

Literature Surpasses History in Post-conflict Situations: Representing the ‘Unrepresentable’ through the Inter-ethnic Love Relationship in Karen Roberts’ *July*

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ABSTRACT:

This study questions whether literature surpasses history in post-conflict situations as history reveals facts and figures in a catastrophe whereas literature unfolds psychological trauma of the victims and survivors of an insurgency. This study is based on Karen Roberts’ ‘July’ –a Sri Lankan English fiction which deals with the real incident of anti-Tamil riots in July 1983 – an organized mob violence of the majority Sinhalese against the entire Tamil race, the so-called minority in Sri Lanka. The novel represents the traumatic experience of the romantic relationship between a Sinhalese girl and a Tamil boy and how their inter-ethnic love relationship is responded by a multi-ethnic society. In this task, a qualitative content analysis was used as the methodology, for, the study intended to give some inner consciousness and humanity to the emotional incidents related to the historical record of hostility in anti-Tamil riots in July 1983. In this regard, the study engages in incorporating a critical model of a series of scholarly discussions made by Lawrence Langer, Gary Weissman and others in order to put forth a critical investigation of the gap between the real experience of a catastrophic event and its fictional representation. Therein, the study reveals that Karen Roberts’ ‘July’ offers an undue weight on the psychological trauma of the Sinhalese girl in the face of the murder of her Tamil husband which is committed by her own Sinhalese brother. Thus, concluding, I argue that literature surpasses history in a post-conflict situation as literature carries more power in addressing the readers in a sensational manner about racism, hostility, torture and trauma whereas history aims to enhance knowledge of the readership regarding the facts related to roots of war, its causes and its crimes against humanity.

KEY WORDS: Literature, history, trauma, July, post-conflict situation, Sri Lanka

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I. INTRODUCTION

Post-conflict situation can be defined as a period where a war between two parties had come to an end leaving its massive impact on victims and survivors. Post-conflict situations in the world are often followed by stress, psychological trauma, impairments, confusion, political violence and attempts for reconciliation and rehabilitation. In the aftermath of any conflict or war, feelings of numbness and emptiness in most of the victims can be visible as they have to fight in order to forget the recurring memory of their past experiences of war and its terror. Even if war victims and survivors are under rehabilitation programmes, it is not that easy to eradicate their former hostile attitudes towards each other with whom they fought. In *Reconciliation after Violent Conflict*, it is explained that ‘typically, we have in mind what is often called a post-conflict situation: war has ended, a settlement has been reached, and a new regime is struggling to construct a new society out of the ashes of the old. Part of that task of construction is to build better relationships between the previously warring factions’ (Bloomfield 12). In other words, post-conflict situation undergoes many challenges than the complicated issues during the war itself because creating trust and mutual understanding between the former enemies of opposing communities is a tremendously difficult process. As this paper is mainly based on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, I would briefly explain its long-lasting effects on all ethnic groups in the country at large. After thirty years of active military conflict, the ethnic war in Sri Lanka had come to an end in 2009. In the aftermath of this hostile ethnic war between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils, reconciliation between these two communities at large is a long process which should be implemented in a wise manner by addressing the youth in the country. Thus addressing the pain and suffering of the victims and also the post-defeat emotions of

losers are essentially counted in building an everlasting peace and reconciliation between the two communities.

