



RESEARCH PAPER

**The Convergence of Sri Lankan Civil War Memories through
Intertextual Allusions in Arudpragasam's *A Passage North***

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DOI

[http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022\(6-1\)7](http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022(6-1)7)

PAPER INFO

ABSTRACT

Received:

October 30, 2021

Accepted:

January 15, 2022

Online:

January 22, 2022

Keywords:

A Passage North,

Anuk

Arudpragasam,

Intertextuality,

South Asian

Anglophone

Fiction, Sri Lankan

Civil War

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The paper critically gazes at Arudpragasam's second novel *A Passage North* (2021) as a fictive temple site to commemorate the traumatic memories (during and after) of the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009). Taking cue from Gerard Genette's structuralist theoretic observations as given in Graham Allen's book *Intertextuality* (2022 [2000]) with regard to the key term of 'Intertextuality' along with its associated terms: 'Hypotext' and 'Hypertext', the paper highlights half a dozen texts (ranging across genres of poetry, biography, prose, and documentary film) as intertextual allusions (hypotexts) to Arudpragasam's novel (hypertext). The paper attempts to establish that Arudpragasam employs these intertextual allusions of the canonical literary and filmic texts as a conscious strategy, albeit labeled as 'superfluous overlays' or 'digressions' by some critics, to lead his readers to the cumulative significance of the novel as a converging temple site in memory of those Sri Lankan Tamils lost directly during the war or indirectly consumed by their post-war traumas.

Introduction

The war time violence spills out from the boundaries of time and its concentric ripple effect "far exceed[s] the moment of its occurrence" (Valli Kanapathipillai quoted in Nira Wickramasinghe, 2014, p. 300). Arudpragasam's second novel *A Passage North* (2020), like his sure footed debut novel *The Story of a Brief Marriage* (2016), mourns the massive loss of about 140,000 Sri Lankan Tamils (Raghavan, 2015, p. 121) during the 26 years of Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009). Both the novels look at Sri Lankan Civil War: the first gives a first-hand fictive account of those helpless victim civilians trapped within the folds of the said war and the second offers the disturbing

facts of post-war psychological traumatic grief that the war survivors have to deal with. The novels are on-scene and off-scene, respectively, accounts of the Sri Lankan Civil War. And Arudpragasam rightly says, in an interview given to Kion You, that his “first novel is more about the experience of violence, while the second novel is about the spectatorship of violence” (*Los Angeles Review of Books*, October 20, 2021). Arudpragasam’s *A Passage North* is more a collection of retrospective thoughts of Krishan, the protagonist, than a story with a smooth plot and fluent dialogues. The novel’s span, in real time, is spread over just three days from Friday to Sunday in the year 2015 when Krishan’s serene Colombo life as an NGO worker is reverted to thoughts about his love affair with Anjum, at the pinnacle of his stay in India from 2005-2011, after he receives an email from her after almost four years since his arrival in Sri Lanka. The same Friday evening he also receives the phone call from a suburban village of Killonochchi town by Rani’s daughter telling him about the sudden accidental demise of her mother Rani (Rani had spent two years with Krishan’s family in Colombo as Krishan’s grandmother’s caretaker) whose funeral is fixed for coming Sunday. Krishan’s thoughts triggered by Anjum’s email and the news about Rani’s death take him back to his time with Anjum and later his decision to return to Sri Lanka.

Unlike his debut novel that celebrated consciousness, even in the wake of immense pain and impending death, Arudpragasam’s second novel deals with the question of the extinction of consciousness. Rani died either a natural death or committed a suicide remains unresolved but Arudpragasam, very cleverly, alludes to Rani’s deep yearning for extinction of her consciousness that neither electric shocks nor sleeping pills were able to bring to effect. Therefore death and extinction of human body, through the final ritual of ‘Burning’, may bestow the final reprieve from all the consciousness of pain caused by the loss of one’s loved ones. All the sorrowful and unbearable images, resultant to the atrocities of Sri Lankan Civil War, saved in the deep recesses of Rani’s retina may burn with her own ‘Burning’ and bring a final period to her sufferings of consciousness.

