi wishes her granddaughter to remember her. ‘Gifts like this usually come from within the family’, reflects Yalini (LM 238). Similarly, it is through the ageing and the experienced that history is transmitted to the younger generation – a history which needs to be preserved not only to instil a sense of pride for their nation or ethnic identity in the younger generation but also to show them what one can learn from mistakes committed by predecessors. The intergenerational bonding as well as conflict in *Love Marriage* is tied with the re-examination of the past, of what went wrong, of what could have been righted.

Yalini’s sense and understanding of history comes through the stories ageing adults in the family tell her incessantly, or she hears them recounting, as if out of compulsion: her father Murali, her mother Vani, her aunt Kalyani and most importantly, her dying maternal uncle Kumaran, a former LTTE leader. Yalini acts as care-giver to Kumaran in his last days and he passes on to her a history of which she is an inextricable part, but has only second hand information. This is a family history, both personal and political, which Kumaran feels Yalini, brought up in a foreign country, must be told: “I wanted to tell you something...A story” (LM 46). On his deathbed, Kumaran wishes Yalini to bear the brunt of his catharsis, by confessing to her the wrongs he had done to her father and the family at large: “I deserve to have to tell you. When your father wanted to marry your mother, I tried to stop him” (LM

47). But Kumaran is not just an overprotective brother confessing to his niece the way in which he tried to separate her parents. He is also a Tiger: “I was a Tiger...I am a Tiger” (LM 47). He could not accept his sister conveniently running away from the cause to which he dedicated his life, while also shaming the family by choosing her own husband (LM 119). This family narrative is a page out of a larger political history of the island, to which Yalini belongs, but does not seem to know it quite well. Kumaran claims: “I can tell you the whole story.” But, Yalini, aware of how the past has differently afflicted different people, contradicts him: “No, you can’t...Part of it is my father’s” (LM 48).

As discussed in Chapter 2, Murali, an emotional family man and Kumaran, a Tamil Tiger who abandoned the family to pursue a violent political cause, are pitted against each other in Yalini’s narrative. Each has his own account of history, and one cannot be prioritised over the other. The history which Yalini should inherit, therefore, should be a palimpsest of histories – a concurrence of polyphonic voices, one corroborating the other, one contradicting the other, one totally dismissing the other – ‘it’s a war that belongs as much to you as to me. And you cannot decide where you stand unless you know all of it’, advises Murali (LM 53). The novel by deploying elderly family members to recount a family saga intertwined with stories of insurgency, militancy, and homicide to a 22 year old Yalini, revives an ancient tradition of older people passing on histories of the clan or tribe to younger members orally. Just as elderly members of the family bequeath property and possessions on younger members, histories too need to be bequeathed through telling and retelling. In this case, however, the younger listener is not a passive recipient of the tales told her. She reinterprets them, conscientiously circumventing the predisposition of the narrators, and retells the stories with a deep sense of obligation: “I am just recording it. They do not understand this: *history*. Cure the future by knowing the past” (LM 247; emphasis in the original). The purpose of recording this history, which is channelled through stories of very intimate affective relationships is to prevent the recurrence of the wrongs done in the past – the importance of allowing different lives to co-exist, of recognising polyphonic voices that emerge from the nation, and of learning ‘to love people who do not worship our gods, eat our food, or share our blood’ (LM 223). As Jeganathan and Ismail write:

The nation has many histories, but it claims one as its own; its people have many identities but they must inhabit one...And the pursuit of this single minded,

monolithic object has brought nothing but violence, terror, and destruction to us all (1995: 16)

