SILENCE IN SRI LANKAN CINEMA

FROM 1990 TO 2010

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

S.L. Priyantha Fonseka

29 October 2014

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the characteristic silence that dominates the new wave of Sri Lankan cinema after 1990 in a socio-cultural approach. The central concern of this study is to examine the phenomenon of silence in relation to Sri Lanka's social, political and cultural history and contemporary trends in national cinema.

This is an in-depth study of the underlying theories exemplified in the characters in the films, their expressions of silence and the whole concept of silence. The silence in the films selected for this study reflects the forces of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that trigger the civil war, youth unrest, social and systemic imbalance in the socio-political landscape of Sri Lanka. The thesis's arguments are validated by relevant characters, the visual texts, narrative and the socio-cultural setting of the films studied.

Further, based on the theoretical concepts of silence the thesis proposes the idea of 'silence as a weapon' seen from a two-fold perspective: silence safeguards personal and cultural identities and creates space for a 'shield' to ward off the violence directed at the self, to make an appropriate counter response to the hegemonic authority that seeks to control personal identities. The weapon of silence employed by the characters in the films lays bare their internal monologues while the silence in the setting of the film crystallizes the weapon of silence to pinpoint the common space that it inhabits. The thesis finally purports that the recent oppression of freedom of expression of filmmakers and cinema by the formal and

informal organs of hegemonic authority are nothing but its own state of panic and

the fear of this weapon.

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This research thesis is a result of a tiresome two and a half years. It should be mentioned that if not for the encouragement and help received from various characters met at different places, there was no way that I could finish this successfully. I hereby wish to thank all of them.

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Dr. Richard Smith of the Department of Film Studies and Mary Roberts, Head of the Department both were concerned about me as they understood the shock I got

You were ready to take on everything from part-time jobs to preparing meals and ready to go through a hard time forgetting the pleasant moments of a marriage, with a perpetual smile and a confidence about the future. You gave me confidence to look clearly at the future amidst mental and physical difficulties. So, I must go with you.

I offer this thesis to my dear dad, mom and dear wife Harshi, to whom I cannot thank enough.

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Introduction

Background

I still remember leaving Kandy in the first week of March in 2012 to go to the Katunayake international airport and to fly to Sydney to begin my postgraduate studies for which this thesis is presented. My mother seated in the rear seat of the car spoke not a word; she remained silent right to the end of the journey. She may have felt sad in her heart that I was leaving and though she uttered a word or two only if necessary. She had abandoned the use of language over several years.

At the airport, when I knelt at her feet in obeisance, she said 'May the Triple Gem bless my beloved son'.[1] She said nothing about the pain caused by my absence. In our childhood, when my two brothers and I left the house she lived in and went to our father's ancestral home far away to pursue our education nobody had told me that she had wept. Doctors had described her silence as a symptom of mental depression. She had lost her mother when she was a child and because her father had remarried she had to live with her grandparents; when she got married and had three children they left her just as they reached the age of five years for their

school education. Over several decades, she first spent her childhood under her grandfather, and then as a married woman under her husband. I wondered whether it was possible to simplistically conclude that the silence of such a woman was a symptom of depression.

It was not through my mother that I first experienced silence. In our childhood, we were not permitted to engage in conversation with our elders but were required to follow their instructions in silence. In our home and in the Buddhist temple that I visited it was considered wrong to question an elder or a bhikkhu (Buddhist priest). To be called 'a good quiet child' was a compliment that indicated a child who was silent, attentive and unquestioning. This was considered an honour for a child and it was embedded in his psyche. Thus I and many of my peers strove to remain silent, to listen to our elders and to be placid and thus earn a 'good name'.

But nevertheless, I remember experiencing silence in another form in the latter part of the 80s -a collective, communal, safe silence. Elders too maintained strict silence in our home during the 1988-89 period of terror.[2] The *Deshapremi* (Patriotic) organization that was in operation at the time had issued warnings that the entire family would be killed if our young uncles who worked in the police did not leave the service.[3] They spent every night in our home and for good measure brought their dog along with them. We spent those long nights in silence -our radios and lights switched off, only kerosene lamps lit dimly, only looking at each other in fear. On many nights, gunshots were heard in the distance. Although there was silence surely our minds were filled with a myriad of thoughts. Looking back,

I now think we were all engaged in an internal monologue as we experienced the night, its darkness and its terror, filled with anxiety in our hearts. The morning news and the sight of dead bodies afloat in the *Mahaveli* that flowed in the vicinity turned the river of our childhood, of fun and frolic, into an alien river and our village of innocence into a deserted village of silence.[4]

In the post-1990 era, I observed that in many of the art films 'silence' was beginning to take centre stage as the form of oral expression. At the University of Peradeniya, I wrote my academic thesis for my first degree on the films of Prasanna Vithanage who was emerging as the voice of the new generation of cinema of the nineties. I observed that in his films the majority of his characters chose silence in the face of their insoluble dilemmas.[5] Wannihamy in his *Purahanda Kaluwara* (Death on a Full Moon Day, 1997)*,* unable to accept his son's death, lapses into silence. In *Anantha Rathriya* (Dark Night of the Soul, 1996) Piyumi and in *Sisila Gini Ganee* (Ice on Fire, 1992) Annette are silent, unable to prove their innocence in the face of murder charges. In *Pawuru Walalu* (Walls Within, 1997) Violet, unable to resist a tradition that calls for the abandonment of all other human feelings in the face of maternity, is silent. In Vithanage's films, all the main characters are silent as part of their internal monologues.[6]

I also realized that silence played a major role in the Sri Lankan social fabric and transcended the meanings in dialogues in a more complex manner when in 2006 I directed *Alu* as a Sinhala stage drama based on Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes.* In

trying to negotiate the pauses and silences of Pinteresque language and incorporate them into the Sinhala adaptation I also realized that between the silences and pauses in the language of Devlin and Rebecca there were many internal monologues taking place in their minds. What made *Ashes to Ashes* suitable for the Sinhala stage was that its silence- and pause-related speech reflected certain happenings in the recent political history of Sri Lanka? When I discussed with the actors and actresses how to understand their roles in the play it was also necessary for us to understand the internal monologues of the characters and how they were related to the silences in our political history. In a play that I myself directed I had to understand the import of its silences and of its internal monologues the thereby pave the way for a self-examination. Such self-examination, needless to say, provided the primary motivation for this research.

However, although on the face of it from the medical diagnosis of my mother's silence to the silence we maintained in our childhood and the collective silence imposed on us by terrorism seemed to suppress personal freedom of expression, I felt that the internal monologues, both personal and collective, can arise either at the end of or within periods of silence. Reading Vithanage's cinematic creations and my involvement in the stage creations of Pinter reinforced this feeling in me through the silences of their characters which were not so much occasions without verbal expression but a preparation for the ensuing expression or a means of using silence as a space for communicating responses.

Research methodology, problem and objectives

This research was nourished by the aforesaid personal and collective experiences and the experience gained later with national cinema. It examines whether the silence imposed in the long term on citizens by political and cultural authority cannot be broken and whether there are mechanisms for opposing such authority. It covers a special period of Sri Lanka cinema beginning in the 1990s and is based on an analysis of the content of such cinematic creations. Most of the films of this genre portray the citizen who faces the social, cultural and political pressures of post-Independence Sri Lanka. The setting is the social space occupied by him/her. Their space in the narrative is marked largely by silence in the face of the horrible national crises such as the civil war and also that space portrays silence. The primary focus of this research is on understanding this phenomenon of silence.

The silence, both character-centred and space-centred, in the film cannot be broken; it is based on the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism that created a religious and political hegemonic authority against which the problem of seeking a practical communication mode is a concern of this research.[7] The research, which traverses the arena of social-cultural silence, also seeks to identify silence as a tool of both of defence and attack in the face of the power of authority faced by the individual citizen hiding behind a cloak of silence.

The geographical zone of the research

This research is based in Sri Lanka, an island 65,610 sq km situated in the Indian Ocean 23 km from the tip of the subcontinent of India.
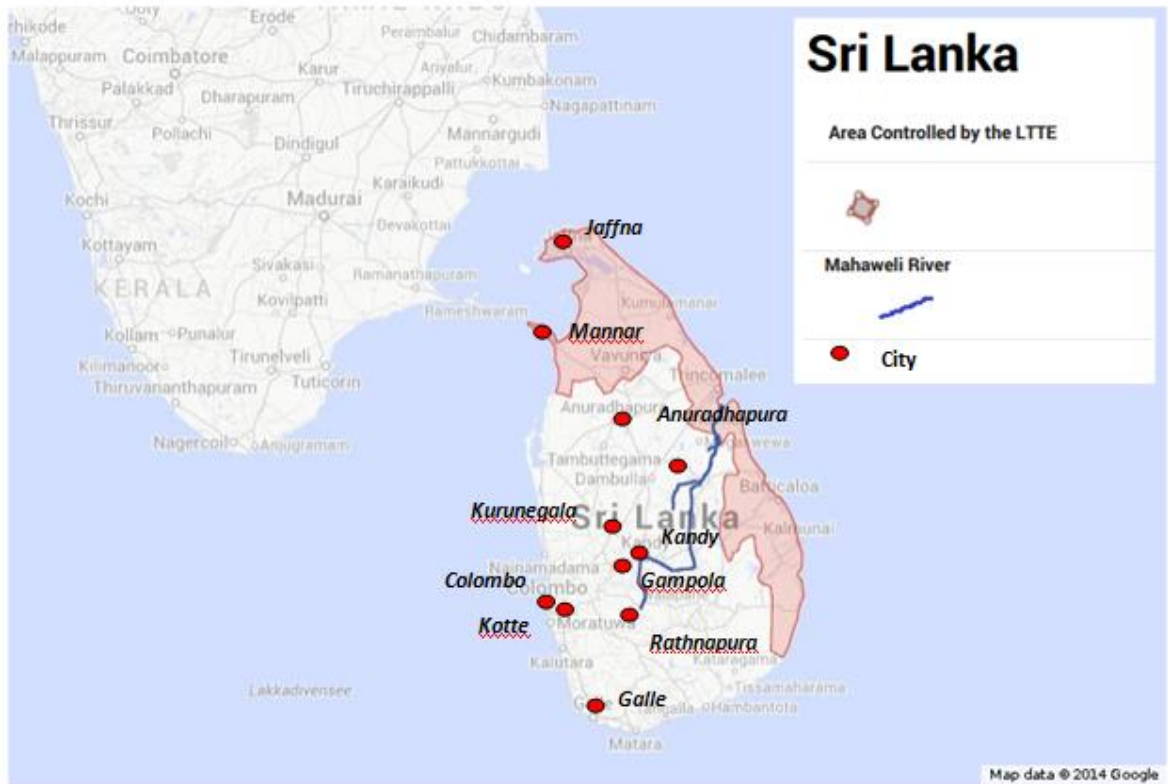
Figure 01

Films and literary sources

I selected six films within the Sri Lankan art cinema of the period from 1990 to 2010 for the purpose of this thesis: Prasanna Vithanage's *Death on a Full Moon Day* and *August Sun*, Asoka Handagama's *Me Mage Sandai* (This is My Moon, 2000), Vimukthi Jayasundera's *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (Forsaken Land, 2005), Sanjeewa Pushpakumara's *Igillena Maluwo* (Flying Fish, 2011) and Chinthana Dharmadasa and Udaya Dharmawardhane's *How I wonder what you are* (2009). Where relevant other films of an earlier period were also examined while several recent films by certain Sri Lankan filmmakers (e.g. Sudath Devapriya) had to be

disregarded in this research because they were not available in the film archives or research laboratories. The films included in this investigation were available as DVDs while *Flying Fish* and *How I wonder what you are* were made available to me by their directors themselves.

