

THE “STORYWORLD” OF SRI LANKA: PORTRAYAL OF WAR IN MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S *ANIL'S GHOST* AND MANI RATNAM'S *KANNATHIL MUTHAMITTAAL*

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Abstract:

How does one approach a critique of literature in the age of media? In the book “Storyworlds Across Media”, Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noel Thon write, “The explosion of new types of media in the twentieth century and their ever-increasing role in our daily life have led to a strong sense that “understanding media” is key to understanding the dynamics of culture and society”(2). In Michael Ondaatje's novel “Anil's Ghost”, the horrors of the Sri Lankan civil war are portrayed first-hand through the eyes of the Sinhalese protagonist, Anil Tissera. The struggle to reconcile with a war-ravaged nation that was once her oasis of peace, becomes a metaphor for Anil's almost-Blakean journey from innocence to experience to a higher innocence, which may or may not be cynical. Mani Ratnam's Tamil film, “Kannathil Muthamittaal” (A Peck On The Cheek, 2001) has a vantage-point of the war that is distinctly Tamil, but it tackles the issue of the futility of war through a critique of the purest of bondsmaternity. The journeys of Anil (from Anil's Ghost) and Amudha (from Kannathil Muthamittaal) collectively form a “storyworld” set in Sri Lanka that has rarely been explored in popular culture. How this happens is what forms the crux of my paper.

Keywords: Storyworld, Ondaatje, Ratnam, Sri Lanka, LTTE, War, South Asia.

The Sri Lankan War: A Historical Background

Considered one of the longest and bloodiest wars to have been fought in modern history, the civil war in Sri Lanka has had a far-reaching impact not only on the political scenario in South Asia, but has also served as an eye-opener regarding violations of human rights, to the rest of the world. Numerous violations of human rights, including assassinations, bombings and disappearances, have overshadowed the Sri Lankan military's final victory over the LTTE in 2009. Many notable human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) have repeatedly faced hurdles while investigating human rights violations. In a 2012 report on Sri Lanka, Amnesty International states:

During the armed conflict between Sri Lankan government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) gross and large-scale violations of international human rights and humanitarian law were committed by both sides with impunity... Thousands of Tamils were denied rations, services, or the permission to leave LTTE territory, charged fines, detained and killed by the LTTE as “traitors” for acts of perceived disloyalty. For many years, government repression of dissent in Sri Lanka focused on silencing those who opposed the way the war was fought, particularly those who were critical of violations of international humanitarian law by the Sri Lankan forces. Members of the security forces and government-allied paramilitaries have arrested, threatened and killed critical journalists, and used intimidation and violence to silence witnesses to government violations. (7)

The war in Sri Lanka may have started in the early 1980s, but the seeds of dissent had been sown much before then. The policy of “communal representation” initiated during British rule in Ceylon, as well as the passage of the Sinhala Only Act in 1956 by the then-Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, gave rise to ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. It had far-reaching effects for the nation it led to the adoption of the Vaddukkodei Accord in 1976, which called for the establishment of a separate state for the Tamil community, Tamil Eelam, and it expedited the mobilization of disgruntled Tamil youths into the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) over the next two decades, resulting in the outbreak of the civil war in 1983.

India's position with regard to the war was also intriguing. The initial technical and monetary support extended to the LTTE and other pro-Tamil militant organizations by the Indian intelligence agency RAW, and the dropping of food packets over Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka during the 1983-1987 period have been widely considered as the main reasons for the rise of the LTTE. However, after the signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accord in 1987, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was established by the Rajiv Gandhi-led Indian government for maintaining peace in the north. This led to a bloody war between the LTTE and the IPKF from 1987 to 1990, ending only when the Indian government, led by the then-Prime Minister V.P. Singh, recalled the IPKF troops back to India. The war led to over 1200 casualties for the IPKF, and also ensured India's exit from the war.