The young narrator of *Love Marriage* looks forward to the possibility of the end of violence, by scrutinising the wrongs done by an older generation in the past by unveiling the fallacies of an older generation of bigots and hardcore nationalists. In fact, Kumaran, the devoted LTTE leader, who had acquired an obsessive liking for killing people, regrets the harm he has done to his daughter, Janani – “The Tigers are the only thing she has known” (LM 49). This realisation occurs to him when he sees Yalini at the airport – “I was never more jealous of [your father] than I was at the airport, when I saw you standing next to Janani. Look at how different you are, the things you inherited” (LM 50). Perhaps, Yalini has not experienced or witnessed violence the way Janani has; but the burden of history she carries on her is no less disturbing. For, every single member in her family has been witness to it: ‘So from the time she was a child, to well after she left Sri Lanka, my mother knew violence’ (LM 134). The past cannot be altered; but future acts of violence can be forestalled by retelling this history dominated by a profound agony of loss. In Yalini’s unprejudiced storytelling, the cause of the Tamil Eelam is neither upheld nor disparaged as mindless terrorism; she treads a middle ground, undoing deceptive official versions of history. Yalini has heard stories about ‘Tamils disappearing, Tamils tortured, Tamils killing Tamils’ (LM 255). Even her father, despite all his tolerance and philanthropy, supports the cause, if not as belligerently as Kumaran or Janani does: “I am a doctor and I cannot agree with the Tigers’ tactics, but at the end of the day I am a Tamil. People attacked my friends, and the government let them” (LM 52). Yalini tries to comprehend both sides of the story; but she knows that while ‘no one would be right’, ‘some would be more wrong’ (LM 255). Therefore, she has mixed feelings for her dying uncle: ‘I could hate Kumaran and still love him’ (LM 255). But, in her story, she takes a long view of things, shows violence in its stark nakedness: by revealing the atrocities of a terrorising political rebellion, Yalini calls for the necessity of peace-building. Her generation should not repeat the same mistakes made by the older one. Therefore, she tries to thwart Janani’s marriage with Suthan, the young LTTE loyalist. But Janani refuses to see reason in Yalini’s pleas. She mocks her for all the privileges she has, for having irresponsibly escaped the duty she has towards her homeland. Yalini is surprised at Janani’s steely commitment to the cause of the Eelam – “Like your mother chose your father. I am choosing Suthan, I’m choosing a cause” (LM 274). However, Yalini sympathises with her, thinking ‘these are the things I could have done’ (LM 277), had her father not kept her safely out of the civil war, by

migrating to the United States early in life. Yalini understands that it is not easy to put an end to violence and eliminate ethnic animosity which has a very long history, no matter, how much she advocates the necessity to love, as her father does. The novel ends with a deep sense of pathos – ‘...today it is a country held together by lies. Shells fall and no one claims them. People disappear and bereaved families bury no one’ (LM 289). This pathos which undergirds every sentence of the novel indicates the necessity to re-think the nation – not in aggressive, territorialist and homogenous terms as an older generation of Sri Lankans have imagined it, but in more heterogeneous ways.

This is not to suggest that no one belonging to the older generation envisaged the nation in polyvalent and syncretic terms. But they were minorities. Murali and Vani, Yalini’s parents, are two examples. Another is Arun, the ageing headmaster of Yalini’s cousin Haran’s school, who held a similar view, for which he had to pay a very heavy price. He was murdered ruthlessly, and much later it was discovered that ‘the assassin was a Tamil rebel who was angry with the old gentleman for arranging for a Tamil school to have a [cricket] match with the Sri Lankan Army’ (LM 133). There are several such stories in the public memory, in the family lore churned out by the ageing members. These stories need to be told and retold and condemned in the process of retelling, by highlighting on the effects these events had on individuals –

When he heard the news, Haran’s Heart – which had broken with the burning of his Colombo home – broke again. It broke quietly but firmly, and he knew this could not be fixed this time. (LM 133)

This retelling therefore should involve reinstating faith in humaneness and people’s capacity to love. This is an enormous responsibility today’s Sri Lankan youths must take upon themselves, to redress the unspeakable violence their elders have perpetrated on innocent lives for decades. Janani, devoted to the cause of the Tamil Eelam, a proud daughter of revolutionary parents, might deride Yalini for her alleged escapism; but, it is high time, as Ganeshananthan emphasizes through Yalini’s narration, the path chosen by Kumaran and his wife was abandoned by the younger generation of Sri Lankans.

If the Moon Smiled and The Match: Ageing, renunciation and nostalgia

In Lokugé's *If the Moon Smiled*, Mahendra and Manthri, the Sri Lankan couple settled in Australia, age with the disconcerting realisation of the impossibility of preserving tradition, of authoritatively controlling children, and recreating a Sinhalese home with rigid gender roles intact. As analysed in considerable detail in chapters 2 and 3, Mahendra's authority as the unbending patriarch of the family is attenuated as his children refuse to conform to the demands he makes of them – Nelum refuses to marry and runs away from her wedding while Devake pursues a career in music, despite Mahendra's raging disapproval. Manthri too grows with her children, initially distraught at their disobedience and apparent waywardness, only to appreciate the sense of emancipation and right to life that their exposure to a more cosmopolitan culture has inculcated in them. As discussed in Chapter 3, Manthri also finds a way out from the oppressive structures of the hetero-patriarchal family dominated by a ruthless husband. Hers is not a confrontational rebellion as is Nelum's. She quietly resigns herself from the duty of looking after the family which has long abandoned her. She discovers peace in reading, spending time in the temple, and teaching children of the war victims. With age, Manthri feels the necessity to renounce emotional ties not because she considers that as a duty every Sri Lankan Buddhist is expected to perform. For her, this renunciation is a muted revolt against the coercion she has been a victim of all her life. She makes no demands of Nelum, who has moved on. No matter how emancipated Nelum is her own world, Manthri feels abandoned by her. She does not complain to any of them, for they are no longer around. She makes herself happy by sending flowers to herself on Mother's Day "just so I don't forget that I have been a mother, that I have given birth to a son and a daughter. And on Valentine's Day I send flowers again so that I don't forget I am married" (IMS 218). Manthri ages to realise that what she has been prepared for since adolescence – the rites of passage she went through to become a woman, and by default a good wife and a dutiful mother – has all come to naught. The novel ends with a disturbing nightmare, in which, Manthri seems to encounter a second self which might be lurking within her, the image of a 'Wild woman with streaming hair, naked and languorously stretched in the moonlight' (IMS 223). This wildness has never been unleashed; rather rigorously suppressed, through patronising lessons in morality and womanly decorum. Frail and immobilised partially by ill-health, Manthri listens to herself 'crying in [her] sleep' (IMS 223).

