**‘BRINGING TO LIGHT’: UNVEILING ABUSES AND RUMOURS IN N.
MALATHY’S
*A FLEETING MOMENT IN MY COUNTRY***

**R. Samuel Gnanaraj
Dr. S. Azariah Kirubakaran**

Abstract

Malathy’s *A Fleeting Moment in My Country* is a personal narrative of what she witnessed first-hand during the last years of the Eelam war. The narrative addresses the cause and struggle for Tamil liberation in the Sri Lankan island. Malathy’s focus on the ethnic war demonstrates the accessibility of engaging the victims through her account. This paper brings out how the Tamils suffered and were controlled by the Sinhala majorities during the last phase of the war, where the army destroys everything that the Tamils own. The unsettlement of war crimes has a severe outcome in society which involves abuses and rumours. This paper attempts to unveil the intensity of the perpetrators who involve in abusing the Tamils by involving in human rights violations.

Keywords: Human Rights, Eelam War, Abuses, Rumours, and Victims.

“Human rights require three interlocking qualities: rights must be *natural* (inherent in human beings), *equal* (the same for everyone), and *universal* (applicable everywhere). For rights to be *human* rights, all humans everywhere in the world must possess them equally and only because of their status as human beings” (*Inventing Human Rights* 21). Human rights discourses allow identifying the ignored, to voice against slavery, social ills, to justify the rights, claim, and converse. Human rights narrative can be addressed as ethics and aesthetics that always promote equality and empathy to the readers or listeners. It undoubtedly brings basic rights like the right to live, the right to food, the right to speak, and other rights that are essential for a human being for dignified survival. This paper attempts to unveil the intensity of the perpetrators who involve in abusing the Tamils by involving in human rights violations.

Malathy is aware of the Tamils' sufferings as she worked on the island for many years. She witnessed the abuse and the exploitation especially during the last years of war. The island brings a separatist notion among the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The Sri Lankan government treated the Tamils community as lesser and second class citizens. Tamils are denied their basic rights to survive in the land.

Primarily, the human rights violations happened to the civilians, whereas the human rights violence happened on the human body. The catastrophic life of the civilians became vulnerable when it comes to the intensity of the war. The individuality, subjectivity, and dignity have been taken from the Tamil civilians since demonization always residues in making the Tamils demonic. Corresponding to it, the perpetrators [Sinhalese army] chiefly use the various modes and agenda in destroying the Tamils. The war and human rights abuses emphasize 'violence and violations'; it makes people suffer immeasurable pain. The government misleads the people through the religious outlook which forbids human rights in action. Dehumanization constitutes the physical persecution of innocent people making them deprived of the rights.

In Sri Lanka between the Sinhalese army was involved in the continued persecution of the Tamils. The perpetrators' ushers for their political gain is evident through their actions on attacking one group against another group which is insensitive. Malathy in *A Fleeting Moment in My Country* claims: "distributing sweets on the streets of Colombo in celebration, alongside hundreds of thousands of Tamils herded like cattle" (13). This event highlights the post-war conditions of the island which explicit the absence of the right to survival. Dehumanizing the Tamils like cattle's after the victory over the LTTE helps to understand the racist mentality of the oppressors. Peace is replaced with violence. The growing obnoxious conflict among the Tamils shows the intended dehumanization against them. Sinhala's victory over the Tigers is the war that puts the Tamils and their rights aside. The war turned around against the Tamil civilians rather than the Tigers. The sense of grief and pain unmade the government was treating their citizens in an undignified way.

Civilian's plight towards their livelihood is visible. It is repeatedly figured that the case of dehumanizing accumulates pain and allows the physical bodies to get injured. Malathy describes, "During 2004-2005 these events were staged in all the main centers in Tamil Eelam, like a serialized show. There were also reports of harassment of the Tamils traveling to attend these shows by the Lankan Military" (FMC 53). Similarly, the Tamils are objectified. Relating to

the statement of Kelley Oliver about objectification, “Objects do not talk. Objects do not act. Objects are not subjects or agents of their own lives” (Nayar 47). Malathy discusses, “Some cases will illustrate my point. A nine-year-old girl with a mild intellectual handicap, who was abused at home, began behaving erratically at school” (FMC 95). Objectification of the disabled girl is sorted out by the act of erratic. The vulnerability of being a disabled girl results in the abject embodiment. The reduction of the disabled girl to a human body shows the treatment of making her a commodity and a sexual object by the oppressors. Being a child victimized by the oppression due to the ill-treatment rendered to her broken body where the subjectivity has been eroded.