The issue of a separate Tamil Eelam also became a vital plank on which the 1990 Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu were fought. Though the Sri Lankan Tamils were different from their Indian counterparts in culture and language, major political parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), led by M. Karunanidhi and the MGR-led All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) repeatedly referred to the issue in their electoral speeches. These speeches generally argued for popular support for the Sri Lankan Tamils, by appealing to the local people's sense of *maanam* or Tamil honour. Vaasanthi states, “Both Karunanidhi and MGR tried to score points over each other and viewed the Eelam campaign with an eye on the elections. Sri Lankan Tamils became the 'blood of our blood', Tamil Tai shed copious tears over their misery and it was the duty of every Tamilian to wipe her tears.” (97) When the DMK was in power, it allowed many cadres from the LTTE to mobilize funds in Tamil Nadu for the war, but never supported it outright. However, the DMK's loss in the 1990 Assembly elections, as well as Rajiv Gandhi's assassination by an LTTE suicide bomber in Sriperumbudur in 1991, turned out to be game-changing. The goodwill that the LTTE enjoyed in Tamil Nadu vanished after these incidents, with public sentiment going against them. Since then, Tamil electoral politics, with the exception of a few leaders, has steered clear of the Sri Lankan issue.

With all the tumultuous developments in the Sri Lankan war and the reaction to it in India, especially Tamil Nadu, it is only but natural that the war, like so many other notable events in world history, would carve out its own space in the cultural consciousness of the region. However, unlike the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, or the Jewish Holocaust during World War II, or even 9/11 and its aftermath, the Sri Lankan war has not been able to exert much influence on literature and other media coming out of the region.

The “Storyworld” of Sri Lanka

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka remains well-documented in various newspaper articles, because it remained the first-ever conflict that was covered extensively by news media in South Asia, much before the Indo-Pakistan conflict of 1999. However, it remained invisible in popular culture for a long time. Around the turn of the millennium, various writers, poets and artists began engaging in popular discourses about the conflict. A new “storyworld” or narratological universe started emerging within these discourses, with the horrors of war in full view, and the “wronged” Tamil settler at the heart of it. Literature and cinema began to cater to this “storyworld”, with little regard for the nuances of political intrigue, which were to come in later portrayals of the war.

Why is the storyworld important here? Ryan and Thon write, "Thinking of storyworlds as representations that transcend media not only expands the scope of narratology beyond its "native" territory of language-based narrative (native both because language was among the first media in which stories were told and because classical narratology was developed primarily with literary fiction in mind) but also provides a much-needed center of convergence and point of comparison to media studies. The explosion of new types of media in the twentieth century and their ever-increasing role in our daily life have led to a strong sense that "understanding media" (McLuhan) is key to understanding the dynamics of culture and society." (2) In a highly mediatized society, which has been constantly finding newer ways to engage with audiences and readers, popular culture is heavily reliant on the moving image. In case of Sri Lanka, the unceasing coverage of the war in print and television helped fashion a view of the war that was critical of the Sri Lankan government and simultaneously sympathetic to the Tamil cause.

Anil's Ghost and Kannathil Muthamittaal: Thematic Insights

Michael Ondaatje's 2000 novel *Anil's Ghost* and Mani Ratnam's 2001 Tamil film *Kannathil Muthamittaal* (*A Peck On The Cheek*) were the pioneers in shaping this narratological universe. While Ondaatje's novel explores the brutal nature of the war through a series of anecdotes and flashbacks involving its various characters, Ratnam's film makes an obtuse critique of the war through the innocuous search of a girl for her biological mother. Ideologically, each work explores the war from a different perspective while *Anil's Ghost* shows the war from a predominantly Sinhalese point of view, *Kannathil Muthamittaal* makes the viewer, along with the girl, more sensitive to the horrors of the war, through an Indian Tamil lens. Both works, however, collectively create a morose and haunting image of the Sri Lankan war by critiquing and objectifying it, and by doing so, denounce it.

It is interesting to note the role language and culture plays in the shaping of perceptions of identities and loyalties in each of these works. In *Anil's Ghost* while a mix of Sinhalese and English forms a common ground for interaction, diverse, country-specific dialects of Tamil serve as the communicative backbone in *Kannathil Muthamittaal*. Interestingly, language performs dual functions in the two texts while it serves as a tool for aggregation and consolidation, as in the mobilization of the LTTE and the Sri Lankan authorities on opposing sides, it also serves as a differentiator in some cases. In *Anil's Ghost*, Anil's Sinhalese origins are what allow her, in spite of her identity as a UN representative, to allow her to work in Sri Lanka. However, her Anglo-centric upbringing is what separates her from the other characters in the novel, most of whom are native Sinhalese. Anil's English, therefore, becomes a tool for a churning of colonial discourse and anti-colonial sentiments. Similarly, in *Kannathil Muthamittaal*, while Tamil is the unifying language that enables a father to make a humble request, using poetry as a tool of identity, to an LTTE militant, Ratnam subtly plays on the difference in dialects when at the park, Amudha asks the man in the wheelchair, "Why does your Tamil sound strange?" Ondaatje and Ratnam, through their respective works, portray the use of language as a means of abjection to deflect the *thanatos* from the Self. In such circumstances, the Tamil-Sinhalese dichotomy reflects the creation of the binaries of the Self and the Other, which change with the prevalent perspective, and is common to both backgrounds. Language becomes an abject space.