While Manthri is institutionalised, Mahendra sobers down with age, although unable to reconcile himself with his independent children. His relationship with Nelum changes over

time: father and daughter reconnect, when the social humiliation of having to deal with Nelum's escape from her wedding gradually subsides. Manthri also notices the change in Mahendra, the fact that he does not lose his temper anymore, or makes it a point that he is heard and obeyed: 'Mahendra. He says nothing now. He seems to have lost the will to protest. I don't know whether I am relieved or just tired' (IMS 199). With age, Mahendra loses his aggressiveness, but he does not outgrow his conservative self. He is surprised as Manthri begins to maintain a studied distance from him, and wishes she had a little of her mother in her – the devoted wife as the latter has been all her life. At Manthri's father's death anniversary as her mother performs the rituals, she rues: "I am like a flower gone stale, Manthri, now that your father's light is extinguished" (IMS 205). Mahendra does not see a reflection of his mother-in-law in his wife. Had it been so, he would have been happier. Earlier he would have demanded that from Manthri; but with age, while he has lost the temperament to demand and protest, Manthri has also acquired an agency not to succumb to his demands. 'He has lost his power over me', asserts Manthri (IMS 199). Mahendra hangs on to his roots – a painting from Kandy, some Sri Lankan music, a few old photographs – these are all that is left of the past, after the family disintegrates. He is defeated and he knows it. *If the Moon Smiled* ends with a disturbing feeling of isolation that comes with old age.

Gunasekara's *The Match*, as we have seen in Chapter 2, dramatises an ageing father's endless efforts to reconnect with his only son, and also with his roots in Sri Lanka, a country he has never visited in his youth. Getting on in years, Sunny understands the necessity to revivify disintegrated affective ties not only with his family but an entire country, his original homeland. Located in England, he is driven by a profound sense of nostalgia for the past, and a foreboding – the possibility of his son growing apart, and never knowing or appreciating his roots. Having analysed Sunny's emotional turmoil of reaching back to a father he has always misunderstood and reaching out to a son whose world is fast moving apart from his in Chapter 2, here I shall focus on Hector who nurtures a deep avuncular love for Sunny since his childhood days. It is Sunny's chance meeting with an ageing Hector in Britain that shapes for him his perspective on relationships and filial ties later in life.

Sunny meets Hector through his friend Ranil, whose father, a Sri Lankan man had migrated to England in his teenage years never to return. By this time, Hector, his father's friend has grown visibly old – 'His hair had thinned and whitened, making his face seem a little darker' (M 127). Hector has been the only medium of communication between Sunny and his father