Reconciliation is a major issue in any post-conflict society. It takes a long way to make the enemies tolerant of each other in the aftermath of Sri Lankan war, especially those who lost the war – minority Tamils – as their former goals and political expectations are collapsed in the face of the victory of the Sinhalese majority. In this regard, education comes into prominence as it is the main step to initiate reconciliation between the two communities in a gradual manner. Though it is impossible to eradicate the long-standing atrocity in the experienced adults of both communities, the future generations can be guided positively to interact with each other through a sound education aimed for reconciliation. Thus, reconciliation-oriented curricular and text books based on a broad range of subject areas should be implemented in any post-conflict society. For this task, school curriculum as well as university curriculum should be updated with texts which will awaken the eyes of the youth into the negative effects of racism, hatred and communal hostility in a multi-ethnic society. In this regard, literature plays a main role as it can enhance the knowledge of the tragedy behind conflicts and wars in a sensational manner through creative pieces on real issues based on war. Subjects such as History, Sociology, Religion and Political Science are related with real issues based on real incidents, but literature is a subject based on the imagination of real issues. Literature deals with stories and various incidents of past and present. Though literature is based on imaginations or creative incidents produced out of the real issues, the extent to which the representation of truth behind the conflicts is dubious as the truth often relies on the knowledge and experience of war and also political ideologies of the authors. Certain literary representations of the Sri Lankan ethnic hostility may not be compatible with the attempt to rebuild a harmonious relationship between the former enemies. For example, if an author supports Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism where only the Sinhalese majority achieves the privileges of education, employment and other political benefits, it will be against the expectations of a unified society in the post-war Sri Lanka because Sri Lanka is a country which consists of many ethnicities such as Tamils, Muslims, Burghers and even Malays. Furthermore, lack of experiential knowledge about the battlefield also hinders the exact truth of the pain and the trauma of war victims and survivors. However, these limitations in the literature do not hinder the message that literature brings to the society – to the future generations who know nothing about past catastrophes – because literature carries memory of the ethnic riots of the past.

English Literature produced in post-colonial Sri Lanka is mainly based on the Sinhalese-Tamil ethnic conflict which took the form of a military war in 1983. Post-1983 war literature in Sri Lanka consists of a wide range of writings including poetry, fiction, non-fiction and a few plays as well. With the escalation of the ethnic conflict in July 1983, the Sri Lankan literary canon has taken a new form as that incorporates territorial and political issues related to the Sinhala –Tamil ethnic conflict. There are two aspects of Sri Lankan English literature that I would consider very important in post-conflict societies. First, that kind of literature on war and conflict helps us understand the period of the conflict in different perspectives as the roots and the historical factors of the conflict are brought forth by characters of both communities –the Sinhalese and the Tamils. When the anti-Tamil riots in 1983 took place in the most terrified and inhuman manner, majority of scholars and writers choose 'ethnic conflict' as their subject matter. They elaborate the history of the ethnic animosity from the year 1983 back to 1940s to examine how the British colonial rule caused the reasons behind Sinhalese-Tamil hatred that can be found even today. Furthermore, literature comes into prominence in dealing with nationalist views towards the ethnic conflict as some people support Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism while some others are in favour of multi-ethnic nationalism. Thus literature helps learning all these contradictory nationalist ideologies in a country driven by a long-term war and also helps contemplating solutions to prevent another war in the future. This paper aims to investigate all these aspects in detail through a close scrutiny of a Sri Lankan English fiction – Karen Roberts' *July* – based on the ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The second aspect I stress that literature is significant in post-conflict situations is that literature can create a feeling of sympathetic understanding in the reader because literature on war addresses the unbearable trauma of war in the point of view of the victims through imagined characters. In this study I aim to stress that literature enables awakening sympathy towards the traumatized victims and survivors of the ethnic conflict through a close scrutiny of the novel *July* set on indelible effects of ethnic war in Sri Lanka. The way characters encounter violence and near-death experiences make the readers participate in their traumatic pasts which make the reader understand the trauma of the victims in a humanistic point of view.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sri Lankan English writer, Karen Roberts' *July* is used as the major literary material to carry out this critical interpretation. Literature on Sri Lankan ethnic conflict relying on the imaginary expression of remembered events related to riots and terror is accessible to the readers as a means of knowing the unknown facts behind the thirty year ethnic war in Sri Lanka. In this regard, the term 'trauma' is unmistakable which directly connects with the representation of the suffering community in literature. Trauma is a significant measure of psychological risks in terms of historical as well as modern catastrophes, and also it can be used in situations where modernity fails such as accidents resulted from technological errors. The artistic formulations and narratives of traumatic incidents are useful generating awareness and knowledge in the future generations who know not about the past catastrophes. Thus narratives representing trauma can be recognized as crucial in a post-conflict society where traumatic memory itself warns the reader not to inspire to another trauma-inducing incident in the future.