Even though *Anil's Ghost* is titled thus, it is not about Anil Tissera, the Colombo-born forensic anthropologist who returns to Sri Lanka as an investigator for the Geneva-headquartered UNHCR. Having spent the last fifteen years of her life in Britain and America, Anil is, as Margaret Scanlan says, "a Westernized outsider" (305) who is forced to work with a local archaeologist, Sarath Diasena, for the duration of her stay. The initial part of the novel gives the reader the impression that this novel is all about her experiences as she attempts to work in the country she has come back to. However, Ondaatje takes the reader by surprise with his volte-face:

Because her name appears in the title, and the early chapters are seen from her perspective, she initially seems to be the central character; but as the book goes on the Diasena brothers assume greater importance; reversing the film cliché, Ondaatje drops her from the narrative

as soon as she heads for the airport. (Scanlan 305)

In Sri Lanka, Anil and Sarath, during their excavations, come across the remains of a skeleton whose skull is badly disfigured. However, Anil suspects that the skeleton may not be ancient, as they had originally thought. In trying to investigate into the identity of the skeleton, whom they affectionately nickname "Sailor", they embark on a journey across Sri Lanka. The various people they meet in their quest for the truth lead fragmented lives, with unfulfilled dreams. Yet Anil and Sarath also realize that they cannot depend on the government that has, quite ironically, brought them together; thus, the people they encounter must be brought out of their shells, and their narratives must be uncovered as a professional, rather than a psychological need.

Though Anil is not the central character, her visit to Sri Lanka actually becomes the catalyst for all the other characters in the novel to revisit their own fragmented lives. The image of the defaced Buddha statue and its painstaking, yet haphazard reconstruction by Ananda, serves as a powerful image for the plight of the other characters. It also seems an apt euphemism for the meta-narrative about the war that the reader has to piece together from their recollections. Their recollections, as also Anil's, provide a common haphazard ground from which Ondaatje's meta-narrative speaks to the reader. By reconstructing these multiple narratives, the reader can derive a complex, clandestine, yet unsettling portrait of the war and its excesses. Whether it be Palipana's hermit existence, or Ananda's struggle to come to terms with the loss of his wife, or even Gamini's consciousness that is slowly being unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy all these narratives only add, time and again, to the reader piecing together the intra-personal narratives, in order to come up with the horrors of everyday life in Sri Lanka in the 80s and 90s.

Kannathil Muthamittaal, however, is not a direct critique of the war. Rather, it examines the role the war plays in inter-personal relationships, and how it forces a person to break existing ties, while forging new ones. Adapted from an article in *Time* magazine about a Filipino child, raised by American parents, revisiting the Philippines in search of his mother, the film focuses on the search of a nine year-old for her biological mother. This search works at dual levels while Amudha moves from innocence to experience, the audience, observing the circumstances from her perspective, subtly views the civil war from a distant, pristine perspective. According to Ratnam himself,

The (Sri Lankan) issue has been happening in our backyard for so long. You see various shades of it. You see the way people react changing so much, within Tamil Nadu. And this was a simple emotional story through which you could travel into that zone, through the eyes of a girl who's totally unaware a girl from the mainland and look at something that's happening so close to us. (Rangan 214)

The film opens with a mini-narrative that serves as a prologue for what is to follow a marriage taking place in Mankulam, a place in northeastern Sri Lanka, between Dileepan and Shyama, in accordance with traditional Tamil rituals. This particular episode is punctuated by a song about white flowers, which embody peace in the face of adversity. The song also plays at the end of the movie, suggestive of a more direct anti-war message.