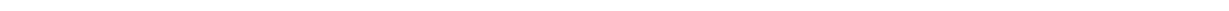
Lester, located in the Philippines, for Sunny could never forgive his father whom he held responsible for his mother's suicide. Hector has kept in touch with Sunny, all through: "the prodigal son" (M 127), as he calls him, with mocking reprimand. He takes him to task the moment they meet at Ranil's place, much to Sunny's awkwardness: "You young fellows never look back. You forget everyone, everything. I thought it was high time you were reminded" (M 127). Although Sunny bypasses the accusation and Hector does not press him further to answer him, the short interaction between them (an ageing uncle and a prodigal nephew, not a biological but a social relation formed within the Sri Lankan ghetto in the Philippines) would gather an unforeseen meaningfulness to Sunny as he gets on in years and feels the necessity to reconnect with his roots. When Sunny asks Hector the purpose of his visit to England, the latter explains the obligation of performing some affective labour by choice – the necessity of reconnecting with friends, old friends – "You do that as you get on. You have to refresh the memory, Sunny, otherwise it all shrivels up" (M 127). Hector's sarcastic jibe at Sunny's indifference to his lonely father is hard to miss in his response. He tries his best to return him to his father – "You know your father misses you. He'd like to see you" (M 128). Sunny does not respond, and Hector lets go of him, sensing his nonchalance. Later, when they go on a day trip, the conversation again turns to the past, and for the first time ever, Sunny expresses the reason behind his gradual separation from his father – "And my mother?...He neglected her. Frustrated her. He let her die. He killed her, didn't he?" (M 131) Hector tries to explain that it is not Lester who is responsible for his mother's suicide; she was a special woman, and something did not work between them – "Love needs something more" (M 131). Sunny refuses to believe Hector; no matter how much Hector has seen life, he is not experienced in love to reflect on love: 'He could be an uncle, but not a father', concludes Sunny (M 133). Hector's age might have brought him other kinds of wisdom, but not much knowledge about love – "He had never married; he had never come close to [love]" (M 133). Sunny still too young to comprehend Hector's clairvoyance, makes an unproblematic connection between Hector's singlehood and his inability to comprehend love. It would take Sunny many years to realise that what Hector meant when he said "Love needs something more". Hector's wisdom and his perspective on making an effort to preserve relationships would have a new meaning to Sunny when he himself ages and finds himself losing touch with his wife and son. Later, there are several moments in the text, when Sunny looks at his son and fears losing him, remembering 'how he himself had so easily stepped back from his father' (M 186). When he again meets Hector, Sunny's son Miley is nine years old. The latter reminds him how they all used to play cricket in their Philippines home, and

enquires of Mikey – “Does he play cricket?” (M 205) Those were the days when Sunny and his father really connected with each other, over the enthusiasm of playing the game, brought to Manila from Ceylon. Hector and Sunny again reconnect over cricket, as they discuss the game, and the former shows how he still practices batting following a method he learned from Sunny – “You see, I have discovered it is not from the old that you learn but from the young. Isn’t that so?” Embarrassed, Sunny shyly replies: “I am not so sure” (M 206). What Sunny learns from Hector is extremely significant to him, as the ageing man fills him with a deep nostalgia for the bygone years – the necessity for him to develop in Mikey a love for cricket: ‘If he only knew how, and time was a little kinder’ (M 206). Teaching Mikey cricket is not only a means to connect the boy to his roots, but also a penance on his part – a penance to redress the negligence he showed his father who is no more. The rest of the novel, as I have already analysed in Chapter 2, is about Sunny’s untiring endeavours to reconnect with his lost past and inculcate in his son love for his roots. Although not acknowledged in explicit terms, the ageing Hector, with all his wisdom, steps in to save Sunny from a feeling of complete isolation and loneliness; he saves Sunny from the same predicament his father suffered, by bringing home to him the necessity of forging an unyielding bond with the past, and relationships that ultimately matter. This is the kind of wisdom an older kin sometimes passes on to the younger generation and changes their lives for the better. *The Match*, therefore, focuses on another aspect of intergenerational relationship which is often essential to hold together loved ones.

In this chapter I have made an attempt to trace diverse facets of intergenerational relationships within postcolonial, expatriate or local Sri Lankan families, with a focus on the ageing individuals. There is, as the analysis of the seven novels shows, no singular template within which these relationships operate; and, the experience of ageing is as varied as the number of individuals this chapter has discussed. Each experience is unique, contingent upon the person’s location, sexuality, class and ethnicity in a given historical moment. Within the heteronormative family, ageing might sometimes come with ease, with children taking care of the older, or turning to them in moments of crisis. However, looking after parents or grandparents is bound with a sense of duty (or *dhamma*) which is a form of affective labour children are expected to perform as a sign of gratitude towards parents or grandparents who brought them up. The give-and-take policy hidden in this care-giving is never perceived as an