Organization of Chapters

This thesis consists of five chapters. Following this introduction is the first chapter dealing with a theoretical analysis of "Silence", which first looks at a definition and history of "Silence" and second at the theoretical readings on the subject. The discussion covers areas of philosophy and psychology, language and communication so as to reinforce the basis of the theoretical introduction. It is after this that the thesis focuses on the themes of socio-cultural silence and the silence related to the cinema and aesthetics.

The second chapter begins with an examination first of how silence has functioned as an integral element of the Sri Lankan socio-cultural landscape from the time of the monarchs to the time of the colonial rulers and of how the religious and political power base operated in the face of which the citizen was drawn to silence. Secondly, the chapter considers how the social, political and religious authority created in post-Independence era condemned the citizen to a state of silence. Next, it examines the inability and limitations of the arts to communicate these marginalizations of the aforesaid periods.

The third chapter is devoted to the main direction of the research, which is how popular cinema directly and art cinema indirectly developed in the background of

the post-Independence social, political and cultural landscape of the time and its social, religious and political power base and ideology. It also examines other contemporary trends in the cinematic arts and the phenomenon of social and cultural displacement.

The fourth chapter covers the first step of the analytical study of films from the 1990s. Here the powerful silences indulged in by Wannihamy, the main character in PrasannaVithanage's *Death on a Full Moon Day* and the Tamil girl, the main character in Asoka Handagama's *This is My Moon* are examined. The chapter suggests that the Tamil girl uses silence as a weapon of attack or shield against her marginal social survival in the face of impregnable hegemonic authoritarianism while Wannihamy uses silence as a reactive weapon and emphasizes the role of silence as a weapon.

The final chapter of the thesis discusses the phenomenon of silence transcending the limits of a personal tool to become a weapon of social value. Here silence is explored as it permeates the 'background space' in the films selected for this study, namely Vithanage's *Death on a Full Moon Day*, Handagama's *This is My Moon*, Jayasundera's *Forsaken Land*, Pushpakumara's *Flying Fish* and Dharmadasa and Dharmawardana's *How I wonder what you are*. This chapter analyses silence separately in terms of the village and the city, both of which swallow up the characters that appear in the narratives and transform their tool of silence into a common communication mode. The chapter ends with a review of the thesis of this research and its conclusions.

[1]Blessing by the Buddhist Triple Gems is a form of wishing of good luck in among the Buddhists in Sri Lanka. Blessings of Buddha, his teachings and the present Buddhist monk population are invoked.

[2]Youth unrest in 1989-90 was the second uprising in the Southern part of post-independence Sri Lanka. Chapter two presents a detailed discussion of it.

[3]There was no organization by the name of 'patriotic association' in Sri Lanka. People's Liberation Front (JVP) used this evasive title to unleash violent acts.

[4]The village I lived in was situated 4 Kilometers from Kandy city and was bordered by the *Mahaveli* river, the longest in Sri Lanka.

[5]'Understanding Prasanna Vithanage's cinema though author theory and realism' is an unpublished thesis, accessible from the reference section at Peradeniya University's fine arts department library.

[6]When the earlier thesis was written, Viathanage had directed only four films. Those works and his later works are discussed briefly in third chapter. Selected films are discussed in detail in the fourth and fifth chapters.

[7]Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism is a constructed facilitated by Sinahala nationalism and Sinhala Buddhism. Chapter two discusses them in detail.

Chapter One

Silence: Theoritical approaches to the Sri Lankan Cinema of the 1990s.

> *"Young Woman: If she cannot understand Sinhalese,*
> *How did you speak with her?*
> *Soldier: We didn't talk.*
> *Young Woman: You spent two nights with her,*
> *everything else happened, but you didn't talk?*
> *You expect me to believe it?"*
> (*This is My Moon*, 2000)

Introduction

Multiple forms of silence that became a defining characteristic in the art-house cinema of Sri Lanka for two decades since the 1990s invite a deeper understanding of the concept of 'silence' in its contemporary manifestations in cinema as well as in Sri Lanka's cultural and social history. The challenge of this chapter is to focus the varied and multi-faceted theory of silence and apply it to the limited scope of this study, so as to form a coherent theoretical framework for the discussion of silence in the Sri Lankan cinema since the 1990s in the following chapters.

The focus of this framework is to develop a theoretical approach that lend itself to read the phenomenon of silence in this cinema as representative of the socio-cultural canvass of silence in which these works have been reproduced. Further, this survey of literature attempts to locate theories and approaches that supports the assumption that human silence is an attempt to underpin individual identity

and establish and sustain cultural continuity when they are threatened by hegemonic powers that marginalise and terrorize citizens through divisions based on ethnicity, religion, language and caste.

This chapter has two sections: in the first, the term 'silence' is explored from etymological perspectives and its usage in various fields of knowledge is chronologically explored in brief. The second part is dedicated to theorize the concept of silence with a view to test the hypothesis of the research. As theorizations on silence are interdisciplinary and broad in nature, some theoretical approaches and stances will be treated in greater detail in an attempt to configure the theoretical framework directly useful for this study.

1.1 Silence: in terms of a definition

1.1.1. What is 'Silence'?

The English word 'silence' has its roots in Old French *silence*, Latin *silentium* and the Latin verb *silere* which means 'to be silent'. In contemporary usage, it is synonymous with 'quietness, quiet, quietude, still, stillness, hush, tranquillity, noiselessness, soundlessness, peace, peacefulness, peace and quiet, speechlessness, wordlessness, voicelessness, dumbness, muteness; taciturnity, reticence, uncommunicativeness, unresponsiveness, secretiveness, secrecy, uncommunicativeness, concealment' (Waite 2009, p. 797) and point to similar or close meaning to silence, but each of them acquires a unique semantic field by deviating from other close but not identical words.

The various shades of the meaning of the word silence can be condensed thus:

'the moment that arises when 'communication', 'speech', 'sound' or 'voice' ceases to be. However, one could turn in many directions when an attempt is made to define what silence is. Fifth edition of the Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary identifies fives inter-related meanings to the word silence:

> 1. If there is silence, nobody is speaking. 2. The silence of a place is the extreme quietness there. 3. Someone's silence about something is their failure or refusal to speak to other people about it. 4. To silence someone or something means to stop them speaking or making a noise. 5. If someone silences you, they stop you expressing opinions that they do not agree with. (Sinclair 2006, p. 1348)

The fact that expressing the meaning of 'silence' involves other broad notions such as 'person', 'the other', 'space', and 'ideas' suggests the complexities the word can lead into. In relation to the quotation above, one would ask questions such as: Who is 'nobody' vis-à-vis silence? What is its 'place'? Who is are the 'someones' and what are the 'some things' in relation to silence? And finally, what 'opinions' are associated with silence? The disagreements emanating from a discussion of the notion of silence brings us back to the issue of the definition of silence. These 'non-existent' and the 'incommensurable' phenomena related to the idea of 'silence' becomes the most complex in a philosophical discourse. As 'silence' playfully evades any attempt to define it in material terms, it poses challenges in a conceptual sense as well as in a structural sense. Therefore, in this preliminary account of the concept of silence, it is necessary to chart its history, its spread and breath in various fields and zones, and its applications.

Silence, as a concept, has its origins in the religious discourse associating 'the

divine', which in turn has become a device in literature and poetry, before being taken up for scrutiny by twentieth century philosophical investigations and psychoanalysis. It associated 'the divine' or 'transcendental' until the late nineteenth century but the philosophers and psychoanalysts gave it a theoretical base (Freud 1912; Wittgenstein 1922; Reik 1926). In a few decades into the twentieth century, the study of silence spread into various fields such as linguistics, aesthetics, drama and theatre, culture, and communication (Methuen 1962; Sontag 1966; Ganguly 1968; Basso 1972; Bruneau 1973; Halliday 1978). Later, in the 1980's, the idea of started attracting the attention of a wide range of subjects and disciplines (Nwoye 1985; Saville-Troike 1985; Walker 1985; Gilmore 1985; Tannen 1985; Brown and Levinson 1987). This revival of silence was twofold. On the one hand, earlier discussion on silence was intensified in the fields of philosophy, psychology, linguistics and communication (Jaworski 1993, 1997; Kurson 1992, 1997, 1998; Sifinou 1997; Watts 1991, 1997). On the other hand, specially, since first decade of the new millennium, the notion of silence became widely spoken of in such fields as sociology, political science, semiotics, education science, musicology, drama and theatre and Cinema (Agyekum 2002; Glenn 2004; Saville-Troike 2006; Karzon 2007; Ephratt 2008; O'Rowe 2006; Bae 2006; Liu 2002; Covarrubias 2007; Nakane 2007). In the current decade, its penetration seems most impactful in political science, sociology, and feminism (Glenn and Ratcliffe 2011, Malhothra and Rowe 2013; Furguson 2011; Ephratt 2011; Alagözlüa and Procedia 2011).

Most of these studies make attempts to define what silence means in their

respective fields or studies. However, any attempt to define it in terms of its material aspects limits the discussion to acoustics laboratories, whereas theoretical approaches to the notion of silence opens up to a world of nuances and amusing complexities. Thomas J. Bruneau (1973) starts his linguistic work 'Communicative Silences: Forms and Functions' with the statement that silence is a creation of the mind.

> **Silence does not exist** in the physical absolute-notions to the contrary are mythical. John Cage said it simply: "there is no such thing as absolute silence; something is always happening that makes a sound." Silence, then, appears to be both a concept and an actual process of mind. Only man appears to have the ability to achieve silence; animals must tolerate sounds when awake. (Bruneau 1973, p.17) – [original author's emphasis]

Saville-Troike argues that silence may contain propositional contents and 'is more context-embedded than speech' (1985, p. 11). To Gurevich (1989) silence is a barometer of the distance between the interlocutors in a dialog. On similar lines, Bonvillain sees that 'silence is an act of non-verbal communication that transmits many kinds of meaning, depending on cultural norms of interpretation.' (1993, p. 47).

In his 'The right of silence: A socio-pragmatic model of interpretation' Dennis Kurzon (1995, p. 56) introduces a typology of silence based on the modes of speech:

> Let us see whether the meaning or meanings of silence can be ascertained on the basis of equivalent speech acts. In the following table the left-hand column consists of acts performed in speech analogous to elocutionary forces, while the right-hand column consists of non-actions suggested by silence:

Statement	v. No statement
Assertion of facts	v. No assertion
Negative or positive expressing feeling	v. no feeling in the matter
Command	v. No command (perhaps no authority to command)

Agyekum conceives, in the introduction to his famous study on the 'Communicative Role of Silence Akan?', that silence is a mode of communication attuned to cultural background, context, register or membership.[1] 'Its meaning is interpreted according to the situation, cultural norms, the participants involved, their individual traits, and the bystanders. It is created and used by interlocutors in a speech community.' (Agyekum 2002, p. 32)

However, Harold Pinter, who uses silences as an integral part of his dramas, seems to have had little to learn from some of the more recent theorizations on silence, when he suggests that silence will capture meanings even beyond spoken words, utterances or gaps between them:

> There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness. (Methuen 1962)

Any attempt to define silence has placed it in other areas of academic interest such as the individual mind, society, communication, linguistics, or artistic expression.

In each, silence acquires wider meaning and opens up new potentialities for theoretical engagement.

1.1.2. Silence: a History of its Practice

What makes the history of silence a difficult question in history is it's very silence. Cheryl Glenn (2004, p.1) proposes: 'Much of the past is, of course, irrevocably silenced: gestures, conversations, and original manuscripts can never be recaptured'. Therefore, our attempts to understand how silence existed in the past have to be based on whatever source that is current. In an approach of this sort, silence occupies a place equal or higher tier than words or speech. In religious discourses, silence denotes both positive and negative, as well as inexplicable notions, sometimes associating the mysterious or bordering on grotesque. Silence finds itself close to the utmost pleasure in literature or would unite with bliss in poetry. In drama, silence emerges when the quality of being 'inexpressive' itself become a stronger theatrical expression. Individual and social silences open up a wide range of areas for psychological or sociological engagement.