Literature Review

Anuk Arudpragasam’s second novel *A Passage North* has received instant reviews establishing him as one among the youngest as well as the greatest novelists of contemporary times, therefore giving Sri Lankan Anglophone literature a star whose shine is going to last a lot longer and attract a global readership since its shortlisting for the Man Booker Prize for 2021. Lucy Popescu reads it as a “profound meditation on suffering[s]”, like Arudpragasam’s debut novel *The Story of a Brief Marriage*, of Sri Lankan Tamil community in the aftermath of long Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009) leaving them with un-healing emotional scars (*The Observer*, 2021). Tara K. Menon also reiterates the fact by emphasizing the recalcitrance of War scars that still run deep in the minds of Sri Lankan Tamils even after the peace in Northern Provinces and thriving Colombo. She believes that though the novel “is full of melancholy”, however, “it [does] avoid despair” (*The New York Times*, 2021). Nawaid Anjum reads the novel as a ‘eulogy’ instead of reading it as an ‘elegy’ since he believes

it to be more of a commendation of the Tamil dead of Sri Lankan Civil War than a lamentation. As the historical fact goes a large number of the Sri Lankan Tamils “were not given funerals”, therefore, Arudpragasam’s novel, ending with a detailed account of the “ritualised mourning” and funeral, becomes a metaphor for offering the dignity of missed funerals albeit fictively. The novel is a fixed gaze “at the erasures of history”, underscoring remembrance of state excesses perpetrated against its marginalized, “in the face of collective and institutional amnesia around the war” (*Hindustan Times*, 2021). Marcel Thoroux has given the novel a grilling review as he brings out some serious allegations regarding Arudpragasam’s creative hang-ups. Despite being a “meticulous observer” of human emotions, Thoroux accuses him of putting forward “an unsubstantial story [with] unclear motivation” since there does not seem to be a binding stake for the protagonist to take up his passage north to attend the funeral of Rani. For Thoroux, the protagonist’s excessive remembering and wondering cut him as “a frustratingly passive” figure with “no real agency” (*The Guardian*, 2021). Peter Gordon makes up for Marcel Thoroux’ allegations by lauding the novel as “an exercise in style” and compares the novel with a handmade pair of shoes for its “long, thoughtful sentences and deliberate construction”. Referring to the novel’s intertextuality (accounts of poosal; Kuttimani- the Tamil leader; Puhal and Dharshika-cadres of suicidal Black Tigers), he stresses them to be superfluous overlays causing a bumpy ride for the readers (*Asian Review of Books*, 2021). Whereas Kion You calls these ‘overlays’ the “digressions” that Arudpragasam grafts in his novel as the outside textual motors to “provide the primary movement” to the novel’s text as well as structuring “the grammar of [Krishan’s] mind” (*Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2021). Interestingly it is this intertextual aspect of the novel that the paper attempts to unravel in order to lay bare its artistic bravado. But before we move on with our analysis vis-à-vis the intertextuality of the novel it is pertinent to explain the key term of intertextuality that serves as the theoretic framework for the paper.

Material and Methods

‘Intertextuality’ is a key term usually used within postmodern literature and theory. The term has earned a fair share of complexity, like postmodernism itself, due to its differential usage by both the Structuralist as well as the Poststructuralist approaches of reading texts. The Poststructuralist thinkers like Julia Kristeva use ‘Intertextuality’ in its capacity “to disrupt notions of [fixed] meaning” whereas the Structuralist thinkers like Gerard Genette “employ intertextual theory to argue for critical certainty, or at least for the possibility of saying definite, stable and incontrovertible things about literary texts” (Allen, 2022, p. 4).

It is this Structuralist approach towards intertextual theory, as broached by Genette, that the paper at hand aims at appropriating for the purpose of critically analyzing Arudpragasam’s novel *A Passage North*, in order to explicate the fixture of its singular signification of the long Sri Lankan Civil War and its trauma for the Sri Lankan Tamils. Arudpragasam’s novel employs, very deftly, half a dozen intertextual allusions to make the central theme of the war time trauma (during and after) stand

out formidably and etched in the minds of his readers since he openly alludes, in the acknowledgement section, to the hypotexts for which his own novel serves as a hypertext.