economic exchange, but is euphemised as moral duty or labour of love, unless of course children turn out to be particularly uncaring and selfish (as in *The Hungry Ghosts*). Those who fall outside the structures of normative filial associations – queer men and women, for example – have a completely different experience of ageing, often marked by agonising loneliness, under the disapproving gaze of a judgemental society (as evidenced by *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* and *Bodies in Motion*). However, ageing within Sri Lankan families is not always about disempowerment and marginalisation; sometimes it is just the opposite (as evidenced by Shivan's strained relationship with his grandmother Daya in *The Hungry Ghosts*). The very fact that one is chronologically older than the other attributes to the former an involuntary power to subjugate and oppress the latter. On the other hand, the younger generation often mocks the redundancy of the values and ideologies upheld by an older one – sometimes they violently dismiss them; at other times, patronises them on the pretext of their senility. At other times, the wisdom of the younger generation exposed to more cosmopolitan ways of being contends narrow essentialist visions of the older generation, sometimes successful, sometimes failing, to convert the latter into accepting differences, which so far, have been perceived as unnatural (for instance, Shivan and Renu's conflict with the ageing Daya and Hema, both interpellated in hetero-patriarchal ideas of gender relations and sexual coupledness in *The Hungry Ghosts*). Within Tamil communities from the north of Sri Lanka, the wisdom of an older generation of leftist activists is ignored as ineffectual (as in *When Memory Dies*), while more cosmopolitan youths of the present day look back upon ageing Tamil militants with suspicion, making an endeavour to show them where they had exactly gone wrong (as in *Love Marriage*). Within a Sinhalese family (such as in *If the Moon Smiled*), an ageing father's animosity with his more liberal daughter brought up within a transnational space, throws into relief the mindless conservatism of an older generation, whose inflexible adherence to tradition and ideas of ethnic purity had led to a violent communal war resulting in the loss of innumerable innocent lives. At other times, intervention of older kin, sagacious about the ways of the world, is necessary to show a more prodigal younger generation the importance of preserving filial ties, of making attempts to connect with those matters, and resuscitate failing affective bonds (as in *The Match*). The intergenerational concords and conflicts which are central or marginal to the plots of the novels I have analysed in this chapter, therefore, reveal a complex hierarchy in filial relationship between the older and younger generations – a hierarchy which is not fixed but variable, depending upon who wields more power at a certain juncture. While the presence of older people brings in a sense of genealogy, biological, social as well as political to the

younger generations, intergenerational antagonism underlines paradigmatic shifts in making sense of the world, affective relations and ideas of progress. The comparatively cosmopolitan youth are, in many of these novels, posited vis-à-vis a conservative generation of parents and grandparents, revealing the necessity to speak back to autocratic authoritative figures in order to open up possibilities for minorities, sexual or ethnic, to have their voices heard, to emphasise the essentiality of abandoning a narrow, homogenous, territorialist vision of the nation and therefore, push agendas for peace-building in a warring nation-state, fractured across ethnic lines.



Conclusion

Sri Lankan expatriate writings have found a global market, and in the last few years, quite a few novels in English have been published to high critical acclaim. While this thesis was being written, established as well as new authors published interesting stories about issues ranging from the ethnic riots and the LTTE, to the tsunami of 2005 which took several lives, caused mass displacement and seriously affected the Sri Lankan economy.

The war officially ended in 2009; at this moment, there is immense need for radical political writings from Sri Lanka that deal with the communal and ethnic tensions underlying the lives of the islanders even today. Recent novels such as Yasmine Gooneratne's *Sweet and Simple Kind* (2006) and Mary Anne Mohanraj's *The Stars Change* (2013) fictionalise the history of the war. The first is in the form of a family saga, and the second resorts to the genre of science fiction, reminiscent of the *Star Wars* series, avoiding direct references to the real war. *Sweet and Simple Kind*, going back to the colonial past and locating its narrative within modern Ceylonese families reminds one of *Cinnamon Gardens*. *The Stars Change* continues the erotic abundance of *Bodies in Motion*, underlining the importance of recognising individual desires and choices at the time of the war. Shehan Karunatilaka's *Chinaman: The Legend of Pradeep Mathew* (2010), based on the life of an elusive cricketer, experiments with the novelistic form by making textual and para-textual use of the Internet. This biographical novel traverses the murky world of the sports-betting business, embroiled in larger political turbulence caused by the ethnic war. Newer writers have emerged in the past one decade, located in Sri Lanka or abroad. These writings are still sparsely commented upon, and more than their literary merit, these works are relevant for they narrate the nation by visiting its interstices, that are hidden or obliterated in dominant discourses constructing the nation. Nalin de Silva is one such writer who became an author at 63 and published three novels before his accidental death in a landmine explosion: *The Road From Elephant Pass*, *The Far Spent Day*, and *The Ginirella Conspiracy* are three important contemporary novels, of which the first, based on the journey of an erstwhile female LTTE member and a Sinhalese army officer, has now become a bestselling classic. However, not much has been written about this