The investigation of the importance of literature in post-conflict Sri Lanka is accompanied by a close study of a scholarly discussion on the Holocaust and the value of literary works followed by post-Holocaust consciousness. In identifying the concept of trauma in the context of Eurocentric conflicts such as the Holocaust and the Vietnam War, manifold discussions have been emerged on the gap between the real experience of a catastrophic event and its fictional representation. In this respect, yet another material that I take into this critical scrutiny is *Reclaiming Memory* which is edited by Pirjo Ahokas and Martine Chard-Hutchinson as an example of a critical model which deals with the representation of trauma experienced by Jews in the Holocaust and post-Holocaust society. In *Reclaiming Memory*, different perspectives of representing the trauma of the Holocaust experience are examined in greater detail. In *Reclaiming Memory*, some selected Holocaust fictions have been studied in detail to investigate the extent to which the exact reality of the catastrophe is represented and how does it affect the mindset of the present and future generations. The aesthetic capacity in representing a disaster like the Holocaust is often questioned throughout the book by focusing on different approaches of representations by different authors such as Harold Kaplan, Lawrence Langer, Chaim Potok, Gary Weissman, Ankersmit and Theodor Adorno. The ethical norms of representing an enormous disaster are discussed as to learn the limitations of creating a story or a poem on an unrepresentable event.

Reclaiming Memory is a great source of expanding our knowledge of the ethics and justifiability of representing trauma and evil in disasters and mass killings though the book solely deals with Holocaust memory. I aim to discuss how *Reclaiming Memory* explores the role of literature in post-Holocaust consciousness. To support my arguments about the historical significance in trauma-inducing incidents represented in *July*, I examine how these scholars in *Reclaiming Memory* employ arguments and discussions based on history, politics, personal and social implications of trauma and how their literary texts address readers in different contexts.

III. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Reading scholarly researches regarding the controversial topic of representing the 'unrepresentable' through literature has been so far based only on the historical incidents happened outside Sri Lanka as I found sparse survey in terms of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lankan context. Thus, most of the arguments in this paper are put forth in relation to the Holocaust experience and its ethical concerns as to what extent such an inhumane massacre can be represented through literature. Some debates with regard to the literary representation of insurgencies are taken into consideration in this paper as certain arguments can be applicable to some extent in Sri Lankan ethnic context as well though the magnitude of the Holocaust is incomparable in every sense.

Theodor Adorno's oft-quoted announcement 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' certainly poses the problem of the 'aestheticisation of the Catastrophe' of the appropriateness of aesthetic forms to represent the disaster in which millions were killed.[...]Even in the ongoing critical debates about the limits of representation, some American scholars want to avoid the intersection of art and atrocity, privileging such supposedly 'unmediated' forms of discourse as history and testimony as efforts 'to honour the line between fact and fiction'. (Ahokas and Chard-Hutchinson, p.12)

This extract questions the ethicality of poetic or fictional representations of the Holocaust as no one can ever represent the unrepresentable reality of the Holocaust or any kind of war. In the introduction, the editors explain how Theodor Adorno rejects the notion of representing a catastrophe through literature. The authors of *Reclaiming Memory* further note that, ethics, aesthetics and art in relation to hostility and atrocity between the two opposing parties of the Holocaust persist even today. *Reclaiming Memory* as a whole explores the possibilities and controversial arguments in representing the inexpressible trauma of the Holocaust and the extent to which that kind of representation becomes

a shareable experience in those who know not anything about this huge human execution in the world. Furthermore, the difference between the reading experience (through literature) and the real experience of the Holocaust is often put into question in many of the essays in this book. Yet another aim of this book is to examine the truth value of fiction that represents historical contexts and traumatic incidents of the Holocaust.