Although Genette uses the term 'Transtextuality' for what has now come to be known as 'Intertextuality', his aim remains to forward a poetics of textual transactions. His concepts of 'Hypotext' and 'Hypertext' are relevant to our theoretic model for analyzing Arudpragasam's novel. Hypotext then, for Genette, is the one that is the earlier text to which the late text (as in our case is Arudpragasam's novel *A Passage North*) refers to either for transformative or imitative purposes. The transformative hypertexts entail the "processes of self-expurgation, excision, reduction, and amplification" (Allen, 2022, pp. 104-105). "[E]xtension, contamination and expansion" (p. 106) may result due to amplifications of hypertexts and at times hypertexts may import additive "character motivations lacking in the hypotext": a process that Genette labels as 'Transmotivization' (p. 107). Interestingly all the hypotexts utilized by Arudpragasam in his novel *A Passage North* singularly aim at converging the readers' reflective prowess upon the trauma of the Sri Lankan Civil War. In the light of our above given brief understanding of Genette's poetics of 'Transtextuality' (styled as Intertextuality now) and its auxiliary terms like 'hypotext' and 'hypertext', we now advance to unspool Arudpragasam's deliberate exploitation of half a dozen hypotexts (ranging over multiple genres like poetry, biography, prose, documentary film, etc.) with relation to his novel *A Passage North* as the hypertext.

Discussion

Close reading helps us unravel the "network[s] of textual relations". It is hard to find texts having their "independent meanings" which, in fact, "exist between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates" (Allen, 2022, p. 1). Arudpragasam's novel too is one such text that heavily depends on its 'network of textual relations' to communicate its "definite, stable, and incontrovertible" (p. 4) signification of the trauma of Sri Lankan Civil War. Like other artistic objects, Arudpragasam's novel is also "assembled from bits and pieces of already existent art" (p. 5). Sekkizhar's *Periya Puranam*; Kalidasa's *Meghaduta [The Cloud Messenger]* translated by James Mallinson; Asvaghosa's *Buddhacharita [The Life of the Buddha]* translated by Patrick Olivelle; Rajan Hoole and Rajani Thiranagama's account of Kuttimani's death in *Sri Lanka: The Arrogance of Power: Myths, Decadence and Murder*; Beate Arnestad and Morten Daae's documentary film *My Daughter the Terrorist*; and *Therigatha [Therigatha: Poems of the First Buddhist Women]* translated by Charles Hallisey are the sources that supply Arudpragasam's novel its 'bits and pieces' to singularly allude to the resultant trauma of Sri Lankan Civil War. The essay at hand aims "to locate, describe and thus stabilize" Arudpragasam's novel's "significance" (the unhealing trauma of Sri Lankan Civil War) through its intertextual allusions to the above mentioned texts ranging over a number of genres (p. 94). Arudpragasam's novel is a 'hypertext' whose meanings "depend upon the reader's knowledge of the hypotext[s]" mentioned earlier (p. 105). However, Arudpragasam, in order to provide a certain critical ease to his readers, explicitly lays bare his novel's intertextuality by

giving bibliographic references to the above mentioned texts on his novel's acknowledgement page (Arudpragasam, 2021, p. 289).

Arudpragasam's Fiction as a Literary Temple Site

Shaheen et al. (2020) branded Arudpragasam's debut novel *The Story of a Brief Marriage* as a "novelized testimony" (p. 136) recording the human rights abuses during the Sri Lankan Civil War - "a result of Sri Lankan postcolonial decadent society" led by an exclusionary Sinhalese nationalist state guilty of 'Othering' the Tamil, Christian, Muslim "minorities from the national stream" (p. 129) - thus giving the novel the status of a "literary memorial site" (p. 135). Arudpragasam's second novel *A Passage North* too is a memorial site but more sacred and sanctified as to become a fictive literary temple imagined by the likes of Sri Lankan Tamils like Krishan and Rani to commemorate the erasures in the wake of what Hyndman and Amarasingam (2014) call "War Tourism" initiated by Sri Lankan Sinhalese state to allow the defeated Sri Lankan Tamils a "selective memorialization" and at the same time appeasing the triumphalist ego of Sinhalese nationalism (p. 573).

Arudpragasam, with the help of intertextual allusion to Poosal's story from *Periya Puranam*, constructs the fictive temple site (*A Passage North*) as an alternative memorial site of the weak and defeated Sri Lankan Tamils what Pramod K. Nayar calls "counterpublics" (2016, p. 143) to conserve the historical truth. Arudpragasam, referring to David Shulman's translation of the sacred Tamil text: Sekkizhar's *Periya Puranam*, brings forward the story of Poosal, a Lord Siva bhagat and saint, who is narrated to have built a temple for Lord Siva in his mind as he could not afford the means to construct a physical temple.