Even in the earliest discourses, language as well as the absence of it could evoke the divine. Language (communication), a critical invention in the history of people, is elevated to the level of God thus: 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with the God, and word was God' (Jhon 1.1). Language becomes a 'divine gift' for its contribution to create civilisation and generate power as no other singular human capacity could match.

However, whenever the expressive prowess of language is found insufficient of expressing such things as divinity, Gods, divine existence, death, heaven, in the Western religions and Buddhist *Nirvana* (The Enlightenment), death, life after death, existence of other worlds in the religions of the East, there emerge heterogeneous silences carrying communication beyond the bounds of language. The transcendental is not explicable by anything that 'exists' as Fleckenstein proposes, 'God as silence is neither unspeakable nor unspoken' (Fleckenstein 2011, p. 44)

Silence is common in the communicative systems in all major religious. The Buddha's imposition of silence on one Bikkhu in the example below lies outside the positive role that silence plays in Buddhist meditation. Buddha dictates this redress on Bhikkhu Channa to Bhikkhu Ananda on the last day before the *Parinirvana* (Nirvana after-death):

> Ananda, when I am gone, let the higher penalty be imposed upon the bhikkhu Channa.
>
> But what, Lord, is the higher penalty?
>
> The bhikkhu Channa, Ananda, may say what he will, but the bhikkhus should neither converse with him, nor exhort him, nor admonish him. (Park 2008, p. 118)[2]

Silence has (though negative uses of it are randomly found) predominantly a positive application in Buddhism. Buddha used silence in meditation, in discussion o n the Damma as well as a mode of response. He spent the first Seven Weeks after Enlightenment in silent meditation. On some metaphysical questions such as those on the universe or existence, the death of a Buddha, when he

maintained silence as a mode of response, specially when the question's intention was rhetorical.[3] As a strong religious practice, meditation is common to both Theravada and Mahanaya Buddhisms. They have intrinsic traditions and practices of meditation, in which silence plays a key role and perhaps marks the point of departure in almost all forms of Buddhist Meditation.[4] Zen Buddhism is no exception in terms of its persistent usage of silence.[5]

Not only Buddhism, but other major religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam use silence in their meditations, prayer and rituals.[6] Further, Islamist Sufism and Protestant Quakerism rely highly on silence to evoke spirituality.[7] In another occasion, silence envelops the character of Jesus: 'A visible and corporeal signs of God's true knowledge, Jesus himself existed as a performative silence, one who built the way to salvation through his actions first and his words second' (Fleckenstein 2011, p. 43). However, a student comes across many instances where silence is used in Christianity in a negative sense and for negations, as the Bible (1 Tim, 2) suggest here: 'Let a woman learn in a silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent' (*Holy Bible* n.d., pp. 11-12)

Besides religion, philosophy is another area of knowledge where silence is taken seriously since the earliest days. On his journey to Syria and Egypt, upon the advice of his teacher Thales, Pythagoras engages in musings with silence, that connotes the invisible and the divine. (Clark 1989, pp. 6-7).[8] However, silence was to be re-articulated and repositioned with the modern paradigms of philosophy, departing from religious and mysterious nature generally associated

with silence in the previous ages. The lead philosopher in this new dimension to silence was the German-Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein. In Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, where he focuses (Wittgenstein 1922) on the relationship between reality and language, he dedicates the seventh and the last chapter 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent' to a serious discussion on silence and futility of trying to talk about some things.

> The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists— and if it did exist, it would have no value. If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie within the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world. (Wittgenstein, Pears & McGuinness 2001)

The famous conclusion of Wittgenstein's book, 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence' (Wittgenstein 2014), guides us to the conceptualization of silence in Freudian psychoanalysis. The triptych model of mind in psychoanalysis suggests the existence of three invisible but conceivable parts of the mind: 'Ego', 'Super Ego' and 'Id'. In methods such as free association as well as in conceptual notions such 'Psychic Resistance' a view of the mind as a silent but active processes in Ego, Super Ego and the Id is adopted. Psychoanalysis treats silence not only as an expression but a useful indicator in the treatment of psychological disorders as well, as is seen in this statement 'Duration of silences during a therapy interview was considered as a possible index of therapeutic movement.' (Cook 1962, p. 42)

However, it was literature that was to actively engage this 'strange' and obscure nature of silence first. Literatures of the Western world, specially poetry and drama, elevate silence to parallel status with the word. In poetry, silence is encountered in both composing and reading poetry. Samuel Miller Hageman writes in the poem 81 of his collection of poetry, Silence (1870):

> GOD hath set all things in being sliding out
> of sound and sight,
> dropping down to mighty death dust in the
> marble Urn in the night;
> Blessed sacrament of Silence, holy shadow-
> sphere of rest,
> on thy scroll forever fading like a smoulder-
> ing palimpsest. (Hageman 1870, p. 87)

In the Introduction his collection of poetry 'The silence: thoughts on the silence and on various other subjects', B.F.Woodcox (1928, p.4) writes: 'To get most of this book, go read it loud in the silence, pausing at the end of each sentence for the space of from three to five seconds to allow the silence to creep in.'

In drama, although Western theatre related itself to the idea of silence from the time of the Greek classics, it was Shakespeare, who exploits many potentialities of silence, as Kyung Jin Bae posits in his 'Interpreting Silence in Drama'(2006). Here he studies Shakespearean plays *Coriolanus*, *King Lear*, *Winter's Tale*, in order to grasp the silences and interpret them. Shakespeare pioneers the usage of silence as a tool of charging the characters with the tensions and anxiety that are in the subtext of the scene.

In the twentieth century theatre, moving in a different direction than did Shakespeare, dramatists of Theatre of the Absurd used silence as a strong

technique with politically charged meanings and associations.[9] Leading figures in

the theatre of the absurd such as Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter used silence as

a major medium of meaning-making in their plays. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is

a very rich text in terms of its admixture of silence and spoken word in the process

of bringing about a meaning that words alone would have been unable to express:

Estragon. In the meantime let's try and converse calmly,
Since we're incapable of keeping silent.
Vladimir. You're right, we're inexhaustible.
Estragon. It's so we won't think.
Vladimir. We have that excuse.
Estragon. It's so we won't hear.
Vladimir. We have our reasons.
Estragon. All the dead voices.
Vladimir. They make a noise like wings.
Estragon. Like leaves.
Vladimir. Like sand.
Estragon. Like leaves.
     Silence.
Vladimir. They all speak together.
Estragon. Each one to itself.
     Silence.
Vladimir. Rather they whisper.
Estragon. They rustle.
Vladimir. They murmur.
Estragon. They rustle.
     Silence.
Vladimir. What do they say?
Estragon. They talk about their lives.
Vladimir. To have lived is not enough for them.
Estragon. They have to talk about it.
Vladimir. To be dead is not enough for them.
Estragon. It is not sufficient.
     Silence.
Vladimir. They make a noise like feathers.
Estragon. Like leaves.
Vladimir. Like ashes.
Estragon. Like leaves.
     Long silence.
Vladimir. Say something!
Estragon. I'm trying.
     Long silence.

<pre>
Vladimir.   (in anguish). Say something at all!
Estragon.   What do we do now?
Vladimir.   Wait for Godot?
Estragon.   Ah!
                   Silence (Bae 2006)
</pre>

Among Beckett's contemporaries, Pinter's use of silence marks what has come to be known as the Pinteresque. Pinter's repertoire of silences is rich; 'Pinter silence' and 'Pinter pause' were clinical application of silences as form of stand-alone meaning, perhaps common to all his plays since the *The Room* (1957), his first play. Methuen writes:

> We have heard many times that tired, grimy phrase: 'failure of communication' … and this phrase has been fixed to my work quite consistently. I believe the contrary. I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rear-guard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility. (Methuen 1962)

All these engagements and analyses of silence seem to focus their attention on the relationship between silence and the individual, whether it is Freudian psychoanalysis or Pinter's silence, where a character finds no other better word than silence to say what he or she wants to say. However, apart from this interest in silence of individuals, there has been little attempt to understand silence as a mode of expression of a society or a community. Discourse on silence expanded to talk about 'communal silences' or 'social silence' much later. Recent theoretical contributions to the study of silence tended to explore new areas such as, how silence plays a role in different social contexts, or in inter-personal

relationships conditioned by the society. These fresh studies brought in new dimensions to the study of silence, which could be used to shed light on long-existing spaces of social silences hitherto unexplored.

The communal or social aspect of silence was first looked at in Basso's seminal work in (1972), on the communal silences among Western Apache American Indians. Later contributions include Saunders (1985) on the Italian community; Tannen (1985) on silence in social interactions among Jews in New York; Morsbach (1988) on silence and stillness in Japanese communication, Agyekum (2002) on the function of silence in the Akan community; Liu (2002) on silences among people of Chinese origin living in the United States; Vainioma ̈ki (2004) on the Finns; Gardner and Mushin (2009) on Conversational silence in Australian Aborigines; and Alagözlüa and Sahin (2011) on Silence in Turkish political discourse.

The many and varied forms of silences, which Basso experiences among Western Apache American Indians were socio-cultural practices coded in their culture. He shows that the silence in a certain culture can be brough about by its core values and norms. The community's silence in the presence of strangers, parental silence in the presence of children, who return after long absence from home, lovers silence in public spaces, and the silence of those who surround someone who's in great pain, are all culturally bound silences, which Basso (1972) describes in great detail. He quotes a Western Apache interviewee's comment on the silence between lovers:

> It's hard to talk with your sweetheart at first. She doesn't know you and won't know what to say. It's the same way towards her. You don't know how to talk yet.., so you get very bashful. That makes it sometimes so you don't say anything. So you just go around together and don't talk. At first, it's better that way. Then, after a while, when you know each other, you aren't shy anymore and can talk good. (Basso 1970, p. 219)

In more recent times, there is a tendency to study silences in small groups as opposed to focusing on silences on societies. Some of the key readings on this nature of silence are: Covarrubias (2008) on the silence in the Classroom titled 'Masked Silence Sequences: Hearing Discrimination in the College Classroom'; Nakane (2011) on the atmosphere of police interrogation in the work 'the role of silence in interpreted police interviews' (Nakane 2006), and on the nature of inter-cultural silence as it manifests in College seminars. These studies focus on silences that takes place within a rather small and defined space, but are reflections of the silences that feature in the society at large.

Covarrubias (2008) brings her reader face-to-face with Melisa, an American-Indian young woman whose classroom experience, more precisely, vis-à-vis a White American lecturer's racist speech, is a private experience of Melisa's, but it can be the common experience of such students and groups of students too. The kind of silence that emanates in this encounter is a typical context-bound silence.

> I cried through the whole class but I knew I couldn't leave. I needed to take notes. [the White guest speaker] began by saying, ''drunk Indians, drunk Indians,'' we shouldn't think this way he made everyone squirm in their seats because he said it so hateful like .. He had a ery disrespectful tone to the stories he was telling .[When no one speaks up against a prejudiced speaker the interpersonal space created] is no longer a space, it is a wall with many locks on it and no one has the key, not even the Native student .. For the Native student it really is not silence, it is an inward

cry... They feel like an animal or like they got kicked in the stomach. (Covarrubias 2008, pp 238-239)

In terms of the application and functions of silence that were discussed above, it appears to be a voluntary choice in religion, literature, and performing arts. However in some other social occasions, silence becomes an outcome or a reflexion of the context in which it occurred. Understanding such 'voluntary' or 'just encountered' silences was the focus of many disciplines of knowledge since the beginning of the 20th Century. The next section of this chapter charts those developments with a focus on those relevant to the current study.