Gary Weissman develops an argument with reference to Lawrence Langer's *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (1975) and Christopher Browning's one of the essays on history in *Probing the Limits of Representation* (1992). Langer explains that

While Holocaust literature may be 'no more satisfactory than history for solving the desperate and by now persistent questions of how and why the Holocaust occurred,' it is far more able to evoke the 'atmosphere of the Holocaust' and confront readers with the 'exact details of the experience'. Literature succeeds where history fails because whereas the historian is bound up fidelity to fact, the survivor-writer is able to draw not only on historical fact (by virtue of his or her memory), but on 'the power of imagination'. (Langer 42)

Langer's argument clearly defines the significance of literature in a post-conflict situation because literature addresses the readers in a sensational manner while history aims to enhance knowledge of the readership regarding the facts related to roots of war and its crimes against humanity. Furthermore Gary Weissman discusses in great detail how Langer explores two stages of Holocaust response in the post-Holocaust consciousness. 'The first stage appears to have been dominated by historians and their project of determining "what we know of the event" –what our historical knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust might be; the second stage involves moving from what we know to "how to remember it." By this Langer means not how we are to remember this history which we know from historians, but rather how we are to remember by being good historians or students of history. Indeed, historians are ill-equipped to "remember it," as they know only history, which Langer equates with "Holocaust facts". To remember it," it seems that we must turn not to history but to memory, and not to historians but to our own imaginations (Weissman 41). Weissman's discussion on the ideologies of Langer and Browning registers an in-depth investigation into what kind of role that literature plays in a post-conflict situation. While Langer stresses on the significance of memory of the Holocaust that should be remembered through our own imaginations, Browning states about writing of the Holocaust quite negatively as he observes "[T]he Holocaust is not an abstraction. It was a real event in which more than five million Jews were murdered, most in a manner so violent and on a scale (Weissman 43) so vast that historians and others trying to write about these events have experienced nothing in their personal lives that remotely compares. Historians lack precisely the knowledge –that is, the experience –which Langer most desires; what they do know, by comparison, are "mere facts." Browning refers to this limit on knowledge as an "experiential shortcoming" (Weissman 44). However, Langer shares this shortcoming, as he too can never know the event or the history in an experiential sense. Thus he turns to the Holocaust as an abstraction believing that 'through a convergence of survivor memory and our own imaginations, Holocaust testimony can be translated into "a shareable experience"' (Weissman 44)

Concomitant to these controversial aspects discussed with regard to the representation of trauma in literary materials, it is vital to examine how Sri Lankan war fiction plays its role in portraying trauma inducing incidents in terms of inexpressible and unrepresentable trauma of ethnically discriminated human beings. In the novel, *July* Roberts represents a true historical incident on 23rd July, 1983, on the day of bringing those bodies of thirteen soldiers who were killed by the Tamil separatists to the Colombo city to display for the general public. The following day is the day that changes the entire peaceful life style of many Tamils as well as Sinhalese who are not interested in violence or fighting. The first sign of terrorism occurs in the Colombo suburbs and the third person narrator of *July* reveals that:

When the first bomb exploded in Colombo, people were aghast. Anti-separatist feelings became anti-Tamil feeling almost instantly. Uneducated people found it impossible to make the distinction between peaceful Tamils and separatist rebels– they were all Tamils, weren't they? Educated people tried to see the situation in a more objective light, but it was difficult with hundreds being killed and maimed. (Roberts 291)

I address *July* with a deep touch on the history of the ethnic conflict in order to transform the historical facts 'in the light of imagination'. In my study, most of the historical factors embedded in *July* are taken into consideration in order to interpret the trauma of ethnic hostility and its long-term impact on Sri Lankans at large. I explore how multiple viewpoints of the history behind the present post-conflict trauma are portrayed in personal and social relationships of the fictional characters. In *July*, Niranjana reasons out the history of Tamils in Sri Lanka and explains it to his mother in a consoling tone though there is no solution for the moment.

