
**SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ETHNIC CONFLICT: AN EXPOSITION OF VIOLATION
OF
HUMAN RIGHTS IN *SUGANDHI ALIAS ANDAL DEVANAGARI***

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Abstract

Their increased civilization consciousness makes the differences between civilizations more apparent and the difference in culture may lead to conflict. The ethnic conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese resulted in the Sri Lankan Civil War which has lasted nearly three decades and is one of the longest-running civil wars in Asia. Literature always attempts to understand wars from a human perspective by looking at how it impacts people. Both men and women suffer human rights violations but women by their disadvantaged position in the society are subjected to certain abuses more often than men and suffer in different ways too. Sexual violence as part of the war or ethnic conflicts often has no relation to sexual desire but is instead linked to power, dominance, and abuse of authority. The study analyses how the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka ravaged the normal life of common people and how the acts of sexual violence affected women lives and violated their human rights with reference to T. D Ramakrishnan's novel *Sugandhi Alias Andal Devanagari*. The study also points out the importance of inculcation of social empathy and universal humanism to respect other human rights and to recess the violence against fellow human beings.

Keywords: *Ethnicity, Ethnic conflict, Human rights, Civil War*

An ethnic group or ethnicity is a category of people who identify with each other based on similarities such as common ancestry, language, history, society, culture or nation. Different ethnicities existing in one nation may lead to conflict. Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country where a number of ethnoreligious groups co-existing for centuries. The increased civilization consciousness makes the differences between civilizations more apparent and the difference in culture may lead to conflict. The ethnic conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese resulted in the Sri Lankan Civil War which has lasted nearly three decades and is one of the longest-running civil wars in Asia. Literature always attempts to understand wars from a human perspective by looking at how it impacts people. The current ethnic conflict involving the country's Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority has to lead the country towards continuous civil war which destroyed the peaceful coexistence of the common people in the nation.

Civil war is a violent military conflict within the boundaries of a state over the political and social order. The conflict brings about severe state impairment or its complete breakdown. The loss of the government's monopoly over force and the disintegration of the political order lead to a collapse of law, order and social institutions, breeding extreme chaos. Literature attempts to understand civil war from a human perspective by looking at how it impacts people. The meaning of the civil war is narratively constructed through imagined stories showing human experiences endured during the violent transformation of society. It is one of the greatest human rights scandals of the international arena. Human rights are the basic rights and freedom to which all humans are entitled but women are restricted many of these rights as part of the gender role they are given in the society and especially in a war front, where none of the human rights are protected, women lives are completely at a verge of threat and mutilation.

T D Ramakrishnan's *Sugandhi alias Andal Devanagari* portrays the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka which ravaged the normal lives of people and how it completely devastated the complete existence of civilians in the country. The novel discusses the war inflicted life of Sri Lankan civilians in the Sri Lankan Civil war between LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and Sinhalese. The novelist highlights ordinary people's experiences of civil war and how the destruction and shift from one social system to another is artificial, absurd and violent through their literary excavations. This study defends, through a comparative analysis of novels dealing with the two civil wars, that literature narratively constructs the meaning and significance of civil war through its impact on people. Both the novels use the economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions among the various peoples of the countries and bring out the emotional and psychological consequences of the conflict to construct a multidimensional version of the civil wars. The novels illustrate how civil war's reconfiguration of a social space implicates a complex dynamic of physical and symbolic violence which puts people's identity, life, sense of home and belonging in crisis.

The novel illustrates how people suddenly have to adapt to newly imposed divisions in society which redefine who they are, which side they belong on, and transform their neighbor into the enemy. The violence leads to a loss of community, home and belonging as the physical, social and cultural space people inhabited, established a social network in and constructed their lives around suddenly collapses. Women and children are very much vulnerable to violence and destruction of war. Both women and men suffer human rights violations such as indiscriminate killings and torture but women by their disadvantaged position in the society are subjected to certain abuses more often than men, and they suffer in different ways too. The study analyses how the wars affected and ravaged the normal lives of women during civil wars of Nigeria and Sri Lanka as reflected by the novelists and the study points out the importance of inculcation of social empathy and universal humanism in the lives of human beings to recess the violence against their fellow beings.

Women suffer various types of physical and mental tortures and they are ill-treated than men. Physical violence against women includes rape, imprisonment, torture, trafficking, compelled prostitution sexual assault and execution. War destroys the secured shelter and it may lead to vulnerable exposure to different kinds of exploitation. Poverty and lack of food supplies lead women towards ill health which may end in different kinds of diseases. Women combatants who become captives are highly tortured in specially designed torture camps. All these tortures and exploitations may result in mental trauma which would follow them throughout their life.