1.2. Theoretical Approach to Silence

The practice of silence in forms of Art has been the subject of many theoretical approaches and critical perspectives ranging from literature, linguistics, psychoanalysis and philosophy among others. In terms of their approach, all theoretical approaches can be divided into two main types. One of them engages silence directly through a single or multiple theoretical approach and tries to theorize silence (Bruneau 1973, Tannen and Saville-Troike 1985, Jaworski 1993, Sifianou 1997, Kurzon 2007, Ephratt 2008). The other type approaches silence after and/or as a result of the theoretical treatment of social, political, and psychological events of individual, group or communal nature (Ex: Stucky 1992, Ageykum 2002, Covarrubias &. Windchief 2009, Sutton & Backer 2009). Both these types of approaches ameliorate existing theories. Another dichotomy of theories of silence is the difference between those theories that study silence in

isolation as a unique subject and those that study silence in relation to and in the context of its related features such as voice, story, mood or setting.

Discussion of the key hypotheses of this study presupposes the embededness of silence in cultural and aesthetic silences. However, such discussion will not be limited to contextual readings of silence within the Sri Lankan socio-cultural space, as any serious study of silence in cannot avoid paying attention to philosophical, psychological and communicational silences. The present study on cinematic silence explores them first. That discussion will also show us why philosophical, psychological, or communicative theoretical approaches will not be sufficient in exhausitng the study of silence, thereby calling for theoretical approaches in socio-cultural and aesthetic silences. However, this is not an air tight division as most theories interact and build upon each other.

1.2.1. Theorisation of Silence

a) Philosophical and Psychological Approaches

The initial attempts to theorize silence grapple with the question as to whether it can be taken as an absolute. Thomas J. Bruneau sets the dimension of this discussion in 'Communicative Silences: Forms and Functions', by arguing that it is futile to talk about an absolute (silenceas discussed in 1.1.1) thus: 'Absolute silence, then, is impossible: even when not speaking aloud, man carries on a continuous interior monologue.' (Bruneau 1973, p. 17)

Bruneau's position that silence is not absolute forces us to take silence as something relative to the verbal expression. As many other scholars have also

attempted, silence is considered as something that expresses the internal monologue of the interlocutor. This internal monologue comes in cinema as a character-bound or a space-bound or (cultural) citizen-bound. It is important to distinguish between them in order to approach the socio-cultural silences that form the main focus of the thesis.

In fact such an attempt is not to look for an absolute silence, but to listen to the 'eloquent silence' (Ephartt 2008).[10] Philosophy does not treat eloquent silence as a zone which has something in it. Contrarily, psychoanalysis attempts to generate something out of it.

'Philosophers have never felt comfortable speaking about silence. Why should they?' (Phil 2008) asks Phil (an obvious pseudonym), writing on the internet in the site 'Detached Ideas', in an essay titled 'Wittgenstein on Silence'. Philosophy, being a deep study of reality, knowledge, ethics, existence, mind, language and reason, it is fathomable why silence, the mysterious element spread over most of those areas of study, is found not to be harmonising with philosophical inquiry. Philosophy excludes mystery or the unexplainable. The Latin maxim *ex nihilo, nihil fit* (from nothing, nothing comes) sums up why philosophy cannot have a serious exchange with silence, as it is not considered to generate anything other than silence itself. Yet, the odd philosopher would make use of the idea of mystics to make comments and allusions: he dismisses silent knowledge as 'the night in which all cows are black' (ibid).

However, silence has been integral to the Pythagorean philosophy. 'The ability to remain silent was seen as important training in self-control, and the later tradition reports that those who wanted to become Pythagoreans had to observe a five-year silence' (Huffman 2014). Pythagorean silence was a requirement in terms of academic rather than a theoretical framework. A theoretical treatment of silence is first encountered in Wittgenstein when he wrote 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent' concluding the pioneering work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Though this has as its focus on language than on silence, throughout the book, there are allusions to silence, as a choice when language fails: 'what can't be said, can't be said, and it can't be whistled either.' (Wittgenstein 1922)

Considering the famous end to his *Tractatus*, it seems that Wittgenstein does not mean that silence is meaningless. Here he contends that silence is the appropriate mode for expressing meaningful content which falls outside logical expressions. Wittgenstein refers here to the language of mystics, the language of ethics and aesthetics (see Zemach 1964). Bilmes (1994, p.78) adheres to his view that 'where the rule is 'Speak', not speaking is communicative' He writes: 'conversational silence is the absence of talk (or of particular kinds of talk) where talk might relevantly occur' (ibid, p.79).

Freudian psychoanalysis considers silence as a repository rich in clues to understand behaviour and psychological disorders. Because of this interest in psychoanalysis, it is among one of the first intellectual enquiries into the silence

of individuals. Psychoanalysts observe silences of people to discover unexpressed or inexpressible and unrevealed or unrevealable notions within the mind of an individual. The unexpressed or the inexpressible is the domain of silence. 'Can we speak about what cannot be heard but only experienced? Can we capture silence in the clinical work (a firefly perhaps) and portray it in writing?' (Salberg 2012). Salberg's question was raised at the Roundtable discussion on silence in the American Psychological Association's 39th division in 2012, in his paper *Silence: Contemporary relational and Freudian perspectives*. Though, even in 2012, the question was raised rhetorically, reading or interpreting a patient's silence in general and in its various manifestations and functions has been a long standing technique in psychoanalysis and in psychotherapy. Freud himself took silence to indicate psychic resistance and interruption of free associations (manifested as pauses) to indicate transference (Freud 1912). Silence occupied a privileged position in dealings of psychoanalysis ever since. The 1961 volume of the Journal of the Psychoanalytic Association was dedicated to silence in therapy (Ephratt 2011, p. 2295).

In psychoanalysis, the possibility to read the silence indicates the existence of 'internal monologues' within the patients. More importantly for the present research, psychoanalysis' interest in silence can be applied beyond the bounds of psychoanalysis, not only to patients, but also silences of normal people, communities, as well as societies. Freudian psychoanalysis provides reasonability to the hypothesis, among others, that in a space of socio-cultural silence, there can

be similarities between internal monologues of those who belong to that socio-cultural space.

Danziger's research (1976) on silence among political prisoners suggest ways in which a study on silence can be expanded beyond the applications in psychoanalysis. His observations are based on his experience with the way political prisoners in South Africa and North Korea sink into a form of silence during interrogations. His propositions are applicable to the present study, as will be shown, the socio-cultural space does not appear to be very different from a 'prison cell' in the eyes of the studied characters. Such similarity in experience creates a space for internal monologues of members of a society to be similar and inter-related, thereby allowing silence to be hypothesized as a shield and a weapon.

Danziger observed that, when the prisoners were asked easy and direct questions, their responses too are straightforward and spontaneous. However, when more focused questions about the subject are posed, they choose silence (Danziger 1976, pp.13-19). This silence, although brings a sense of guilt of the prisoner, Danziger suggests, persistent silence of the prisoner may tire the interrogator using silence as a weapon. "I may not speak" or "I will not speak" or "I must not speak" are the internal statments of the respondent, who chooses silence as a strategy as the prisoners above. Danziger calls it 'intentional silence' (Kurzon 1995, p. 59)

The researcher above argues that, the 'intentional silence' is an outcome of a psychological process than a firm decision of the respondent. Denis Kurzon, studies it further and makes some interesting propositions in 'The Right of silence: A socio-pragmatic model of interpretation'. He proposes, drawing from Paul Grice (1967), that unintentional silence is 'psychological' and 'natural' when silence is a result of an internal proposition of the respondent, it is intentional and therefore both 'modalistic' and 'non-natural' silence (ibid, p. 60).

Kurzon argues further, that 'the ability' or 'inability' to talk as well as 'not to talk' is related to ignorance about the topic or fact under discussion, while psychological reasons such as shame or stigma can cause silence (ibid, p. 61). Further, "I may not speak" or "I will not speak" or "I must not speak" as well as 'ability not to speak' or 'ability not to say anything' all expand the connotations of 'internal monologue', while bordering on the margin between communication and non-communication.

It is this 'intentional silence', the category explored by Danziger, Kurzon and others that is of central importance to the discussion of the present study, as it transcends the notion that silence is decision based on one person's 'ability'. This study will bring forth many characters from various films, where silence plays a key role. Looking at the socio-cultural background of these films, one would argue that the silence in them transcend the mere field of cinema. To draw a parallel between Danziger's study, where the silence of the prisoners was embedded in the socio-cultural reality of South Africa and North Korea

respectively, these films depict a silence entrenched in the socio-cultural milieu of a particular moment in Sri Lanka's contemporary history.

However, as any form of silence, be it 'intentional' or 'unintentional', is produced and is meaningful vis-à-vis language and communication, it is necessary to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of silence in terms of language and communication, where speech as well as non-speech are seen as modes of expression.

b) Approaches in Linguistics and Language and Communication Studies

There are a few reasons why the study of linguistic and communicative theories of silence can be useful for the present discussion of silence in a national cinema. First, the silence which was identified as a 'personal internal monologue' has to be articulated in terms of a mode of communication with the external world, as purely an internal monologue cannot be perceived if not expressed. Secondly, if such 'personal' silence has no communicative aspect, it will not be possible to talk about it as a common experience of a particular community or group of people. Thirdly, if silence acquires new meanings when observed under language and linguistic theories, new dimensions of silence will be open to the present study of silence related to communicative spaces in Sinhala and Tamil languages. Although this study prioritizes a socio-cultural approach to reading of silence, the above reasons stress why theories of linguistics and communication studies are useful for a broader understanding of the concept of silence.

Sidney Baker, who entered the discourse on silence in 1955,based on her research data, suggests: 'there are two basic forms of interpersonal silence, when speech breaks down or words become irrelevant' (Ephratt 2011, p.2295). Internal monologue intertwined with words and speech, when they converge on zone of interpersonal relationships, tend to indicate the necessity to explore the workings of communication and language more closely. It is in that light that psychological approaches of Bruneau and others become important. In his seminal research (1973) on communication and psychology of silence, Bruneau identifies three types of silences (1973, p. 20). Under his more linguistically oriented approach, the first category of silence is called psychological silence; in which silence is used , for example, by the encoder of the message to help the decoder to understand the message; this is manifested by hesitations, sentence corrections, etc. The second type is interactive silence, occurring as intentional pauses in conversation, allowing the addresse(s) to draw inferences concerning the meaning of the conversation. The third type is socio-cultural silence; where silence is observed as a component of a cultural practice, for example, in mourning for example in Buddhist culture.

Interpersonal communication is the first instance of recognising an internal silence of a speaker. Therefore, it is the first step to listen to the silent monologue of a person. The second and third types of silence identified by Bruneau opens new avenues for a researcher to go beyond the limits of inter-personal communication and to reach broader areas or communication.

The collaboratively edited book by Saville-Troike and Deborah Tannen 'Perspectives on Silence' (1985) analyses silence from fresh perspectives and in new settings. She begins with (1985, p. 4) two integrated statements about silence: (a) 'we can view silence as itself a valid object of investigation, bounded by stretches of verbal material which provide boundary marking for its identification', and (b) 'just as with speech, silence is not a simple unit of communication, but is composed of complex dimensions and structures'. Thereafter she proceeds to lay out the different types of silences: external to interaction (opposed to noise) and within interaction (co-structure with speech). Here, Saville-Troike first presents her differentiation between code and channel, proposing the oppositions verbal/nonverbal and vocal/nonvocal: 'within communicative events, not all nonvocal communication is nonverbal, so that a further distinction should be made between verbal silence and nonverbal silence' (ibid, p. 5). In essence, her argument is that, for each code there is its dimension of silence. Such is the case with sign language, which she categorizes as verbal nonvocal and its silence dimension in the form of one deliberately closing one's eyes.Such is the case with the punctuation '...' as a silence marker in written language (which she also categorizes as verbal nonvocal). According to her view, pauses are the nonverbal dimension in paralinguistic and prosodic behaviour. Salville-Troike follows a similar line of argument: spoken language, which she calls the verbal vocal, too has silences. They are verbal silences which carry grammatical and indexical meanings and replace different elements within sentences, such as teacher's WH- questions (what? Why? When? etc.) , fill-in-

the-blank structure (''This is ___''), taboo words, and cases where the speaker is at loss for words.Further, she argues that each communicative event 'that can call for a different form of speech can also permit or prescribe silence' (ibid, p.14).