novel in the academia. Another important work, a biographical fiction, which I mentioned in Chapter 4, is *The Limits of Love* (2005) by Rajiv Wijesinha – the fictional life of Richard de Zoysa – a playwright, an actor, a politician and a queer man who led a fantastically non-normative life. Zoysa's radical life retold is an important revelation of alternative lives which cannot be accommodated within familiar, conventional registers. The same is true of Jonny's story, one of the major characters in Karunatilaka's *Chinaman* – the man with amorous interest in boys and cricket. Or, for that matter, Visakesa Chandrasekaram's *Tigers Don't Confess* (2011), an intense homoerotic love story, that clandestinely flourishes despite stringent monitoring within the LTTE. These non-conformist and unconventional lives need to be told, for these have immense power to debunk what is upheld as inviolably normative – such as, marrying within one's ethnic-religious community, marrying within one's caste within that community, unquestioningly accepting patriarchal hegemony, absolute obedience to parental authority and compulsory heterosexuality. The question all these novels seem to raise is about the individual's agency and choice vis-à-vis the state.

The canon of Sri Lankan writing in English is constantly expanding, with contributions from both local and expatriate writers. As mentioned at the very outset, these contemporary writers cannot help writing about the war. The more the war is recalled, the more it is critiqued, the more personal losses are recorded and retold, the possibility of healing the deep scars left by it increases. Sri Lankan literary works seem to participate in this act of iteration – telling and retelling stories about the war, of lost relations, of displaced families, of wronged men and women, of lack of sexual choices, of intergenerational discord. Every Sri Lankan life is rooted in disturbing memories of loss. These are the stories which are being told by the contemporary novel in which the family is by default the primary trope. The family performs a metonymic function in representing many kinds of trauma, because very few things could be more traumatising than experiencing bigotry, marginalisation, and violence within personal spaces of intimate relationships that are perceived to be founded on mutual love, respect and trust.

The war touched every single house, every single family – it was not something happening somewhere else about which people read in the newspapers and forgot. It is interesting how Shyam Selvadurai is conducting workshops across the island to make people write their stories, unburden their pent up feelings on paper, thereby give birth to a whole new discourse of memorialization of loss and destruction which could be therapeutic and help take a step closer to peace-building (Selvadurai 2014c). The process of healing and commemoration will

continue, and needs to continue, since peace-building is the most difficult task in the island at this moment.

I have tried to examine and uphold a possible way of facilitating peace-building, by deconstructing power hierarchies within the affective space of the family. While many of the familial relations are patterned in this manner in every part of the globe, and are not unique to Sri Lanka, these relations acquire a different meaning in a war torn postcolonial nation which is still in the process of building its identity.

The National Peace Council (NPC), which was founded in 1995, is currently working across 25 Sri Lankan districts, through NGOs and interreligious groups, with a special focus on women victimised by the war. Reflecting on poor communicative strategies of the government, led by Maithripala Sirisena of the New Democratic Front that came to power in 2015, Jehan Perera, the executive director of the National Peace Council, says:

The problem of communications is in relation to the transitional justice process. Issues of post-war accountability, war crimes and power-sharing are ethnically divisive. They are not popular with the ethnic majority. Politicians do not wish to publicly take positions on controversial issues in which majority sentiment is in the opposite direction. It seems that the dominant thinking within the government is to get the building blocks in place without too much fanfare. Both the transitional justice and constitutional reform processes are ultimately public processes. So far the government appears to be subcontracting that mission to civil society groups. (Dibbert 2016: n.pag)

Perera underlines the insurmountable difficulties which the peace-process is faced with, seven years after the war ended officially. The violation of human rights which happened during the 26 year war is still to be addressed; justice does not seem to come easy. However, the situation at the current moment is slightly better than what it used to be under President Mahinda Rajapaksa's government, which ruled for about a decade (2006-2015), turning out to be one of the most autocratic governments in postcolonial Sri Lanka. In an illuminating article, titled, 'Fear of Ethnic Reconciliation: The Reason for Post-War Media Censorship', J S Tissainayagam of the National Endowment of Democracy, Washington, D.C., delineates an emergency-like situation that persisted in Sri Lanka after the end of the war, owing to the Rajapaksa government's apprehension of diluting the hegemony of the Sinhalese race. Focusing on mindless media censorship after the end of the war, Tissainayagam writes:

[I]f censorship is lifted in the interests of reconciliation and the Tamils are permitted to tell their story freely, the government fears the myth it has propagated among the Sinhalese for legitimacy – that the Tamils are the “enemy” and have to be militarily suppressed – would explode. (2012: 257)

A similar censorship has been experienced by authors, especially expatriate authors who write in English, the reason being that the country’s intellectuals have always been vociferously critical of the war and the Sinhalese government’s reluctance to accelerate the peace-process.