During the mid-nineties thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils were displaced from the North and North East Provinces' cities (Jaffna, Kilinochchi, and Trincomalee) of Sri Lanka and had arrived in Colombo so that they could migrate to distant colder destinations of United Kingdom and Canada (Arudpragasam, 2021, p. 69) formulating Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic communities there. Krishan's grandmother too had left Jaffna to arrive at Colombo after her brother, a member of a separatist organization, had fled to United Kingdom in 1986 (p. 58). Krishan's father too had died in the 1996 bombings at the Central Bank in Colombo therefore he was sent to India, as soon as he was of age, for higher education. Krishan's stay at Delhi, India, as a diasporic, is marked with "shock", "anger", and "shame" (p. 21) for his detached and helpless existence. Krishan's generation of kids was the one born to "the frequency of sudden and violent death" (p. 51) in the backdrop of long Civil War whose details had become more of a "white noise" (p. 18) over the years. The sum total of the predicament of the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic communities is shown through Krishan, the central character of the novel. Krishan's character is a metaphor for the shock, anger, and shame that the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora went through from their diasporic spaces after looking at documentary films about the Civil War and reading the United Nations' Reports about the massacres of Sri Lankan Tamils. This foreign attestation of

the atrocities perpetrated on Sri Lankan Tamils during the long Civil War, made the Sri Lankan diasporic Tamils like Krishan realize their own guilt for being detached from the sufferings and sorrows of their own people trapped in the Sinhalese nationalist wrath. This kind of remorse, as Arudpragasam fictively shows through Krishan's character, was felt by many Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic adolescents coming of age during or after the culmination of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009. The fictive character of Krishan is the natural end result of guilt and remorse that thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils, looking at the gory damage done to their people from far off diasporic spaces, felt and also is Arudpragasam's mouthpiece caricatured on his own self (Krishan is shown as a PhD scholar in some Delhi based Indian university as well as working on a novel during his PhD studies just like Arudpragasam himself - a PhD candidate at Columbia University in America and working on his debut novel *The Story of a Brief Marriage*).

Krishan's response to the Sri Lankan Civil War, while in India, takes an "inward direction" as he started "making mental timelines" and "re-creating those sites of violence in his mind" in order "to punish himself for what he'd escaped", therefore, he was constructing "through this act of imagination, a kind of private shrine to the memory of all those anonymous lives" lost during the Civil War (pp. 22-23). Rani, Krishan's grandmother's caretaker, had lost both her sons during the war and was "suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder with severe depression" (p. 72). Despite taking several fistfuls of antidepressant pills and electroshock therapy, she is "trapped in her own mind" (p. 73) with "endless thoughts of her sons" (p. 72). Even addictions like "cigarettes, betel leaves, and [...] liquor" (p. 71) are of no help in dealing with the intense pain of the civil war survivors bearing the loss of their loved ones. Is recovery possible from such a devastating pain caused by the memories? Arudpragasam's suggestion is that of constructing mental temple sites like that of Poosal's from *Periya Puranam*. Where the fictive characters of Krishan and Rani construct their own mental temples, to commemorate the loss of their people, Arudpragasam's novel *A Passage North* itself becomes a literary memorial temple site - a fictive place for Sri Lankan Tamils to self-flagellate and commemorate the memories of the great loss in the history of Sri Lanka. This novel as a literary memorial temple site becomes all the more significant for the Sri Lankan Tamils when the Sinhalese nationalist state has already "razed to ground" all the "external signs" of "Tiger offices", "bases", "weapon depots", "signs", "posters", and "statues" lest their presence "spur the Tamil population back toward militarism" (p. 225). The state imposed forgetting can be countered by "activists, artists, and archivists" and common people like Rani, "compelled to live [...] their lives in their memories and imaginations", by constructing "the monuments and memorials they could not build in the world outside" (p. 228) just like Poosal.

"No words [can] bridge the vast distance between [lovers]"

Love is the primary purpose of human life. The unrequited personal love may lead to collective love for humanity as is the case with both Anjum and Krishan. Krishan learns his path of activism for the rehabilitation of Tamil survivors of Civil

War with the help of Anjum, his girlfriend in India, who too had carved her activist path when her lesbian love for Divya was denied to her by her parents back in Bangalore making her recognize a bigger purpose of loving larger number of people beyond one's personal desire of seeking and granting love. Had Anjum's lesbian love been allowed her would she have chosen the path of social work for herself in Jharkand? Likewise had Krishan found his love for Anjum requited would he still have the same passion for finding the purpose of his life as he does in the shape of going back to his country, even sacrificing his PhD studies in India and the novel he is writing at the same time, to help rehabilitate the war torn Tamils of North and North East provinces of Sri Lanka?