‘This country is ours as much as anyone else’s. We are descendants from a long proud line of Cholas-Kings-Conquerors’, said Violet. ‘Amma, you have to know that it doesn’t work that way in real life. We are still outsiders. You said it yourself. The Cholas were conquerors. No one forgives or forgets that kind of humiliation. We represent it. What do you expect them to do?’ (Roberts 172-173)

The conversation manifests the ethnic division in the perspective of educated Tamils in Sri Lanka as to why things have gone this much worse in relation to ethnic animosity in Sri Lanka. Tamils were conquerors in the ancient times, and the British colonial rule provided much more privileges on this group of outsiders. Author’s ideology over the trauma of ethnic conflict and the racial discrimination in a multi-ethnic society is often found through the differing voices of the text. Roberts adds more seriousness to the above conversation as it is between a Tamil mother and her son. Furthermore, Karen Roberts in *July* makes a good balance between the relationships of the fictional families and the historical contexts especially when discussing political matters. Historian, Jonathen Spencer in his examination of Tenna village in Sri Lanka reveals the historical fact that ‘by the mid-1970s, after two decades of frustration and futile negotiation, a section of Northern Tamil youth (in social origin reminiscent of the Sinhala insurgents of 1971) took to violence against the state, calling themselves the Tigers. In 1977 the main Tamil party, the Tamil United Liberation Front, at least nominally committed to a separate Tamil state in the north and east of the island, became the official opposition to the UNP government’(Spencer, 23). Jonathen’s revelations pinpoint the political decision of the LTTE as a solution for the long-term discrimination of the majority Sinhalese against the minority Tamils which is effectively represented in the incidents and conversations in the novel *July*. The novel portrays how the minority Tamils feel their precarious situation in a country ruled by a predominantly Sinhalese government.

The representation of war in *July* denote various manifestations of the trauma experienced by different characters in different relationships such as parents, children, lovers, friends, and politicians. Each person in these relationships experience the war and its terror in a different way thus only literature enables representing varied traumatic moments of differing individuals. Here I would explain how ‘sympathy’ and ‘pity’ are employed in Karen Roberts’ *July* in which anti-Tamil riots in 1983 mark the inception of the Sri Lankan civil war and it lasted for almost 30 years as it was the first violent protest of the Sinhalese majority against the entire Tamil race, the so-called minority in Sri Lanka. The novel represents the traumatic experience of the romantic relationship between a girl and a boy of the so-called two opposing ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, the majority Sinhalese and the minority and how their romantic love is responded by a multi-ethnic society. In this task, it is intended to give some inner consciousness and humanity to the emotional incidents related to the historical record of hostility in anti-Tamil riots in July 1983 which is an organized mob violence of the majority Sinhalese against the minority Tamils in Sri Lanka. Throughout the entire novel, sympathy is aroused in the readers towards the two lovers who encounter protests, violence, and torture both physically and psychologically. The Sinhalese girl Priyanthi is often tormented by the severe protests from her Sinhalese family at first, and later from the entire Sinhalese community at large. The Tamil boy Nirnanjan also gets constantly harassed by Priyanthi’s racist brother and mother who make both Priyanthi and Nirnanjan psychologically frustrated and stressed. However, they get married secretly and they struggle to survive in the midst of anti-Tamil riots in 1983. Finally Priyanthi’s brother murders Nirnanjan making her insane due to the loss of her husband. Towards the closure of the novel, Roberts paints a vivid picture of the degradation of mankind of the Sinhalese race due to their perspective of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism.