<i>Vellai pookkal ulagam engum malarhavae</i>	Let white flowers bloom all over the world
<i>Vidiyum bhoomi amaidhikaaga vidihavae</i>	Let peace dawn all over the world

However, Dileepan's post-coital dream about soldiers and guns, reveals something different to the audience for the first time there is a world of violence outside the framework of the conjugal life that Dileepan and Shyama desire. Later, when Shyama sees Dileepan disappear into the forest, the audience, along with her, comes to the realization that Dileepan, who has devoted himself to the cause of the LTTE,

will, in all probability, not come back to her. It is subsequently revealed that she migrates, with other Sri Lankan Tamils, to a Red Cross refugee camp in Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu, India, even as she clings to hope that Dileepan might return.

The action in the narrative then shifts nine years later to present-day Chennai, and is carried forward by a young girl named Amudha. Through her perspective, the audience observes key aspects of her family life. It is through her eyes that her parents, Thiruchelvan and Indra, are seen for the first time. While the hot-headed Thiruchelvan is an engineer who is also a firebrand Tamil writer, Indra is a popular Tamil news-anchor on television. Along with her parents, Amudha also lives with her two siblings, Akhil and Vinay, and their grandfather. On her ninth birthday, Thiruchelvan decides to tell Amudha that she is not their biological child. This revelation turns Amudha's world upside-down, as she is unable to come to terms with the fact that she is not related to her family by blood. On asking her parents about her own background, Amudha shifts the audience's focus to the story of Thiruchelvan and Indra's marriage. This part of the narrative reveals multiple truths. Shyama had actually given birth to Amudha in the Red Cross camp at Rameswaram and disappeared. This child inspired Thiruchelvan to write his first story, "Umbrella", a feat that endears him to Indra, his next-door neighbour. Thiruchelvan takes Indra to the camp one day, where Indra instantly takes a liking to the child and names her "Amudha", meaning "nectar" in Tamil. Moved by this, Thiruchelvan decides to adopt Amudha, but he cannot do so, as it is not permitted by law. He decides to marry Indra just so that they can adopt Amudha, and bring her up as their own child.

The umbrella is a motif that recurs throughout the film. Beginning with Thiruchelvan's short story inspired by Amudha, the umbrella is present in various scenes set in the second half of the film, in Sri Lanka. The umbrella held over Amudha's head is a symbol of protection against the lurking dangers of the world. When Thiruchelvan and Dr. Wickramasinghe return from their encounter with the LTTE, the umbrella held by the doctor is shown torn, signifying a fight with adversity. In the last scene, the image of Thiruchelvan holding an umbrella over the figure of Indra holding a tearful Amudha becomes a symbol of the "happy family", staying united in the face of adversity and emotional upheavals.

Amudha grows more and more restless, and a desire to meet her real mother grows within her. Armed with only the name of her biological mother, she undertakes a bus ride to Rameswaram with her cousin Pradeep. On reaching the Red Cross camp, she is told that "M.D. Shyama", her biological mother, had given birth to a female infant (meaning her) in 1991. Later, Thiruchelvan, sensing her helplessness, takes a momentous decision he decides to take Indra and Amudha to Sri Lanka, to search for Shyama.

The second half of the film sees Amudha, Thiruchelvan and Indra in Sri Lanka. Aided by a local Sinhalese surgeon, Dr. Harold Wickramasinghe, they set out in search of Shyama, in the trouble-ridden Northern Province that is controlled by the LTTE. It is here that Amudha is exposed to a different kind of horror. As she and her parents go from place to place in search of the elusive Shyama, the shock of her uncertain maternity is replaced by an even bigger fear the raw, horrific power of ethnic conflict. At a felicitation ceremony held in honour of her father in Jaffna, when Amudha wanders off to the nearby park, she meets a young Tamil man sitting in a wheelchair, reading a book of poetry. The conversation that ensues between them is one of everyday life a fact highly unusual for a war zone. However, a few minutes later, she witnesses him leaping on top of a moving Army truck and then detonating himself, killing many soldiers on the spot. Though Amudha gets minor injuries due to the explosion, she is really traumatized by the experience. It is the start of her Blakean journey from innocence to experience. She encounters many more such experiences during her stay. Her encounter with the woman at the Mankulam village near Kilinochchi, the provincial headquarters, exposes her to the grief a mother feels on the loss of her child. Later, when she sees children of her age (possibly Tamil), dressed in military fatigues, she is terrified and runs to the only source of comfort she knows, Indra.