Complementary to Tannon, Saville-Troike approaches silence from the perspective of the opposite pairs verbal/nonverbal and vocal/nonvocal and applies theories in linguistics to analyse them, thereby stressing on the need to consider silence as an independent phenomenon. Building on the work of Saville-Troike, Jaworski's devoted many years to the study of silence and proposed a new typology of silence based on prototypical and non-prototypical silences. Studying day-to-day silences in a social and pragmatic approach, he analyses the intention of silence. Foregrounding of the pragmatic aspect of silence in his theory enables communication based inroads into the phenomenon of silence.

His major contribution to the study of silence was the book, *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives* (1993) in which he deliberately explores any public (he terms 'political'), literary or interpersonal events involving prototypical or atypical instances belonging to the equivocal term 'silence' in its everyday senses (see, e.g. Jaworski 1993, 1997; Jaworski et al. 2005). Jaworski opens the discussion: 'Can I say something without speaking? Can I remain silent when talking?'. In order to answer these questions, first he differentiates between communicative and non-communicative speech and silence; thus, presenting speech and silence on a continuum, that allows for a wide range of phenomena such as meditation, inference and ambiguity as well as abstaining from talk, to be counted as communicative silence (Ephratt 2011, p. 295).

Jaworski (1993, p.78) then goes on to present a typology of intentional silences in which he assigns communicative-intentional silences to one of three categories. The first of them is silence as a state: a given communicative event is structured through, or framed in, silence. The second category is formulaic silence, or silence as an activity: 'a linguistic item becomes classified as an instance of silence when minimal contrast to a formal act of nonspeaking takes place'. Discussing the functions of silence, Jaworski bases his discourse-communicative stand on categorization of semiotic systems by Halliday as fulfilling three major functions: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual. (Ephratt 2011, p. 2295).

His second (edited) book *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (1997) develops his theory further by incorporating contributions by expert in diverse fields. He writes in the last essay in the book *'White in white: Metacommunicative silences and metaphorical silences'* thus:

> As with all pairs of such oppositions, the boundaries between speech and silence are unclear, indistinct and fussy. Although folk beliefs about speech and silence keep both these terms clearly distinct, the linguistic treatment of these categories is far from being simple. The multifaceted character of silence as a communicative concept has been well documented in the preceding chapters with their wide-ranging methodologies. All these studies seem to confirm the correctness of an earlier suggestion (Jaworski, 1993) that the concept of silence be treated in term of a prototype. (Jaworski 1997, p. 381)

Is silence a prototype? Theory seems to both support and problematize this view. Studies on silence, specially, linguistic approaches to the issue, tend to create typologies. Yet, what needs to be kept in mind is that linguistic approaches prioritize the signification of silence than its usage.

> Yet in linguistics, and still more in classic linguistics, silence started off as figure rather than ground. It is the morphological zero sign (ø) we refer to. Panini, the famous 4th-century BCE Indian linguist was the inventor of many basic linguistic terms (e.g. "root", "phoneme"). Panini's ordered formal grammar is clearly the source of the notion "zero sign". (Ephratt 2011, p. 2295)

However, more recent studies on silence within the broader field of language and linguistics adopt multidisciplinary approaches to broaden its classical linguistic stances. A study on the functions of silence benefits greatly the recent approaches, of which the applicability transcends linguistics proper and lend rich perspectives to studies on personal, social and communicative silences; for an example, the linguistic studies on the 'pause' contribute to studies on communication studies. The following is one such instance of broader application of linguistic theory in a communicative situation:

Silence 'that carry meaning' (Saville-Troike 1985, p. 4) in communicative situations is described as silence which is either meaningful but without propositional content, or 'silent communicative acts which are entirely dependent on adjacent vocalizations for interpretation, and which carry their own illocutionary force' (ibid, p. 6). The first type of silence in this distinction can be represented by hesitations and pauses, which may play a role in projection of impressions, attitudes or emotions (e.g. Crown & Feldstein 1985; Scollon & Scollon 1981; Walker 1985). The second type would include silence of non-verbal communication such as gestures and it can also be silence without any accompanying non-verbal signals. For example, silence of students in a class when the teacher asks 'Have you got any questions?' can be a communicative act

where the students collectively mean 'No'. Therefore, silence has the capacity to mean without having to utter any word, yet understanding this meaning requires a higher level of dependency on the context of the situation where the discourse occur (cf. Jaworski 1993; Jaworski & Stephens 1998; Saville-Troike 1985).

Describing how phenomena of silence such as pauses or hesitations get their meaning in a communicative context, Chage's (1985) says 'pauses in retelling a story showed that the lower the codability of items in the story, the longer the pauses'. Further, when the perspective changes of a story, retelling of it involves longer pauses. Sugito (1991) studied the roles of pauses in understanding monologues in Japanese, and the results showed that listeners have greater difficulty in understanding ongoing talk when presented without pauses. Thus, pauses are critical to successful communication in that pauses allow not only the speaker time to organise his/her thoughts but also the listener time to understand what is being said.

Further, the discursive functions of pauses have also been the focus of studies indicating junctures and meaning or grammatical units in speech. Brown & Yule (1983) assert that units of speech defined by prosodic features such as tones are often followed by pauses, while Jaworski (1993, p.12) describes the discursive function of pauses as 'defining the boundaries of utterance', marking boundaries as a feature of discourse.

The discursive function of silence, therefore, works interactively within an utterance and marking differences between them, contributing to achieve better

communication. As noted above, in Bruneau's tripartite typology of silence, pause-related interactive silence was the second type of silence.

Elaborating on 'Interactive silence', Bruneau asserts: 'Interactive silences are pausal interruptions in dialogue, conversation, discussion, debate, etc. They can be related to affective, interpersonal relationships between people as well as to the exchange of information and/or problem solving.' (Bruneau 1973, p. 28). His discussion explores a diverse range of situations such as decision making, drawing inferences, exerting control, reacting to diversity, reacting to intensity of emotion, maintaining or altering interpersonal distance in which interactive silence becomes useful.

Readings of silence after the year 2000 explores many new approaches. Prominent among them are the semiotic approach to silence by Saville-Troike (2006) and Kris Acheson (2008) who looks at silence as a system not limited to language. Her work *Silence as Gesture: Rethinking the Nature of Communicative Silences* proposes that communicative silence should be read as a separate system of meaning like language itself:

> Silence is, after all, inherently spatial and temporal. People metaphorically think of silences as objects that we can ''break,'' ''feel the weight of,'' and ''cut with a knife.'' We often also speak of silence, not as space to be filled, but as a substance filling space itself—a room, a church, or a forest. Silence seems sometimes a palpable force that hangs in the air. Furthermore, when more than an environmental attribute, when humanly produced, silence, like spoken language, seems to emanate from people, moving out through the air around them toward others just as would waves of sound. Human or atmospheric, these meaningful silences occupy space in our lived experiences. (Archson 2008, pp. 545-546)

This looks like a brave move by Acheson, as it's only a few seem to have stood the independence of silence in this manner. In contrast to many other scholars, who study silence in terms of the theoretical space of some other field of study, Acheson considers silence as a separate field of study with its own semantic and structural features.

c) Approaches related to Socio-Cultural Silence

Socio-cultural silence forms the basis of the discussion of cinematic silence in this study. The hypotheses that internal monologue can be common to people who share the same social-cultural experiences, silence shields the marginalised from the violence and the hegemonic authority, and that silence in turn becomes the weapon of the powerless to fight back the oppressing forces are best articulated in the theoretical discussions of socio-cultural silence. An evaluation of the current socio-cultural theories in terms of their strengths and relevance to the present study shall constitute the rest of this chapter.

It is Bruneau (1973), who makes socio-cultural silence a key type of silence in a typology of silence. He proposed that 'Socio-cultural silences are those related to the characteristic manner in which entire social and cultural orders refrain from speech and manipulate both psycholinguistic and interactive silences' (Bruneau 1973). Socio-cultural silences may define cultural patterns of communication better than the spoken word. Bruneau discusses how Western and Asian cultures accommodate silence and how authoritative power brings about silences in

societies. He further explores the kinds of silence brought about by religion, social status, and political authority.

Bruneau's seminal work influenced a series of later studies, which in turn challenged or expanded the concept of 'social silence'. In practical terms, they are either micro or macro level studies. These range from the silence during a lecture of a recital to Situational Silence (Kurzon 2007, p. 1681), silence to minimise difficulties in social interaction (Brown & Levinson 1987) to coping with the shock of death and loss (Basso 1972; Ageykum 2002), and from silence to preserving one's identity vis-à-vis grand cultures to (Covarrubias & Windchief 2009; Covarrubias 2008) to defend oneself against political instability, violence and war or coping with trauma of such experiences.[11] The reach and the diversity of socio-cultural silence is evident in the fact that it is being studied under the most number of sub-sections, compared to other types of silence. One typology for example:

- Cognitive
  – Pauses, hesitations for cognitive/language processing
- Discursive
  – marking boundaries of discourse
- Social
  – negotiating and maintaining social distance
  – Impression management through pause length, frequency and speed of talk
  – Conversational styles through pause length, frequency, speed of talk and overlapping
  – Means of social control through avoiding verbal interaction with specific individuals
  – Means of maintaining power through avoiding certain content of verbal expressions
  – Means of maintaining and reinforcing power relationship
  – Means of negotiating power
  – Politeness strategies (negative, positive, off-record, don't do FTA)

- affective – means of emotion management
  (Nakane 2007, p.12)[12]

The most common form of silence in socio-cultural space is Situational Silence (Kurzon 2007, p. 1681). Silence develops as politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson 1987) as studies on the usage of silence as a of conflict avoidance tactic. In politeness strategy, silence can be used to avoid unwanted or undesired imposition, confrontation or embarrassment in social encounters which may have not been avoided if verbal expressions had been used. However, silence along does not fortify the religious and social freedom one needs in a one's cultural space. 'Culture is concerned with the intrinsic values and spiritual freedom of man, with the ideals that we cherish for their spiritual worth' (Ganguly 1968, p.183). In face of conflicts and confusions brought about great authoritative powers, situational silence become insufficient as a coping. The present study attempts, in its second and third chapters, to explore the forms of silence, when mere situational silences fail. In the remaining part of this chapter, its theoretical framework is discussed.

In *Silences in Stewardship: Some American Indian College Students Examples* (2009) Covarrubias and Windchief, identify and craftily describe the multiple ways in which socio-cultural silence is employed to protect one's cultural space, to clarify or defend it. The tripartite treatment of silence in their discussion lends itself to interesting insights into reading the silence in the Sri Lankan context. The book's focus on the American-Indians' encounter with racist and economic marginalisation cans shed light on parallel modes of oppression such as race,

religion, and caste in the context of Sri Lanka. Their typology of silence is thus: '(a) silence to particularize culture; (b) silence to perpetuate culture; and (c) silence to protect culture.' (Covarrubias & Windchief 2009, p. 341). To particularize culture- interactants use silence to rally a sense of collective ontological and actional distinctiveness (ibid, p. 344). Silence to Perpetuate Culture - Silence to perpetuate culture or cultures and their particular uniquenesses pertains to the culture bearers' mindful replicating of culturally infused silence patterns for the purpose of extending the life of their cultures, and fomenting individual and group existential opportunities. (ibid, p. 344). Silence to Protect Culture - In revealing yet another aspect of their agility to enact diverse silences, in this function communicators reveal how they can manifest agency strategically to achieve individual and collective cultural ends. (ibid, p. 346).