‘This’, said Hemantha grandly, ‘is the man who dares to touch my sister.., yes, my sister, with his filthy Tamil hands’ (Roberts 354)

The words ‘Die Tamil Dogs’(Roberts 355) are scrawled across the white walls in Nirnanjan’s blood red. From this moment, Priyanthi’s trauma transforms into an insane behavior making the readers feel sympathetic towards her. The ending of the novel in this manner makes readers feel both pity and sympathy towards Priyanthi’s fate in the face of a racist society where no love relationship or a marriage is allowed by people with nationalist ideologies. At the outset of the novel, pity is evoked in readers in explaining the tragedy of anti-Tamil riots imposed especially on innocent civilians who are not involved in any kind of racist activity. Readers tend to understand the gravity of confusion of the Tamil minorities during anti-Tamil riots and then and feel pity towards the acute agony the Tamils undergo during this period of ethnic conflict. Readers’ pity is further developed into sympathy as they unintentionally tend to share the pain and trauma of not only the Tamils but Sinhalese also as non-involved civilians were also subject to be tortured. In this regard, Langer’s explanations of ‘pity’ and ‘sympathy’ discussed by Gary Weissmen in his essay in *Reclaiming Memory* can be incorporated into

the discussion. Langer elaborates the two terms of 'pity' and 'sympathy' as a way of response to reading the incidents of traumatic encounters based on war and its horror; '...whereas pity is a feeling felt for another, sympathy is a sharing of another's feelings. In pity, we feel a certain way towards another; in sympathy, another's feelings become our own. Treading a thin line between compassion and appropriation, sympathy raises questions of what another wants to share with the sympathizer and what the self-interest of the sympathiser might be [...] With reference to "tears and pity" and more meaningful "tears of fear and despair", Langer suggests that whereas pity enable us to feel for the survivor, the "sympathetic imagination" enables us to feel like the survivor.'(Weissman 45-46).

In *July*, the aftermath of the July riots is less dealt with except a brief note of the indelible trauma of Priyanthi's survival in losing her husband at the very outset and the end of the novel leaving a great space for the readers to sympathise her undeserved agony. However, the reader from a perspective of hindsight is always fully aware of impending trauma, because they are forewarned at the opening of the novel. Readers clearly realize how risky it is to continue a romantic relationship in an ethnically hostile society like this as depicted in *July*. Roberts' decision to structure the novel in a cyclical mode does increase the sense of uncanny anxiety and even fear in the readers surrounding the relationship between Priyanthi and Niranjan. The anxiety and self-pity Priyanthi feels is doubled for the reader placed in a position after the July riots at the very outset of the novel. The novel ends again with a tremendous impact of the violence of ethnic riots on Priyanthi alone to evoke deep sympathy in readers towards the truth that the discourse of love is more powerful only at individual context, but not the least powerful and challengeable in social and political contexts. In the face of this reality in multi-ethnic Sri Lanka, readers unintentionally engage in the act of sharing Priyanthi's dilemma of life and death after losing her husband in the hands of her racist brother. In this study, I selected the novel *July* set on the violent incidents during the anti-Tamil riots in 1983 in order to bring the unknown agony of the war into focus. This makes readers engage in profound understanding of the traumatised victims and survivors who carry physical and psychological wounds. As Langer suggests in his explanation of 'pity' and 'sympathy', *July* creates a great space in the non-traumatised readers to undergo an unintentional act of sharing the experience of the traumatized survivors with sympathy, caring and supporting.