Krishan's adjustment with his plight of being an unrequited lover and finding solace in the larger purpose of helping fellow Sri Lankan Tamils comes through his thoughts about the love-torn Yaksha, the central character of Kalidasa's poem *Meghaduta* [*The Cloud Messenger*] translated by James Mallinson, punished away from his wife into exile. "No words [can] bridge the vast distance between him and [Anjum]" (Arudpragasam, 2021, p. 160), Krishan knows, just like the Yaksha, the ultimate choice for him is to replace the personal loss of unrequited love with a greater cause. Arudpragasam, with the help of the intertextual allusion to Kalidasa's poem, appeases his central character's thoughts about his unrequited love, serving at the same time as a textual motor to move Krishan's mind (You, 2021) into the direction of social work. Krishan's thoughts, moving beyond his personal desires, converge on dealing with the post-war trauma of the long Sri Lankan Civil War through taking up the cause of rehabilitating the Tamil survivors of war.

The Buddhist Possibility of Dealing with Trauma

Sri Lanka is a Sinhala ethnic majority state with Buddhism as its state religion. Arudpragasam, through the intertextual allusion to Asvaghosa's epic biographical poem *Buddhacharita* [*The Life of the Buddha*] translated by Patrick Olivelle, makes his readers to consciously recall to their minds the Great Renunciation of the Buddha when he fled Kapilavastu as he could not bear the pain of human suffering around him that he had been kept away from for so long by his parents. Gautama Buddha could not withstand the trauma of life around him so he carved his path of Mukti by achieving 'Nirvana'. How could the Buddhist Sinhalese Sri Lankan State take the opposite course of ethnic cleansing of Sri Lankan Tamils by not only killing them brutally (instead of promoting the true spirit of federalism in Sri Lanka) but also backing the "militant Buddhist groups" expanding the radius of State led hatred to Muslim and Christian minorities too (Holt, 2016, p. 1) even after the Civil War with the Tamils had ended in 2009.

Krishan, with the help of his thoughts about the literary canonical work of *The Life of the Buddha*, draws parallels between Rani, himself, and Gautama Buddha. He believes that his as well as Rani's "disillusionment" with the turn of the socio-political affairs, between and after the Civil War, is quite "similar" to the experiences of

Gautama Buddha (Arudpragasam, 2021, p. 186). Rani's fall into the deep abyss of trauma, after witnessing the helpless death of her two sons without any funeral and burial/cremation rites in the last years of the Civil War, caused her surfeit with living as it did to Buddha who was equally "traumatized by what he'd seen on his three excursions, sights so fundamentally at odds with everything he'd come to believe over the course of his life that he simply could not go on as before" (p. 187). Rani too after witnessing the sights of death and gore during the Civil War could not simply live as before. In order to escape the trauma she had no choice but to revert to the deep recesses of her own mind where she could build, like Poosal, the temple filled with the memories of her sons. However, Rani's brief mental reprieve could not sustain longer in the wake of "regimens of electroshock therapy that left her [...] in a state of constant spasm" (p. 187). For her the shutting off of all consciousness through death was the only possibility of escaping trauma. Krishan's possibility of escaping trauma, nevertheless, is more similar to that of the Buddha's. Like the Buddha's trauma, caused by his sudden encounter with "sickness, old age, and death", that his parents had him "systematically and intentionally blinded" (p. 187) from, Krishan too was "insulated from the traumas of the [Sri Lankan Civil W]ar" (p. 191). Like the Buddha, he too had "grown up in comfort" without "experience[ing] violence directly, neither gunshots, shelling, nor displacement" (p. 191) as he spent his conscious adolescent years as a diasporic in India pursuing his studies like many other Sri Lankan Tamils scattered at more distant spaces like United Kingdom and Canada in order to avoid the direct trauma of the war. However, Krishan knows for sure (thanks to his training as a PhD coursework scholar and his vocation of a novelist albeit he leaves both the things unattended and unfinished to return to Sri Lanka) that there is no possibility of escaping trauma (as in the case of Rani) except the one as that of Gautama Buddha's. As the trauma is "indelibly linked to the physical environments in which it was experienced to specific sounds, images, languages, and times of day", therefore, making it "impossible for people to continue living in the places they'd seen violence occur" (p. 190), the way out is to "abruptly leave behind" and mercilessly reject everything" just like Gautama Buddha (p. 187). The Buddha's detachment led him to achieve 'Nirvana' and so did Krishan's insulation from the direct war time experiences helped him with his epiphanous moment of recognizing that the only possibility to escape the trauma for him was to return to Sri Lanka and dedicate himself to the rehabilitative social work in the Tamil North and North East provinces of Sri Lanka. His insulated detached life in India provided him with a fellowship of dealing with trauma from far off until he achieves his 'Nirvana' (his decision to return to Sri Lanka and deal with the shock, anger, and shame just like the Buddha). For Krishan, a Tamil Hindu, the only possibility of dealing with trauma is the Buddhist route that the Sinhala Buddhist majority of Sri Lanka seems to have long forgotten, Arudpragasam seems to allude to.