Through all the revelations about her maternity, Amudha shares a very complex relationship with Indra. The irony of the narrative lies in the fact that Indra, who is shown christening Amudha, and later

bringing her up, is in danger of losing her status as a mother to Amudha. Though Indra never acknowledges it openly, there are multiple instances in the film when she wishes that Amudha would treat *her* as her real mother. When the family travels to the Mankulam village near Kilinochchi, Indra tells Thiruchelvan, "We've left two kids behind for the sake of one", in a reference to her two "real" sons, Akhil and Vinay.

This volatile relationship, however, comes to an end when the family gets caught in the crossfire between the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE at Subramaniam Park. Thiruchelvan and Dr. Wickramasinghe are accosted by members of the LTTE, one of whom turns out to be Shyama's elder brother, who is seen earlier in the film during her marriage. He promises them that he will bring Shyama to meet them at Subramaniam Park. However, when the family and Dr. Wickramasinghe reach the place, they encounter a large battalion of the Sri Lankan army that is preparing for a major offensive on the LTTE. They want to get back to safety, but Amudha stays stubborn and tries to stay back. As Amudha argues with her family, violence erupts in the park; the entire family gets caught in the crossfire. Indra sustains an injury on her arm, but it is actually Amudha who completes her life-changing journey from innocence to experience. The fragile girl who initially feels disowned when told of her true maternity realizes, at this point, the horrors of war, as well as the utter futility of the entire exercise of finding her real mother. When she tells her father, "I want to go home", she also comes to terms with the fact that the only truth that is constant in her life is that Thiruchelvan and Indra, her adopted family, will obviously protect her, just as they have done throughout her life.

However, it is also ironically at this point that Indra realizes that she must prepare herself for the inevitable meeting between Amudha and her biological mother. As the family prepares to get back to Sri Lanka, she requests Dr. Wickramasinghe to drive them to Subramaniam Park again, ignoring the concerns of her family. Unknown to them, a red auto follows them. At Subramaniam Park, while the family waits for someone to come, they see Shyama and her brother alight from the auto. In this poignant last act of the film, Amudha comes face-to-face with her "real" mother, Shyama. She gives her an album containing photographs of her entire life. She also reads out from a list of twenty questions that she had prepared. However, when Amudha asks Shyama about her true parentage, Shyama replies that she was taken away from her after her birth. Amudha is unwilling to ask any more questions after this, being too overcome with sadness but Indra, the foster mother prods her to embrace Shyama, the biological mother. For Amudha, it is an unusual struggle to cope with from a point in the film when she raised questions about her own maternity, Amudha is now in the enviable position of having the blessings of two mothers.

However, when Amudha requests Shyama to return with them to India, she says she cannot do so. She repeats the same words to Amudha that Dileepan had told her nine years ago while escaping into the forest "Someday there will be peace in this country. Come back to me then." The film ends with a tearful reunion between Amudha, Indra and Thiruchelvan in the rain, as they watch the figures of Shyama and her brother recede in the distance.

***Anil's Ghost* and *Kannathil Muthamittaal*: Comparative Analysis vis-à-vis The War**

Both *Anil's Ghost* and *Kannathil Muthamittaal* differ in their chronological approach to the Sri Lankan War. In the first chapter of *Anil's Ghost*, Anil thinks about a line from Archilochus "In the hospitality of war we left them their dead to remember us by." (7) This line is very revealing. At one level, it tells the reader about Anil's background as a forensic anthropologist, who is well-versed in ancient Greek culture. At another, though, it also points suggestively to the hundreds of people, both Sinhalese and Tamil, who have either died or have been reported missing.