The third type of silence in the typology above suggested by Covarrubias & Windchief seem to be useful in the hypothesis of the present study. The use of silence to protect culture means, in a way, hiding behind silence to protect one's culture. It gives way for the silence-as-a-shield metaphor. However, the kind of protection of culture that Covarrubias & Windchief suggest does not talk directly about defending one's culture from authoritative powers that are particularly targeting culture, whereas, as argued in chapter two, in the context of Sri Lanka, the liminal citizen and his/her culture is targeted and discriminated by the hegemonic powers. Further, Bruneau's position that the marginalized people tend to use inter-active silence, when state's oppressive power is directed against them will be challenged in the present thesis. Although Bruneau's position seems closer

to the theme of this study than the cultural silence typology of Covarrubias & Windchief, it cannot readily be used without further modification. His first suggestion that:

> The character of authority-subordinate relationships appears to be discernible in interactive silences. The initial burden of speech is often the burden of a subordinate. This burden often presses toward respectful silence, depending on the strength of authority management of silence. The use of initial silencing strategy by authority or perceived silencing strategy by the sub- ordinate, appears to help assert or reassert interpersonal and group power. This seems to occur as the subordinate moves toward longer and more frequent silences, whereupon authoritative silencing behaviours (if any were used) decrease and level off (Bruneau 1973, p. 31).

The present study argues that silence of the powerless people is directed against the oppressive forces. Further, it also suggests, contrary to Bruneau, that silence is used by the victims of violence against the perpetrators of it. Bruneau writes:

> Silence can be used as a very successful strategy against violent expression and ignorance. Persons in many authoritative positions often ignore subordinates by silence or absence of response in interaction and globally, to counteract being ignored. Silence by authority is often a means to protect persons in authoritative positions for many reasons, e.g., for saving time, for preventing extraneous activity, and preserving privacy and solitude (Bruneau 1973, p. 39).

Bruneau's claim might be valid for the time and space she studied. However, as the next chapters will show, the authority becomes the perpetrator of violence, against the repressive power of which, the weak adopts silence as a shield. It suggests that the weak finds a zone of active silence behind the shied of silence, that zone of silence is not created by the oppressor but by the vulnerable, contradicting the following suggestion by Bruneau (1979, p. 40): 'Silence can also

be used by authority to require subordinates to do work, to think for themselves, or to create independence in those who cling to dependency relationships.'

Studies and theoretical contributions by Covarrubias & Windchief as wells as Bruneau suggest useful clues and interesting directions for the current thesis though they are, given the difference of time, space and purpose, remain partly applicable for the present study. Therefore, this study makes some new theoretical approaches. An interesting direction is suggested by Debarra Tannen:

> Silence is the extreme manifestation of indirectness. If indirectness is a matter of saying one thing and meaning another, silence can be a matter of saying nothing and meaning something. (1985, p. 97)

Tannen suggests the limitations of single dimensional approaches such as of Bruneau. Later contributions to the theoretical approaches to silence, such as by Cheryl Glenn (2004, 2011) and Kennan Ferguson (2011), are informed by the broader canvas Tannen creates. In fact, Glenn and Ferguson provide the larger theoretical foundation of the present study.

Glenn presents a remarkable re-reading of silence in the second chapter 'Engendering Silence' of her book *Unspoken* (2004). As the title suggests, the reading is in a gender perspective. She starts the chapter rhetorically by raising the question 'Is there a female voice in the Athenian society?' (Glenn 2004, p.20). All Athenian voices, from the philosopher to the artist are those of the males. Women, slaves and foreigners have only a marginal existence that makes them silent and voiceless.

'Commanding' and 'dominating' state machinery suggested by Aristotelian politics represents the masculine and gendered voice in Athens. She argues that

the androcentric of Athens has prevailed till late and is manifest in the Western religious institutions too. God is a man. She quotes Mary Daly in her book 'The Church and the second Sex'. 'When God is male, the male is God' (ibid, p. 21). Glenn is cautious to observe that God is not constructed as a male in sexual terms, but a masculine construct in all Western religions. God is masculine in figure, context, and metaphor and in icon. She argues that this ancient religious and political model has propagated itself and is prevalent United States, leaving the opposite of it, the female figure, is the silenced and the marginalized:

> Masculine discourse has been the monologue of male-dominated ruling class, while feminine discourse has spoken the perspective of the dominated: the poor, the disabled, the 'raced', the foreign, and, of course, the female. (ibid, p. 21)

Glenn's gender approach to silence is a useful tool to apply on the trend in cinema starting from Prasanna Vithanage's *Ice on Fire* and continuing till Sanjeewa Pushpakumara's *Flying Fish*. Sinhala nationalism, religious discourse and caste dominance have acquired a masculine form that marginalized and dominated rest of discourses as something 'feminine' and weak. The following statement of Glenn is a sharp observation in this regard:

> The dominant group in a social hierarchy renders "inarticulate" subordinate or muted groups (any of the traditionally disenfranchised) and exclude them from the formulation, validation and circulation of meaning. Thus, the inability to speak fluently in certain social interactions can indicate muteness, and silence itself becomes the language of the powerless. (ibid, p. 25)

Glenn's fine observations show how silence works, when it becomes the language of the weak. Her useful preliminary observations are given form and articulation

by Kennen Ferguson's powerful paper in *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts* in the book *Silence: The Politics* (2011) edited by Cheryl Gelnn and Krista Ratcliffe.

Ferguson's point of departure is questions the hegemonic power that speech has in socio-political space. He argues that authoritative social institutions from the time of the Greeks have been constructed with the power of speech, and by continuously ignoring the 'silence' of the weak, in a dualistic relationship between 'voice' and 'silence', in which the 'silence' gets designated as the 'other', and therefore, neglected (Ferguson 2011. p.113). She demonstrates this with a simple but a powerful example from the family:

> A family is made up of disparate individuals, with often conflicting values, commitments, interests, even affections who yet still (generally) consider themselves a close-knit community. But of course, close relatives do not necessitate unanimity; indeed, some of the most brutal and unforgiving conflicts emerge within family structures. Families, instead, use a variety of mechanisms to preserve. Of interest here is, one particular strategy, often used in situations of profound disagreement (religion, politics, sexuality): that of silence. (ibid, p. 113)

Suggesting the applicability of the above example to broader social institutions and situations, Ferguson proposes a typology consisting of political, ethical, and epistemological silences (ibid, p. 114). Based on her observations, she calls the concept of 'social power and equality' proposed by Habermas into question. For Ferguson, Habermas is limited in his approach, which is predominantly from the side of communication and speech. She writes (ibid, 117): 'Habermas's theoretical approach not only ignores the ways silence figures within people's lives but also makes the grounds of community (which he ostensibly defends)

insupportable and implausible.' The crux of her argument is that all philosophical and political discourse has hitherto ignored or neglected the presence of silence as a political potent phenomenon: 'If silence, as such, cannot be reduced to determinate purpose, it must be rethought as not only a site of repression but also a nexus of resistance or even as a potentiality for creation' (ibid, p.114).

Ferguson identifies a few categories of silence. The first among them is 'Resistant Silence', which, she claims, can take the form of individual, group, societal resistant silence. She writes: 'silence, in other words, functions as representation of withdrawal; the assumed tranquillity of silence bars the non-tranquil involvements of the outside world.' (ibid, p.119). With this conceptualization of silence, Ferguson's views underpin the approach in this study that proposes the metaphor 'silence as shield'.

Ferguson also looks at silence in cinema. She proposes the lead character 'Ada' of Jane Campion film *The Piano*, as a protagonist of resistant-silence. Ada's husband's great worry is caused by her not letting him hear the reason of her displeasure (ibid, pp. 119-120). This idea of 'inability to hear', implies the existence of an 'internal monologue' on the part of the one who chooses to remain silent, and hints about the possibility of resistant silence (shield of silence) being a form of expression. 'Ada's silence adds to her humanity in that she demands more from her non-interlocutors, yet her silence clearly demonstrates her constant defiance rather than any sort of passivity' (ibid, p. 120).

Further, Ferguson develops the idea of resistant silence in that she claims,

> Silence can be used against others, but not just in resistant ways. To see such usage as merely wresting a tool from an oppressive system, as a self-contained opposite, is to miss that silence power extends beyond resistance. Silence, both as withdrawal and as pointed avoidance, can be used to manipulate, control and harm others just as easily as to protect the self. (ibid, p. 120).

The idea of 'Silence as a shield' is already implied in the above quotation, although she does not use term 'shied' which has military connotations and therefore probably better suited to the Sri Lanka's context. Although, she does not delve into a detailed discussion on the application of silence as a weapon, it provides a sound platform for the development of the concept in the coming chapters.

d) The Approach in Aesthetics and Cinema

If the theoretical debates on socio-cultural silence help us identify and interpret spaces of silences in the trend in cinema under discussion, it is the theoretical approaches in aesthetics of silence that help explore the nuances of silence. A history of aesthetics of silence would reveal how silence is reproduced across various works and genres of art as well as how such instances have been understood theoretically.

Silence in cinema from Bergmann to Campion and beyond have been a lively area of theoretical   investigation on silence. However, it is a few decades after the silent-movie era that silence in cinema attracts the attention of the critics and scholars. Since 1950s, this interest gradually increased. Recent feminist approach of cinema has identified silence as focal area (Kaplan 2009). Recent rise of the scholarly interest in cinema is evident in writings on cinematic silence in world

wars, frontier or civil struggles, and violence (Boyle 2009; Morag 2008; Yose 2008), on cinema in Latin America, Africa and Asia (Salhi 2007), and Hollywood and European cinema (Bradatan 2008; O'shaughnessy 2004; Watts 2011; Fisher 2013). Besides these studies that tended to transcend national boundaries, there were other studies that concentrated merely on the silence in a national cinema (Kumar 2011; O'Rawe 2006).

Silence was not a choice but an undesired obligation until the cinema technologies developed to use sound records in the last years of 1920s. However, as it is the intentional silence that forms the crux of the present study, it takes a different form even in an aesthetic point of view. Silence due to technical challenges is different from a form of intentional silence that is reproduced by a cinema that could produce sound and voice. It is not the silent cinema but the cinema of the silence. Des O'Rawe writes on the subject of silence in sound cinema in '*The great secret: silence, cinema and modernism*':

> The sound film, then, is the only art form capable of reproducing silence. Not only can sound create the dimensions of depth and duration required to make silence truly silent, but it can also invoke silence to transform the expressive power of the moving image itself: 'A silent glance can speak volumes; its soundlessness makes it more expressive because the facial movements of a silent figure may explain the reason for the silence, make us feel its weight, its menace, its tension ...[in] the film, silence does not halt action even for an instant and such silent action gives even silence a living face (O'Rawe 2006, p. 398).

Scholars identify a series of recent filmmakers, who smartly and perceptively reproduce cinematic silence to enhance the narrative's grip and depict nuances and complexities in the characters states of mind. They are many and diverse from

Alfred Hitchcock and Ingmar Bergmann to Jane Campion and Kim-Ki-Duk.

Brightman writes about the use of silence as a device of the filmmaker:

> Scenes like Anna's movements, walking back and forth in the room like a trapped animal, lighting a cigarette, getting a fix, and Esther's spellbound shriek without issue are all charged gestures full of passion which prove more powerful than overtures. It is not the degree of assertion that animates these scenes; it is their resonance, their suggestiveness, cinematically enforced in close-ups, which amplify the minutest gestures into actions of resounding significance (Brightman 1964).