Rape is identified by psychologists as the most intrusive of traumatic events. It is defined as unlawful sexual intercourse without the consent of the victim. The female body is used as a battleground to show the enemy's rage and ferocity. Psychological consequences of rape in women victims have found that it produces psychological difficulties, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, sexual dysfunctions, dissociative disorders, suicide attempts, and alcohol or substance abuse. In societies where ethnicity is inherited through the male line, women in the opposite group are raped and forced to bear children. In literature, rape is often interpreted as men's weapon against women. Rape is an expression of power and authority which is a form of violence and most of the perpetrators of the crime are men. Men desire to rape women in order to assert their authority over them. Rape can even be a symptom of inequality and the desire on the part of those who wield power to assert it on the powerless. It is an action rooted in masculine behavior that serves to perpetuate patriarchal order.

T D Ramakrishnan's *Sugandhi alias Andal Devanagari* portrays rape as a powerful tool to oppress women. The women Human Rights activists who stood up for establishing peace at Sri Lanka are being raped by the army without any ethnic difference of Tamil or Sinhalese. The medical student Poomani Selvanayakam was kidnapped and inhumanly tortured. She was raped by a higher official in the army whom she murders in the end. But she was not able to escape from the place and later killed by the soldiers. She was kidnapped by the Sri Lankan army for

conducting a memorial meeting in the name of Rajani Tiranagama, a human right activist who stood against both Sri Lankan army and LTTE for their ill-treatment of the citizens. Juliet a Sinhalese woman who was magnetized towards Rajani's activism was too abducted by the army and she too was cruelly raped and imprisoned by the military and she was compelled to bear the child of the higher official as a punishment. Later she was completely denied by her parents. When she was kidnapped by the army, her husband, an army officer in the Sri Lankan army, was brutally murdered in the war. The army officials use rape as a weapon against women journalists, combatants, and activists. The harassment of female captives in the army camp is portrayed through the character Tamizholi and Sugandhi. Both of them are cruelly gang-raped by the soldiers and they were physically and mentally tortured. Taizhou is held as a captive for many years and they had to face many torturing equipments in the camp. Sugandhi lost her both hands and palms and she was disfigured by pouring acid over her face. The two girls Arulmozhi and the Yamuna the two helping hands of Sugandhi against the inhuman Sri Lankan army are also gang raped by the army in the guise of interrogation.

T D Ramakrishnan highlights the murders of human right activists, journalists and social activists who work against both groups in Sri Lanka to re-establish peaceful life in the country. Both the groups LTTE and Sri Lankan army work by their own to establish their policies in the country without giving prominence in maintaining a peaceful environment for the civilian life and their mutual violence completely destroys the island nation. The novel revolves around the murder of the human right activist Rajani Tiranagama, a medical officer who brought international attention to Sri Lankan issues. She was killed by LTTE for working against their inhuman treatment of Sri Lankan citizens. Poomani Selvanayakam was murdered for not yielding to the policies of the Sri Lankan army. Sugandhi too lost her life in her fight against the army's fascism. The names of the murdered women in the civil war are being mentioned in an informal meeting of the association 'Women Against War' in Poomani's leadership. The names of Kuttimani, Isaipriya, Selvi, Sivaraman, and Rajani are mentioned in the speech. Many unknown women also lost their lives without doing anything against any of these groups.

War ends in complete destruction like the destruction of families, social life, loss of health, wealth and secured shelters. Many women lost their husbands children and parents. The association named 'War widows of Sri Lanka' presented in *Sugandhi alias Andal Devanayaki* ejaculates the terrible situation of Sri Lankan women life which has completely broken in the civil war. The number of the members of 'War widows of Sri Lanka' is nearly one lakh which itself is an example of the deplorable women living in the war-torn island country. Sugandhi, one of the prominent characters, lost her parents and brother in early childhood itself and she had to spend her whole childhood in an orphanage till the arrival of her uncle. War always devastates human life and whatever destroys the peaceful existence of civilians in a country should be wiped away from our life. Governments and countries are created only for maintaining law and

order in the country not to oppress people for protecting their personal interests or policies. Human rights should be protected otherwise complete anarchy would exist in the country which would make civilian existence impossible.

Civil war is represented in the novel as a sensed danger pressing upon the population and inducing a collective sense of fear and anxiety. The novel does not explain the civil war by clarifying what happened, such as through a historical or political point of view. It is not concerned with the sequence of events that shaped the civil war but seek rather speak of the significance that the civil war has on people by imagining how it disrupts their lives and the society they are a part of. The novel's representation of the relations between people and the complexities of their identities reveal the artificiality of civil war's division of society into two antagonistic opposing sides. The civil war is consistently portrayed as a violent and vague force in the background, which disrupts and transforms the lives of people. The novel's focus on individual experiences also highlights the value of the person and criticizes the harrowing way that civil war objectifies and nullifies their lives. The women lives presented in the novel are completely ravaged by the civil war. They are physically and mentally broken, lost their families, some of them murdered and some of them committed suicide. All of them lost their familial and social co-existence only because of the war. The novelist succeeds in portraying peoples' subjective experiences defy civil war's debasement of the human and communal spirit by accentuating the dignity and value of human lives and people's sense of compassion, friendship, and love. The novel highlights the necessity of tolerance, social empathy, and universal humanism through the realistic portrayal of war-torn lives presented in the novel which embodies complete empathy towards the deplorable condition of humanity in our world.

Works Cited

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