Kuttimani's Trampled Eyes

As Krishan is heading North, on a train, to participate in the final rituals of Rani's funeral and consequent cremation, he recalls his time in Delhi when he had

started excavating facts of the circumstances of the Sri Lankan Civil War. He recalls that how feverishly he had endeavoured to know more about Kuttimani, one of the earliest Tamil insurgents. Arudpragasam clearly indicates in the acknowledgement section of his novel that the details of Kuttimani's contribution to the cause of Sri Lankan Tamil insurgency come from his reading of Rajan Hoole and Rajani Thiranyagama book *Sri Lanka: The Arrogance of Power: Myths, Decadence and Murder* (2001). This intertextual allusion - by giving the account of Kuttimani's death during his imprisonment at Welikada Prison in 1983 along with other fifty three Tamil prisoners - adds to the sad and gloomy atmosphere of the novel and sheds light on the barbarous nature of Sinhalese Sri Lankan state actions against the dissident Tamils.

Guilty of establishing a Tamil separatist organization in 1969 and involved in robberies to support the cause of Tamil Eelam, Kuttimani was sentenced to death but before he was hanged he was mercilessly butchered inside his death cell. Arudpragasam - referring to this incident of mass massacre of Tamil political prisoners, through the recollection of Krishan - scratches at the earliest memories of Sri Lankan Tamil collective pain. Kuttimani had willed to donate his eyes to any blind boy or girl, after he was hanged, leaving a chance for his eyes to see the Tamil Eelam realized on the world map (p. 197). Arudpragasam utilizes this backstory of Kuttimani's will to an immense metaphorical effect when Krishan's thoughts re-enact (for himself and the readers of the novel alike) the moment of Kuttimani's butchering in his death cell and also that how the attacking mob had first gouged both his eyes and callously trampled them under their feet; trampling down the dream of an independent Tamil Eelam yet to come. This crushing of the Tamil national imagination as early as July 1983 becomes all the more a lacerating historical fact for the Sri Lankan Tamils who have come to fully understand, after the culmination of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009, that there is no scope for a federalist Sri Lanka where 'other' ethnic minorities like Tamils themselves and the religious minorities like Hindus, Christians, and Muslims have only secondary rights of citizenship after the Sinhala majority (Raghavan, 2015, p. 121). The trampling of Kuttimani's gouged eyes is the metaphor for the trampling of Tamil Eelam nation state.

Reaching the National Tamil Eelam Haven through the Gateway of Death

As Krishan is moving along with the funeral procession of Rani towards the cremation spot, he passes by a lake and is reminded of a 2007 documentary film *My Daughter the Terrorist* about the female Black Tigers - a specialized and elite wing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) - trained for "suicide missions" ranging over "assassinations of political figures", "bombings in public spaces", and "attacks on Sri Lankan army and navy bases" (Arudpragasam, 2021, p. 238). Arudpragasam, through this intertextual allusion to Beate Arnestad and Morten Daae's documentary film, makes his readers meet with two female black tigers: Dharshika and Puhai, who have, for sure, lost their lives for the cause of Tamil Eelam. The documentary film was shot and released around 2007 and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) lost the war with their chief leader Prabhakaran's death in 2009. This nugget of historical

fact, for the readers of Arudpragasam's novel *A Passage North*, foregrounds the unflinching will of Black Tigers in the face of their certain impending death since "[n]o Black Tiger had ever returned alive from a mission" (p. 243) knowing "months before they died the exact location, moment, and method by which they would die" (p. 244). This intertextual allusion in the novel compels the readers of the novel to follow the trail and watch the documentary film itself soon after finishing the novel or right in-between the course of the novel in the first place.