The character-bound silence which Bergmann created in the film *The Silence* is clearly one of the earliest examples of 'internal monologues', which has been discussed above. Commenting about the character Elizabeth in the film *Persona* Bergmann makes a short but an insightful observation: 'non-neurotic. It is a strong person's way of protesting' (Bjorkman et al. 1963, p. 211).

Bergmann's cinema employs silence to explore inner feelings of humans. His cinematic images are a repository of desire, loneliness, nostalgia, old-age solitude, or fear of death or other deep human feelings. Apart from the Bergmann, one would find many other filmmakers who rely on silence as a device to access sensitive human emotions. For instance, we may consider Michael Angelo Antonioni's films:

> In the films of Antonioni, minimal narratives, scarce dialogue, prolonged shots, prominent characters and the play of landscape brought out definitive notions of art cinema and associated stylistic patterns. Silence in cinema, with its implementation of photographic stasis and obscurity, enhanced and enriched the portrayal of character and narrative. In films the richness of story line and character was founded upon a pared down narrative and photographic credibility. Conventional dialogue or exposition was less and yet one would gaze at the characters' movements to discover their secrets. (Kumar 2011, p. 183)

The visual image and mise-en-scene explore and produce a certain kind of human feelings and sentiments, in a character-specific and context-specific manner, attuned by the intentions of the cinematographer. This becomes evident in Kim Ki-duk's statement about the silent characters he has brought on screen:

> The reason that in my movies there are people who do not talk is because something deeply wounded them. They had their trust in other human beings destroyed because of promises that were not kept. They were told things like "I love you," and the person who said it did not really mean it. Because of these disappointments they lost their faith and trust and stopped talking altogether. (Hummel 2002)

The cinematic silence that filmmakers since Bergmann produce explores human feelings as well as set the aesthetic mood of the films. The silences they produce are not pure or total silences, but discursive ones, which embody a communicative purpose. Susan Sontag wrote *The Aesthetics of Silence* (1968), which is a key text in setting the theoretical framework for understanding silence as an aesthetic device, which is incapable of solitary existence.

> A genuine emptiness, a pure silence, are not feasible — either conceptually or in fact. If only because the art-work exists in a world furnished with many other things, the artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence. Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech (in many instances, of complaint or indictment) and an element in a dialogue. (Sontag 1968)

Sontag makes a few strong suggestions. Most prominent among them is that silence should produce something. In that sense, silence is socio-cultural content expressed in aesthetic forms.

Conclusion

This focus of the first chapter was to define silence and to explore the theoretical background in which the concept of silence grew. Before embarking on a discussion on socio-cultural silence, which forms the main theoretical approach for this thesis, other areas of importance to the study of silence, such as philosophical, psychological, communication, and language and linguistics related approaches to silence were looked at. In the latter part of the chapter, aesthetics of silence was discussed. A study of silence in cinema cannot be complete without an understanding of these fields, where most of the concepts and contributions remain interwoven with socio-cultural approaches to silence. Given the nature of the object of study, silence, which evades most attempts to categorise and define it, and the relatively short history of the study of silence, it is obvious that such interdisciplinarity exists and has to be taken seriously in order to enhance the completeness and relevance of the present study. Besides, insights from other than purely socio-cultural approaches will be incorporated in the coming chapters.

The discussion of theory in this chapter first considered psychological aspects of silence by looking at internal monologue, which is enveloped in the silence of a person. It soon observed that internal monologue transcends the bounds of individuality and transforms into a silent social expression in the case of a society or a community. As Chris Acheson's proposition shows, silence is an independent system of meaning, lending itself to reading the increased instance of silences in the post-1990 art-house Sri Lankan cinema as expression of voices of the marginalized in a particular socio-cultural context marked by discriminations based on ethnicity, religion, caste and other institutions of oppression.

The latter part of the chapter proposed a counter-reading of Thomas Bruneau's observation that silence can be an oppressive power by the powerful in a measure to contain the weak. Next, the proposition of Covarrubias & Windchief that silence is used to protect culture from threats to transform it was given a rather solid conceptual foundation by suggesting the fact that silence can become a weapon of the weak. Deborah Tannen's insight that '*silence can be a matter of saying nothing and meaning something*' was combined with Cheryl Glenn's proposition that voice is the expression of the powerful and the masculine while the weak adopt silence as their mode of expression. This view of silence is reinforced by Kennen Ferguson's observation that silence is a resistant strategy.

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[1] Akan is an aborigine group of people found in Gold Coast in south of present Ghana. Kofi Agyekum conducted research on this group of people.

[2] Bhikku Ananda is the known as the *Guardian of the Dharma,* for he was the most retentive of Buddha's words.

[3] Bhikku Sri Dhamananda puts forward writes about the silence of Buddha in "Silence of Buddha". From the discourse of the Buddha:

Is the universe eternal?
Is the universe finite?
Is it infinite?

Is soul the same as body?
Is the soul one thing and body another?

Does the Tathagata exist after death?
Does he not exist after death?
Does he both (at the same time) exist and not exist after death?
Does he both (at the same time) neither exist nor not exist?

The Buddha who had truly realized the nature of these issues observed noble silence. An ordinary person who is still unenlightened might have a lot to say, but all of it would be sheer conjecture based on his imagination. Read: http://www.budsas.org/ebud/whatbudbeliev/34.htm

[4] It is mentioned in Buddhist literature that the Buddha had remained in meditative postures for seven weeks immediately after attaining Enlightenment, contemplating his attainment of Nirvana or the Ultimate Bliss, and to pay gratitude for the Bo-tree which sheltered him during his

meditations. Each week of these seven weeks had separate course. Meditation is mainly used in Buddhism to enhance concentration and vision. Buddhist meditation is of two main types: concentration meditation (*Samatha*) and *Vipassana* (clear-insight) meditation. While *Samatha* aims at improving concentration, *Vipassana* meditation aims at realizing the truth.

[5] From the Mahayana Buddhism in China. This school prioritize contemplation on Buddha's noble qualities, while remaining at sitting posture.

[6] Alternation of sound and silence is visible in most of the religious rituals. Religious observances in Buddhism, prayers in Christianity and Islam are performed with recitals and silent observances.

[7] Sufism is a concept in Islam for exploring the mystical dimension of Islam. Quakers, a Christian religious movement mainly in the UK, are members of a family of religious movements.

[8] A long note on this is found at the beginning of the starting chapter of *On the Pythagorean Life By lamblichus* about the journey of Pythagoras to Syria and Egypt (Mesapothemian Civilization) on a suggestion by Thales who is considered as the father of Greek philosophy. Pythagoras who walked in Greece alone showed a meditating posture in his return. "Throughout the voyage – three days and two nights – he had remained in the same position. He had not eaten, drunk or slept. (Clerk 1989, pp. 6-7).

[9] Moments of silence and silent events can be seen in dramas from Greek period. A lot of silent characters, or characters associated with silence can be seen in Shakespeare dramas. However, theatre of the Absurd embeds silence into the theme and narrative of the play, and is therefore the form of drama that incorporates silence best.

[10] Michal Ephratt provides a long list of scholars, who have studied silence in: *The functions of silence*. See: Michal Ephratt, Journal of pragmatics 40 (2008) pages 1909–1938.

[11] At participants observing silence in religious sermons, chanting and recital of funeral poetry (*Malapotha*) at a funeral house can be considered as being silent in Sri Lankan social context. A Participants observing silence in a meeting for the speaker is a universal example of observance of silence.

[12] FTAs are Threatening Acts as per Politeness Strategy.

Chapter Two

Silence a cultural statement: Social, Political and Cultural History Leading to the Cinema of the 1990s.

> *"It is my blood that runs along Bandara's veins....you talk about compensation as if you don't know who Bandara is..."*
>
> Wannihamy to Sunanda
>
> (*Death on a Full Moon Day,* 1997)

Introduction

A necessary second point of entry in this study of the silences that are a feature of the post-1990 national cinema is to examine the public consciousness that forms its background, shaped by a long tradition of prioritizing bloodline and heritage. This Chapter consists of three main sections. Part one deals with Sri Lanka's political, religious and socio-cultural background. Beginning with the Anuradhapura Period, it traverses the many other relevant historical periods up to the beginning of the colonial era, focusing on how the royal subjects were 'non-existent' beneath the towering presence of the King and the Religion. Part two charts how the vigorous imposition of colonial, religious and economic policies and practices shaped the lives of the colonial subject. Part three focuses on how silence became a way of life of the Sri Lankan, as a consequence of the diverse but complex ethnic, political and cultural phenomena, of which the present outcomes are deeply rooted in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial

periods. The ways in which the contours of local art practices were shaped by each period contributes to the understanding of the role of silence in the arts.

2.1. From Anuradhapura period: beginning of 'non-existence'

Reconstructing public consciousness by a study of written history and archaeological sources directs us towards a history of how the dual power centres, i.e. state power and religion, stereotyped the masses within a polarized 'non-existence'. Non-existence implies silence.

2.1.1. 'Meeting' the King

Sri Lanka's written history begins with the arrival of *Vijaya* (483 BC).[1] The narrative of his arrival in *Tambapanni* from India, meeting *Kuveni*, a young woman of the *Yaksha* tribe of Sri Lanka, and taking her hand in marriage is interspersed with his extradition, banishment, defeat or silencing (Geiger 1912, pp. 53-54).

Sinhala kingdoms and later royal rule had their beginnings in the punitive banishment of *Vijaya* from India. He was accompanied by 700 of his followers who were banished from their country, separated from their kith and kin and with their heads half shaven in violation of accepted social norms (Geiger 1912, p. 53).[2] It must have been a traumatic experience that was etched in their memory, creating a collective sense of shame as they set about settling in their new surroundings.[3] It was a blemish on their character and gave them a guilt complex in the eyes of other people. Their banishment from the land of their birth must

have caused them unspeakable trauma. Unlike other historical events this collective feeling of having been wronged pervades the story of the land.[4]

Kuveni is said to have belonged to the *Yaksha* tribe that had inhabited the land before the arrival of the Indian prince. Although *Kuveni*, according to myth, was a demon-possessed of magical powers, what emerges is that she was a local woman whom the Indian invaders met. Her final story may have been one of trauma, mental stress and torture (Geiger 1912, p 53-54). *Kuveni* and her two children (*Jeevahattha* and *Disala*) were chased away by *Vijaya* in order to maintain the royal dynastic lineage. *Kuveni*, whose name headed the civil list of Sri Lankan women, must have undergone severe stress when royal princesses were brought here from India (Geiger 1912, pp. 60-61).

Banishment, abandonment, severance of personal relationships, forced separation, dispossessing and being dispossessed are happenings recorded from the dawn of Sri Lankan history. They have recurred throughout history and impacted on the public consciousness in two ways: first, they embedded traumatic feelings in the psyche; second, it was considered that nothing could or should have been done to change the situation and it was thus made an acceptable element of the popular mindset. Both these processes may have taken place over a long period of time.

It is necessary to understand the deep-rooted relationship between the state and Buddhism that was introduced to the country within a short time after the founding of the first Kingdom in Anuradhapura (377 BC – 1017 AD), that embraced Buddhism as its state religion, and which has continued to be so until

the present day, despite minor setbacks. In the earliest conception of royalty, the King was considered equal to a *Bodhisattva* (Gunewardena 1993, p. 175).[5] In other words, the King was considered as a future Buddha. The maxim that 'Who, himself is not a *Bodhisattva*, is unsuitable for a King' paved the way for the state to exert the authority of Buddhism and the Buddha for further strengthening and justification of its own power.