IV. DISCUSSION

Weissman's discussion on Langer and Browning defines two major factors on writing and representing a catastrophic event. Browning rejects the attempts of both historians and scholars saying that their writings reflect 'an experiential shortcoming'. Langer suggests that memory of such an event can be translated into a 'shareable experience' by representing it in literature through our own imaginations; Langer further notes that history will never address readers in a way of sharing the agony of traumatized victims and survivors. While agreeing upon the fact that history will never address readers in a sensational manner as literature does, in this paper I bring the importance of incorporating the historical information of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka into literary work to some extent in order to add more meaning to the fictionalized characters. In other words, in order to examine how do the selected novelist represents, dramatizes and problematizes the process of ethnic division and future reconciliation, the causes of the conflict should be treated with nuanced and historicised care. In the light of this imperative, my study contributes to bring forth not only the aesthetic imagination of the ethnic war through fictional representations but historical significance behind the war as well. In the face of military victory in 2009, it is socially significant to ensure that this new phase of post-conflict Sri Lanka regarding the relationship between the Sinhalese and the Tamils should be a lasting one. It opens up novel possibilities of post-war recovery which inevitably involves caring for and supporting the surviving soldiers and innocent civilians who have suffered physically and psychologically. In this respect, this paper examines the contemporary ideologies of the Sri Lankan writer in English, Karen Roberts in her novel *July*; her views about Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and multi-ethnic nationalism in particular, and her political stance towards the communal conflict in Sri Lanka are examined in detail. Though my study registers a greater significance for both fields: history and literature, I argue, as Langer claims, that in comparison, literature becomes more prominent in addressing the emotions and psychological issues, as history reveals only facts and figures of a conflict, not the psychological impact of the terror of wars on victims as well as survivors.

The importance of literature in a post-conflict situation marks its capacity in evoking the memory of a forgotten past. However, memory has two aspects: on the one hand memory makes us realize the meaninglessness of past catastrophes which prevent creating another war or conflict in the future due to the fear of near death experiences in the past. In that regard, memory helps resisting

new conflicts thereby literature resists re-emergence of violence and conflicts in the country. On the other hand, unforgettable memory of past conflicts hinders eradicating the revengeful mentality and atrocity over the past enemies that caused immense suffering and this factor hinders healing their psychological wounds. However, I admit that literature can make a plea for humanity by evoking memories of the suffering and undue trauma of innocent civilians.

Harold Kaplan's essay in *Reclaiming Memory* discusses the ethicality of representing the trauma of a huge massacre like the Holocaust. Kaplan says 'the apocalyptic view of the Holocaust suggests a quest for redemption, political or otherwise. But the great shock could turn the mind into the opposite direction toward moral and intellectual despair' (Kaplan 28). Reading the literature of trauma in war might definitely turn the peaceful mentality of readers into moral despair and disappointment as well. This negative phenomenon is not different to Sri Lankan war literature as reading literature on how the majority Sinhalese inhumanly tortured the minority Tamils just for the sake of maintaining the superiority of racial difference makes psychologically desperate and hopeless about our multi-ethnic Sri Lanka. Reading experience of Sri Lankan war fiction makes them emotional and disappointed over the degradation of mankind in Sri Lanka. *July* implies that humanity has come to the lowest level on earth when both Sinhalese majority in the Southern part and LTTE guerillas in the Northern part commit murders due to political expectations of a limited number of ambitious politicians in Sri Lanka. Thus I would suggest in this study that the moral despair itself makes readers get to know an unknown reality of the trauma in ethnic war which inspires them to have a firm determination to live in peace with all ethnic groups at present and future. On the contrary to these positive signs of representing an unrepresentable trauma of a conflict, Theodor Adorno, Jean-Francois Lyotard carry pessimistic views about the effort to express the inexpressible as Lyotard says that it will result in "secondary repression" by which he meant that the 'usual effort to memorialise the Holocaust could become the elaborate shield of forgetting'. (Kaplan 28) Eventually, Kaplan suggests that 'the discourse from which I have quoted implies a defeat of the moral imagination in the face of a crime so awesome that every effort to explain it becomes inept or trivial or simply banal as in the "banality of evil"(Kaplan 29). When Kaplan explains that every effort to explain a crime becomes inept or trivial or simply banal as in the "banality of evil" which is a kind of 'defeat of the moral imagination' (Kaplan 29), I would interrogate whether it is justifiable to bury the magnitude of the crime in its aftermath simply by not attempting to express it. Then how can we transmit the past horror to future generations to make them learn to feel pity as well as sympathy towards the traumatized community? Can history itself solely take responsibility to prevent any other future catastrophes? I argue that there should be a mode of transmitting the knowledge of past agonies to the future generations such as literary materials. To this point, I claim that cinematic creations based on war narratives, poems, and fictions can also play a massive role in de-motivating the future generations of different ethnic groups from involving in any crimes against the humanity. Because even a film or a drama is usually based on a story or a script with characters created in a piece of literary work. If there is no literature exploring the ethnic hostility and its tremendous impact on the ruination of peace and harmony in a country like Sri Lanka, only the facts and figures of a historical event would be considered in a political perspective. Through this paper, I stress that the emotions and the psychological aspects of recurring trauma of a past catastrophe that persist within war victims and also the directly-involved war veterans can be addressed in a humanistic approach only through literature produced on war and its terror.