Another instance occurs when Anil nostalgically remembers her days at Guy's Hospital in London. While studying the brain, when she hears the term *amygdala* being used, she thinks of it as a Sri Lankan term. However, her professor explains to her what it really "is" "It's" the dark aspect of the brain... A place to house fearful memories." (130). The specific location of the "*amygdala*" small knot-like bundle of nerve cells near the stem of the brain has a direct bearing on the narrative. Victoria Burrows argues,

"Metaphorically, and sometimes literally, the amygdala is the living kernel at the center of this text, binding and unbinding the seemingly incommensurable categories of scientific and imaginative "truths" and the histories that they contain." (161). In the same way, the amygdala also dictates the responses to emotional upheavals and personal sorrows, and this, in turn, shapes the various vignettes from the characters Anil encounters in the novel. Thus, while Ananda relies on toddy and sculpture to keep the grief of losing his wife Sirissa at bay, Palipana and Lakma's bare existence in the old monastery is more of a reaction of their amygdalas to the violence perpetrated on their family. In the case of the Diyasena brothers, it is much more complicated. While the news of his wife's death has prompted Sarath to mentally condition himself to reveal to the world (except Anil) that she is alive, it is far worse in Gamini's case. Gamini, the younger of the two siblings, is beset by the twin disappointments of not knowing his brother and losing the one person he really loved, Sarath's late wife.

This combination of the literal and the metaphorical lends credence to the bitter realities of the Sri Lankan war. In *Kannathil Muthamittaal*, Ratnam explores multiple themes with regard to the war, but all of it comes in the second half. When the visual motifs do not occur in the narrative, the short stories attributed to Thiruchelvan in the first half of the film actually fill in the gaps. The pleasant-looking man in the wheelchair who turns out to be an LTTE suicide bomber, the woman fleeing the Mankulam village near Kilinochchi who inadvertently reveals the loss of her daughter in the war, the vision of Tamil child-soldiers, clad in fatigues and armed with guns, and finally the battle at Subramaniam Park these images, when seen through the eyes of a child, signify the loss of innocence. But when seen through a normal adult point of view, it only heightens the viewer's sense of disbelief at the events taking place in the name of identity.

Parallels with real-life events and anecdotes taken from the war and the history of politics in Tamil Nadu are hard to ignore. Ondaatje bases several of the incidents and themes in *Anil's Ghost* on real-life scenarios. The difficulties faced by various international human rights collectives while working in Sri Lankan logistical nightmares as well as repeated clandestine government interference are echoed in the main story of reconstruction of Sailor's skull by Anil and Sarath, that is attempted outside the framework of prying government eyes. The murder of Palipana's brother, a monk, is a sly reference to the way Sinhalese Buddhist monks got involved in the confrontational politics against the Tamil community. Even the death of the "Silver President", Katugala, has many parallels. Suicide bombing was a weapon used, to great effect, by the LTTE at the height of the conflict. Katugala's murder by this method is also based on the assassination of Ranasinghe Premadasa, the Sri Lankan President, in May 1993. By the time this novel was published, in 2000, Sri Lanka had also witnessed another similar assassination attempt this time on Chandrika Kumaratunga, the Sri Lankan President.

Ratnam does not draw too many parallels with real-life incidents in the war, the sole exception being the devastation of Subramaniam Park at Jaffna in the 1990s. However, his characterization of Thiruchelvan is interesting. In a state where the notion of *maanam* was celebrated to gather support for the idea of a Tamil Eelam, Thiruchelvan is the quintessential firebrand Tamil writer, capable of inciting passion through his words. In the first half of the film, his short story "Umbrella" talks about the plight of the thousands of refugees from Sri Lanka who inhabit the refugee camps in Tamil Nadu, which resembles an "open-air prison". But the audience sees a more balanced side to him in the second half, when he voices his feelings about wanting peace to return to Sri Lanka. His character, in this way, becomes a reference to the towering political figure of M. Karunanidhi of the DMK, who supported the LTTE's agenda at one point of time, but fell out with them over the issue of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Thiruchelvan also becomes representative of the entire anti-LTTE sentiment prevalent in contemporary Tamil Nadu.

Conclusion

In totality, therefore, *Anil's Ghost* and *Kannathil Muthamittaal*, despite being different in context, medium of expression and content, convey a united meaning. Ondaatje conveys the truth about the cost of war in a more subtle way; Ratnam chooses a route that is more direct when compared with Ondaatje's

approach, yet is more subtle when it comes to contemporary Tamil cinema. Ultimately, both texts choose not to glorify war, by exploring the trauma caused. Thus, *Anil's Ghost* and *Kannathil Muthamittaal* succeed in transposing the Sri Lankan war and looking at it from an artistic point of view.

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