Apart from that, expatriate or diasporic writers are often censured for exoticising the country for a Western readership. The legitimacy of their writings has been often questioned by writers and critics based in Sri Lanka, and diasporic writings have been pushed to the margins significantly. Chandani Lokugé, protesting the nationalist cultural elites’ disavowal of expatriate and diasporic writers, observes:

Diaspora defies linear definition. It is an intriguing and unpredictable space of (dis)belonging. Generally, we diasporics are seen within the host country, to use Gayatri Spivak’s eloquently coined slogan, as “Resident Aliens”. If this were the case, I would say in the home country, we have come to be equally distanced from the majority community as “other” – Non-Resident Aliens, particularly if our writing does not meet its expectations. Enmeshed in such cultural politics, we diasporics write even more from the edge than creative writers are generally known to do. (2012: 328)

In addition to the suspicion for expatriate writers, for a long time there has been a nationalist discomfort about those who wrote in English. However, it is interesting to note that the resistance towards the linguistic and cultural colonisation purported by the increasing popularity of English among a privileged, urban class in postcolonial Sri Lanka is gradually decreasing. The Sinhala Only Act which had delegitimised the use of English, riding high on the nationalist wave following the independence, is no longer valid. In fact, the Rajapaksa government showed considerably favourable attitude towards English, advocating re-appropriation of the language to suit Sri Lankan realities. The government’s proposition to “Speak English our way” in 2009 was an official step in recognising what Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin call appropriation and abrogation of Queen’s English by the postcolonial nation (1989). This re-legitimation of English as a language of official communication might open

up a larger market for English language writers. However, English will still remain a language of the minority within Sri Lanka, because, as Sivamohan Sumathy (2012) observes:

Concretely speaking, Sri Lankan English has been, and remains to this day, urban centric and Sinhala-Southern oriented. It is complicit in the politics of One Sri Lanka movement...if we are unable to identify one Sri Lanka, how does one talk about a Sri Lankan English? (340-341)

The move by Rajapaksa government could not but appear a progressive one, because within a fiercely aggressive capitalist economy, dominated by Information Technology industries, it is impossible to integrate Sri Lanka meaningfully to the global market without recognising the necessity of knowing English. Therefore, Sumathy, identifying this decision of the government as nothing but a ploy to reinforce its capitalist development policies, warns that the English language should be used 'as counter move' not as a 'unifying force' of nation-building as the government seemed to suggest (341). Within Sri Lanka, English should continue to be used as vehicle of protest and resistance, and not as a language co-opted by the bigoted Sinhalese majoritarian government to accomplish its economic goals. Yet, the problem of English writings reaching the Sri Lankan masses would remain. Conversely, the same writings have the power to transcend the boundaries of the nation and reach those who are not familiar with local Sri Lankan languages. It is a peculiar paradox, as Sumathy also admits. The debate surrounding whether to write in English or not to write in English will continue to dominate the Sri Lankan literary scene; but, that certainly cannot take away from Sri Lankan English literature its political valence. This thesis made a small endeavour in establishing that political and cultural legitimacy of Sri Lankan novels, which, in the coming years would proliferate considerably. What remains to be seen is whether those writings resist or reinforce majoritarian discourses.

Tissainayagam, Lokugé and Sumathy were writing when Rajapaksa was in power, and any form of critical writing in the media or in literary form, was closely scrutinised by the state, in order to stifle all dissenting voices and screen out truths about the ethnic conflict, truths which might be threatening for the Sinhalese majority and their absolutist claims on the island. All of this was happening after the war was declared over. This was also the period which saw the proliferation of expatriate/diasporic writings from multiple locations outside the country.

The new government which came to power in 2015, in an urgency to establish its distinct identity,

...quickly abolished surveillance and censorship of media and civil society groups, embarked on constitutional reforms to restrict executive powers, and took steps to restore the independence of the judiciary. In contrast to the combative approach of the Rajapaksa government, it also initiated a new, more open dialogue with the international community, including human rights organizations.

However, as the Human Rights Watch reports,

... the government took no significant measures to end impunity for security force abuse, including police use of torture. At the time of writing, the government also had not yet repealed the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), despite promises to do so, and continued to detain people under it.⁵⁷

The PTA is yet to be repealed, but what has emerged as a result of sustained protests against the PTA is a counterterrorism law which has been recently framed by the government, but not implemented. This new law has also met with severe criticism from the civil society, for it appears to be more repressive than the existing PTA. The war, therefore, is symbolically continuing: repression, injustice, and violation of human rights continue to define the everyday lives of Sri Lankans. This is precisely why I focussed on family narratives in time of the war, because the nuances of repression and power relations are best understood within these intimate spaces of habitation.