The narrative highlights the disfigurement of the disabled person by reducing them from the subject to an object that treated them as detritus. The treatment renders the individual bodies as wasted bodies expelled from the home. “. . . the embodied subject are rendered into waste” (*Human Rights and Literature* 41). The torturing is a threat used to get confessions through “the intentional infliction of ‘excruciating’ or ‘agonizing’ pain” (Clapham 86). The routine of the investigation department is to confess the Tamil civilians in the form of inquiry. This is considered as a process sooner or later it has become a practice where the civilians became victims and the army became perpetrators. The disabled body was broken again and once it was broken it is hard to replace, Nayar writes: “Abjection is the effect of rendering the individual’s body into an excess, grotesque and ugly – brutalized – in its own legitimate space. That is, abjection and its’ brutish suffering (Kristeva) begins when the body, which belongs in/ to that home is purged violently from the home as a preliminary to its disfigurement and debasement” (41).

Rumours definitely carry the fear, insecurity, and disbelief among the Tamils and other minorities. The provocation of the war gets tensed in spreading rumours. Subramanian reveals his own experience in the post-war island: “It never required much to begin a conversation in Sri Lanka. The very air was primed for it. In a country so full of uncertainty, all life and all death, was rehearsed through conversation” (TDI 15). Human lives became uncertain because of rumours which are immeasurable where the country is deprived of reconciliation. It holds an important part in giving access to the war. The intolerable war cringes through rumours. In such a case, there are many wide-open doors in believing the rumours and wages war against each other. The island is filled with enmity between the civilians and the army and the militants. The

rumours begin to unmake human beings from their existence, “Worlds occupied by the subjects of HR begins to be unmade first through rumours about imminent invasion, purges and assaults” (Nayar 5).

Mohan claims that rumours create a forced threat that condemns the Tamils civilians, “. . . generation had grown up imbibing the fears, wishes, and bitterness of the elder members of the community. Even though his family had lived outside the Vanni, he had been surrounded by films, books, songs, myths, superstitions, schools, and political and religious leaders – all of them talking only of fears and threats” (TST 266). The victim here represents the Tamils on the island as he became an ideal in bringing out the live threat that the Tamils are facing. The place is filled with rumours that limit the rights of the civilians in the form of fear, threat, and condemnation that prevents them to enjoy the rights

The victims are subjected to desperate starvation. Starvation represents dying and this can be related to having the mindset of genocide. The victims in war detentions and refugee camps are suffering from starvation that unfits them for their survival. They are forced to participate in their ‘dying self’ with ‘hunger’ which destroys the lives of the people including children. Clapham addresses the right to food as the proper persistence of human rights:

Certain rights, such as the right to food need to be properly secured before one can turn to the luxury of the right to vote or to the privilege of freedom of expression . . . ‘full belly thesis’, according to which subsistence rights to food and water have to be secured before turning to civil and political rights relating to political participation, arbitrary detention, freedom of expression, or privacy. (*Human Rights* 122)

“Toddlers played in the filthy area right in front of the toilets. I had never seen flies and mosquitoes in such numbers in my life. While eating, one hand was fully occupied with changing the flies; a practice that children would not adopt, thus consuming food contaminated by flies that came straight from the toilets very nearby” (FMC 151). They are in a place where they cannot live in an animalized treatment. Living in the same place where they consume food and excrete the waste seems to be a ridiculous living. The refugees in the camps are surviving in the state of the prison, animals in the cattle field, begging for food that happens often. Malathy witnesses, “Sometimes, when a Sinhala cabinet minister visited the camp, the convoy of Sinhala

video teams that came with him would throw food at the people and then a video with amusement as the people scrambled for food that fell on the ground” (FMC 150). Debasement into animality like treating them like animals brings the theme of domestication of the Tamils. The debasement further attacks the newborn babies too “Newborn babies were sent from hospitals, just a few days after being born into the camp conditions, which were unsuitable even for adults” (FMC 151). The conditions seem worse after the war than during the war, “I saw a doctor prescribing a twelve-year-old boy without finding out what was wrong first” (FMC 152). Many critics claim that the people who are denied from the dignity to live is equally considered to be the perpetrator.

The struggle happened in the island for a separate Tamil homeland press towards the offense between the Tigers and army. Many people politically associated themselves with the Tamil leaders for Eelam. Parties established a political wing to protest against the Sri Lankan government, by placing the historical background of the Tamil civilization. From the victim’s view the confession becomes the primary threat to claim them as a criminal; the prisoners torture and the victim just to get a confession. In any moment of detention, a civilian can be confirmed as a victim [prisoner]. The abduction and detention turn out to be vehement claiming he is working for the Tigers. The police investigation department brutally attacked in expropriate him as an abject body.

To conclude, the island is the cudgel of all the violations that leads to genocide. Hence, it is clear that the ethnic conflict facilitates rumours intended to dehumanization the civilians. Exploring with the political movements, the country further proceeded in proving themselves through Tamil and Sinhala histories “The conflict is therefore fought not only at the political level but also at the academic level among historians” (FMC 164). It is not about killing the enemies; though the communities treating each other as enemies. Whereas the human beings cannot dissociate themselves from the denying of rights.

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R. Samuel Gnanaraj
Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Bishop Heber College
(Autonomous), (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli- 24)
&
Dr. S. Azariah Kirubakaran
Assistant Professor, Department of English, Bishop Heber College
(Autonomous), (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli- 24)