V. CONCLUSION

In this study I argue that literature plays a massive role in preventing the future possibilities of insurgencies and also to motivate resistance towards man-invented disasters causing torture, trauma and death to mankind. This study is based on Karen Roberts' *July* – a Sri Lankan English fiction which unfolds a true historical incident occurred between two ethnic groups in Sri Lanka – the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Framing the socio-political background for the disaster of the true romance between Priyanthi and Niranjana, Roberts engages in studying the psychological trauma of the two lovers in the face of the insoluble conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. In this study, I have discussed some selected incidents in the novel which evoke the psychological trauma of the lovers due to the ethnic conflict in order to pinpoint the fact that literature awakens readers into humanistic issues like love and marriage. Literature in a post-war country should be utilized as a means of understanding and sharing the viewpoints of all races –all communities and we readers should logically weigh the irresistible debates and the contradictory issues of the past ethnic violence. In Sri Lankan context, there is a limited readership for the English fiction on war due to language barrier. However, majority Sinhalese and the largest minority group of Tamils along with other minorities are capable of tackling their mother tongue –Sinhalese or Tamil, so in this study I would suggest that the English fiction on war and traumatic incidents should be translated into

vernaculars in order to make the peace-rending messages popular in the entire society. In order to cater different types of communities apart from the reading community, there are other communities who are not interested in reading, so, to address such, I suggest that Karen Roberts' novel *July* can be made into a film to evoke the indelible trauma of bystanders and lovers of different ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.

I have referred *Reclaiming Memory* in detail as a critical model which is based on a scholarly debate on the significant roles that 'literature' and 'history' play in a post-war society. In his essay, 'Remembering the Holocaust: Mourning and Melancholia' F.R. Ankersmit mentions the significance of writing of the Holocaust. He explains, '...we must never forget the paradox that the greatest crimes always meet with the least resistance, precisely because they are most successful in transcending the barriers we have erected against human cruelty. We can prevent, to a certain extent, what we can more or less foresee because it is on our list of potential evils to be avoided – but who could have foreseen the Holocaust? And because we cannot foresee excesses of this order, they may, under certain circumstances, take place overnight. This is the lesson we must learn from the writings by Hannah Arendt, Berel Lang or Zygmunt Bauman' (Ankersmit 82). Underpinning this positive vision of Holocaust representation, I would like to add another point to Ankersmit that even if there is a limited readership, it is essential to keep writing and representing any catastrophic event at least to address the students of history and literature in schools or universities in order to make them feel for the facts and the imaginations of the suppressed and the traumatized based on real incidents. However, literature surpasses history as war and its traumatising effects on people can be put forth through the memory of the unrepresentable of the writers thus literature on war can be a great source of knowledge to a post-conflict society. The study concludes that literature representing the 'unrepresentable' trauma can be recognized as crucial in a post-conflict society where traumatic memory itself warns the reader not to inspire another trauma-inducing incident in the future.

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