Reading about the central real life characters of Dharshika and Puhai, in 2021, through Arudpragasam's novel, and consequently watching the documentary film too, Arudpragasam's readers are bound to converge their thoughts to the lost cause of Tamil Eelam. Readers are sure that Dharshika and Puhai are dead. By invoking these moving images back to his readers' consciousness he is stirring alive the national dream of Tamil Eelam, albeit temporarily trampled along with Kuttimani's trampled eyes and lost to obscurity with the obscure certain deaths of thousands of Black Tigers like Dharshika and Puhai. For the time being the only way to reaching the national Tamil Eelam Haven might be through the gateway of mourning the death of the thousands of Tamils, civilians and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres, at the temple site of Arudpragasam's fictions.

The Prabhakaran Nuns: Dharshika and Puhai

The intertextual allusion to Beate Arnestad and Morten Daae's documentary film leads to yet another textual allusion when Anjum watches the film with Krishan. After watching Dharshika and Puhai she is reminded of *Therigatha: Poems of the Buddhist Women* written between sixth and third centuries B.C by the Buddhist nuns. She draws the parallels between Dharshika and Puhai and those Buddhist nuns who had left their domestic lives to join the Buddhist cause of enlightening the masses through their poetry. Anjum comes to conclude that Dharshika and Puhai too are, like those Buddhist nuns of ancient times, the Prabhakaran nuns who "left their families" and "joined a movement for liberation, a movement founded and led, like Buddhism, by a man [Prabhakaran], a movement that to their minds promised not only the possibility of freedom from the Sri Lankan state but also real and immediate freedom from their own society's expectations and oppressions" (p. 256).

Arudpragasam's fictive invoking of the female Black Tigers: Dharshika and Puhai and their comparison with the Buddhist nuns as the Prabhakaran nuns reminds his readers of the loss of the Tamil struggle with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam LTTE in 2009. The struggle for Tamil Eelam gave the Sri Lankan Tamils a double hope: for men a hope against the Sinhala ethnic exclusive nation state of Sri Lanka and for women like Dharshika and Puhai to break free from their domestic social barriers and to stand their grounds steadfastly along with their Black Tiger male counterparts.

Now at the time of the release of Arudpragasam's novel more than a decade has passed since the culmination of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009. The wounds of

war are still persistent and green. Even after a decade they are still un-healable. In the wake of such un-healable green wounds Arudpragasam has provided his Sri Lankan Tamil community, at home and abroad, through both his novels, a fictive convergence site, sacred to the status of a mental temple like that of Poosal, to memorialize the thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils lost to the 26 years long Sri Lankan Civil War.

Conclusion

What Peter Gordon calls 'superfluous overlays' and Kion You points out as 'digressions', with reference to the intertextual architecture of the novel, the paper marks them as the redeeming feature of the novel. Arudpragasam, with the help of these intertextual allusions to Sekkizhar's *Periya Puranam*; Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* [*The Cloud Messenger*] translated by James Mallinson; Asvaghosa's *Buddhacharita* [*The Life of the Buddha*] translated by Patrick Olivelle; Rajan Hoole and Rajani Thiranagama's account of Kuttimani's death in *Sri Lanka: The Arrogance of Power: Myths, Decadence and Murder*; Beate Arnestad and Morten Daae's documentary film *My Daughter the Terrorist*; and *Therigatha* [*Therigatha: Poems of the First Buddhist Women*] translated by Charles Hallisey, through the consciousness of novel's central character of Krishan, singularly leads his readers to one central converging point: The Sri Lankan Civil War and its traumas. All the intertextual details, converging on this central point of Krishan's thoughts, make the readers of the novel not only to go back to the intertextual 'hypotexts' but also lend their 'hypertext' - the novel *A Passage North* - its true significance entrenched singularly and definitely in the post-war trauma engrained deep in the DNA of Tamil survivors like Rani and in the detached Tamil diasporics like Krishan living at distanced spaces at the time of the Sri Lankan Civil War. The shock, anger, and shame have riddled the Sri Lankan Tamil survivors, at home or abroad, and the resultant grief is un-healable as Arudpragasam makes clear by building this sacred fictive temple site of a novel: a memorial site to self-flagellate and mourn the loss of those lost to the unfulfilled dream of Tamil Eelam.

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