All ten novels discussed in this thesis are about repression, injustice and violation of rights; and, the source of perpetration of violence is not necessarily external. The novels while throwing into relief the power mechanisms of the family, also often reaffirm it. The question which is raised eventually is given that the family is an immediate reality in which an individual grows up, and therefore, it appears indispensable at times, what should be the family's role in the time of such turbulent national crisis as exemplified by Sri Lanka's political situation? The novels I have discussed have reaffirmed the family, despite their strong critical distancing from it. Apart from *If the Moon Smiled* and *When Memory Dies*

⁵⁷ See, 'Sri Lanka: Events of 2015'.

which end in a disintegration of the family, all the other novels end with a return to it, notwithstanding the exposed fissures that might never be mended. *Bodies in Motion* plays around the concept of the family, and carves out interesting ways of living close to it, while not being repressed by it. The war may not directly impact lives represented in these novels, but, the deconstruction of the power relations within them bring out the complex network of social, cultural and political forces, and their mechanisms of operation which are responsible for the war. The ethnic-religious model of the war cannot be explained without taking recourse to deeper issues related to modernity, a gradual movement from feudal to a capitalist economy, urbanisation, reconfiguration of family structures, reformulation of gender relations within it, marginalisation of all forms of non-reproductive sexualities, and increasing emphasis on maintenance of traditions, as opposed to endorsing a western lifestyle, although the line dividing the East and the West has blurred beyond recognition. The war has deepened the dividing lines limitlessly, as discussed in the previous chapters.

There are no easy solutions of building bridges across those abyss-like divides. One possible way of erasing ethnic animosities is to ideologically re-imagine the nation in more syncretic terms. The post-war nation needs to be re-imagined through newer registers. This task of re-imagination of the nation is being carried out by the contemporary novel – expatriate or local – among other forms of cultural productions. The abstract idea of nation and nationhood to which loyalty are constantly sought is both concretised and challenged by the novel. This demand for and willingness to show loyalty could be dangerous at times, for it often leads to fiercely bigoted territorialist nationalism, the kind which brought about the fragmentation of the Sri Lankan nation. In addition to that, since the nation is an abstraction, it is not simply a geopolitical territory contained within fixed boundaries. Rather, it constantly travels across borders with mass displacements of natives, acquiring a strong symbolic presence within transnational, multicultural spaces. As discussed in the thesis, powerful nationalist rhetoric dominates transnational or expatriate Sri Lankan lives, leading to violent long-distance nationalism manifested in the diaspora's compulsive and consistent funding of the ethnic war at home. Although Sri Lankan diasporas, especially, the writers, have been vociferous in their criticism of the war, the diasporas have been the most prolific resources for fuelling the war.

In this thesis, I try to read the novels from a queer-feminist critical position, which allows me a leeway into hidden power structures, hierarchies within relationships and the impossibility of unconditional freedom even within the most private spaces. Some issues, particularly the

construction of masculinities, non-normative sexualities and patterns of ageing and ageism, which I have dealt with in this thesis, could be examined further with respect to the more recent novels, both local and expatriate, and other cultural texts, such as cinema and theatre. Negligible research has been done on Sri Lankan theatre and popular cinema which could complement the research done on Sri Lankan English novels, in delineating the ubiquity of power hierarchies within Sri Lankan families. Popular culture, as Neloufer de Mel shows in *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict* (2007), circulates certain images and iconographies which have tremendous power in constructing and reinforcing norms and morals. Although some significant work has been done on the position, representation and circulation of the image of the woman in popular cultural forms, the related fields of gendered representations – that is, masculinities and queer sexualities – are still underworked. Most importantly, the changing pattern of gender behavior with age and the problems of ageing as a single queer or heterosexual individual within the Sri Lankan family have not been written about extensively. This thesis makes an attempt to address these issues as they emerge in literary discourses during the past three decades, opening up possibilities of further research.

The family will continue to remain a significant trope in both literary and other cultural texts, for nowhere else it is possible to locate individual dissident voices challenging dominant ideologies, notwithstanding the fact that the family always privileges its own interest over the individual's. It is often argued that such hegemonic families are fast disintegrating, owing to women's increasing access to the public domain, the increasing visibility of queer citizens, and rampant migration. Within global economies, of which Sri Lanka is an integral part, the sanctity of the hetero-patriarchal family has been challenged to a considerable extent, although, as one may contend, that such dismantling has mostly happened within an urbane, privileged class who are a numerical minority. Yet, one may recall that in Sri Lanka this numerical minority belonging to a privileged class has mostly ruled the country. So, counter-discourses emerging from the same class could not be ignored as having negligible power in transforming dominant ideologies.

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