> The notion that King is almost equal to the Buddha' conforms fully with the Theravada tradition. It may be a claim to that effect by King Nissanka Malla as he wrote on the North palace gate epigraph 'coming of a righteous king is as equally difficult as coming of a Buddha (Gunewardena 1993, p 178)

Buddha ordered the Sangha to act in submission to the ruler (*Vinaya Pitaka* 1879, p. 138). The mutual relationship between the state and religion comes to light in that the Sanga preach and advise the ruler, while the rulers patronise monks, thereby the religious institution works closely with the political leadership.

Buddhism, the state religion, diverged from its pristine form and turned into an applied Buddhism characterised by a co-operative relationship between religion and ruler with many administrative decisions and arrangement receiving the blessings and approval of the temple. Wars and conflicts received the sanction of the sangha either directly or indirectly (Gunawardhane 1993, p. 179). Consequently, the common people considered the counsel of the sangha as superstitious, un-Buddhistic or un-Sinhala, and that their teaching is designed to vanquish the opponent and leave him dispossessed and tormented.

What were these wars? They had religious roots. *Mahanama* Thero (priest) of the *Maha Vihara* tradition, who authored the *Mahavamsa* (the Great Chronicle of Ceylon), gives centre stage to *Dutugemunu* who defeated the *Chola* King *Elara* the Just. The *Mahavamsa* devotes eleven chapters to the *Dutugemunu* story.[6] Sinhala royalty is a vital factor in the country's national state apparatus and, however, just an Indian ruler is, he is not considered a real leader of this country. Since *Dutugemunu* unified Sri Lanka, later defeating the old King *Elara*, the King was bestowed the duty of patronizing Buddhism and thereby re-affirming the Kingship of the island. All later wars and conflicts were founded on religious patronage and approval.

The reigns of kings were marked by both victories and defeats in war. Although the dynastic chronicles do not provide detailed accounts of them most reigns collapsed and were restored by moving on to safer areas in the face of enemy onslaughts. Just as war victories were covered in all their glory, long years following a defeat in war spent under a foreign yoke, are also recorded. Furthermore, concealed in history (or pressed into silence), the Jaffna Kingdom of the North is shown as a kingdom that had to be invaded and conquered by the South. The proud boast of Sinhala kings of the South was that it was tantamount to the defeat of the foreign foe, but such wars did not extend beyond the dimensions of a civil war. Covetousness for the crown even involved the gruesome murder of the father, brother or husband through conspiracy and revolt.[7]

2.1.2. Eclipse of the Citizen

Opposition to the rule of kings in the form of popular revolt and rebellion are hardly heard of in Sri Lankan history. The people lived and had their being under the authority of the royal decree. With the advent of Buddhism members of different castes did the work that was their lot under the *rajakariya* (service to the king) system and received *nindagam* and land donations from the king. Historical evidence is sparse that shows that these sufficed to satisfy their needs and the tendency lies in the direction of dissatisfaction.[8] What is evident is that under the rule of kings all rules and regulations and decrees were accepted by the people without question and with forbearance. Or else, did they refrain from raising a voice in dissent, or were they of necessity silent and reticent?

Different and opposing viewpoints on this question are not given in modern historical studies maybe because ancient historical texts deleted such references or did not reveal them. What should and should not be included in the history may have been decided by the powers that be and all literature was authored by the royalty or the priesthood. Did the *Mahavamsa*, the *Thūpavamsa* and *Chulavamsa* and similar chronicles show zero tolerance for dissent?[9]

There is no way to fill this historical lacuna relating to the social and economic life of the common people based on caste and *rajakariya* systems and the discipline of Sinhala Buddhism. There are historical silences about a united and prosperous state, about the king, about conflicts and conspiracies and crises. The historical records make no mention of them. Some indicators may be found in the

art and culture of the period, but they too came under the authority of the state and religion.

What is more obvious is that over a long period of time, Sri Lankan public consciousness and dissent remained unexpressed. What entrenched this mental silence in the public consciousness? How did it impact on social relations and personal values? The search for answers to these questions is our second point of entry to the theme of this thesis.

2.1.3. The Dynamic Buddhist Monk

A way of release and relief from the pain of the trauma of deep-seated grievances, of dispossession and of being dispossessed that can be found in Buddhism. Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are also relevant in this regard, but the vast majority (71%) of Sri Lankans are Buddhists (Department of Census and Statistics 2012).

The highly acclaimed event of the arrival of *Mahinda* Thero and the relations between state and ruler is of symbolic significance.[10] According to the ancient chronicles, *Mahinda* and his followers reached *Mihintale* by the power of *Erdi* when King *Devanampiya Tissa* was engaged in a deer hunt.[11] Whatever the truth or untruth of this episode, the literary acclaim with which it was received was enormous. The symbols associated with the event endow it with many factors relating to the hegemony of Buddhism.

The head of state is positioned in a lower status when *Mahinda* Thero and his followers occupy a higher position on the *Mihintale* Rock at their first meeting

with the King. Religion acquired a higher status and the King himself and his people too accorded religion primacy. In the beginning, *Mahinda* Thero stands above the King when he asks questions in the famed and well-remembered 'mango tree quiz'.[12] This episode helped in the course of time to validate the supremacy of the religious establishment in the general scheme of things.

Buddhism has thrived as the main religion of Sri Lanka from the time of the Anuradhapura Period and beyond the colonial era. Meanwhile under each royal rule the king built places of religious worship, temples, Buddha statues and Stupas in addition to royal patronage for the temple with land, alms, gifts and other kinds of material assistance. Either under royal decree or with generous donations of temple land (*viharagam*) people who worked in the temple lands paid obeisance to both King and monk under a pragmatic form of Buddhism that gave approval to feudalistic processes.

In the course of its history, Buddhism acquired an aura of authority. The *Maha Viharaya* gave pride of place to Theravada and *Abhayagiriya* to Mahayana and the two grew into two separate monasteries in Anuradhapura. In the course of time, the two schools engaged in a power struggle which brought about a major upheaval that has lasted to the present time.[13] In the time of the kings, the power contest grew in intensity until, under state intervention, *Abhayagiriya* collapsed. This destruction gave a twist to the authority of Buddhism. In the fields of the visual arts and literature, *Abhayagiriya* was on the ascendant and its fall had a direct and indirect impact on social silence.

What collapsed was *Abhayagiriya*? *Maha Viharaya* was stable and laid the necessary foundation for the long established Theravada Buddhism. The Holy Tooth Relic of the Buddha brought to Sri Lanka became a symbol of kingship.[14] The incumbent of power was required to protect the Tooth Relic and not being in possession of it would lead to a dispossession of power (Gunawardhane 1993). In the time of royal rule, the king protected the Relic and hid it as a protection from opposition.

This link between monarch and monk results in the loss of identity of the citizen before the state and before the temple. For agriculture and prosperity kings built tanks and Stupas, in other words, it fell to the king and the state to sustain agriculture and religion; it was his function to provide the services needed for the purpose. It also became the function of the citizen to serve the temple and the sangha. His tasks in this regard were determined by his caste and by royal decree. He fell into silence again. We meet the monk but not his servant (the patron) of the temple.

2.1.4. The disappearance from sight of the temple patron and benefactor

Considering the practices of the devotees of the prevailing religions of the time, the factors that attracted the common people to Buddhism can be surmised. One was that the values of Buddhist philosophy encompassed many democratic features. Scepticism is encouraged in Buddhism. Religious scholars too could be questioned; asking questions was encouraged before accepting the dharma that was preached; tolerance and respect for other opinions were outstanding features

of enshrined in Buddhist philosophy. In India both in the incipient era and in later periods the Buddha dharma rejected caste divisions that were facts of life. Although not to the same extent as in India, in Sri Lanka too caste divided the people and the teachings of the dharma against caste must have touched the people of the island very sincerely. What the dharma taught about the present life and the after-life, the cause of life's suffering and pain (*karma* and its effects) may have no doubt touched a chord in the life of a people who lived by the toil of their hands and the sweat of their brow tilling the soil and performing manual labour.[15] The dharma must no doubt have given them a degree of relief from their lot and condition of life.

With the passage of time, however, did the religious devotee or the patron of the temple have the space to see these attractive features in practice? It was not the pristine Buddha dharma (doctrine) that the common people living in the shadow of the priest and temple received. As a result of the strong bond between the state and the religion the citizen disappeared from the ken of the state and also disappeared also from the ken of the religion. Although the Sanga and the temple were closer to the people than was the state the common people transacted with the temple only in silence and subjection. Although the Buddha dharma rejected fundamental inequality and hostility, firstly, the conflict of interests among the *Maha Vihara*, *Abhayagiriya* and *Jethavanaya,* and secondly, the divisions among different *nikayas* based on caste led to divisions between temples and sangas.[16] All of these, it is possible to assume, had a direct impact on the popular conscience.

That happiness and sorrow and similar emotional states had to be experienced and endured by the individual by him/herself was what the religion taught. Life is suffering and the cessation of suffering and the attainment of nirvana (Buddhist state of bliss) had to be learnt through the *dhamma*. These are lessons that must have been taught in the early teachings. But whether the people faced and endured the authoritarian power of the state and of the temple on the strength of these teachings is a moot point.

The ordinary citizen was closely linked with the history of the temple and the history of the state. The end-result was that the citizen disappeared from sight and the patron of the temple disappeared from view. The people who occupied temple lands lived in silence and performed the labour of *rajakariya* in silence; they suffered the oppressions imposed by the caste system and the *rajakariya* system in silence. They endured their lot in silence.

2.1.5. Art of the Kings, Gods and Bodhisattvas

This history of Sri Lanka narrated in the *Vamsa* (genealogies) stories is not devoid of art. In fact, it is enriched with plastic arts such as sculpture, architecture and temple paintings. Besides, the *Mahavamsa* reports that a feast full of instrumental music, singing and dancing was held in the *Sirivatthupura*, as Prince *Vijaya* arrived in Sri Lanka.

> And she said to the prince:' Here there is a yakkha-city called Sirisavatthu; the daughter of the chief of the yakkhas who dwells in the city of Lanka has been brought hither, and her mother too is come. And for the wedding there is high festival, lasting seven days; therefore there is this noise, for a great multitude is gathered together. (Geiger 1912, p. 57).

Vamsa stories also refer to musical and dance ceremonies held in the days of Kings.[17]

Pre-modern literature provides generously detailed descriptions of musical notes, sounds of musical instruments, types of string instruments or drums played at ceremonies and the kind of actors and actresses or dancers who performed in them.[18] However, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that the 'entertainment industry' of the pre-modern Sri Lanka was hardly more than a service rendered unto the King and his court, mostly retelling and gloriously reinforcing well known religious narratives. Most of these works are marked by their bounce and exaggeration, prioritising literary and stylistic effect over the gravity of the content except in a religious sense. In this literature, we are told, dancers resemble angels or real angels descend to dance floors, often in thousands; and in those dances, divine beings witness spectacles their eyes had been long deprived of, and they are saddened by the fact that the heavens lack such pretty extravaganza.[19]

The bounty and the luxury in the divine worlds of deities and Brahmas, imagined existing in the cosmos beyond this earth of humans, are customary themes in Buddhist literature.[20] To say that pretty goddesses and immortal gods envied the King for his dance troupes' talent could be to play up to him and to add a flavour of extravagance to the literary work. Besides, the vantage point of the writer becomes easily evident as most literary works have been written by the King himself, a member of the court or a monk, always a close associate of the King.[21]

Religion and religious figures, divine beings, kings and princes take the centre stage of literary writing and visual and plastic art of pre-modern Sri Lanka. Buddha is said to have had 32 bodily marks of perfection, which, apart from him, can only be found in the body of a *Chakravarti* or an emperor of the universe. This and the claim that the King is a *Bodhisattva*, set the platform for a very close bond between state and religion (Gunewardena 1993). Such symbolism is glorified in visual arts amplifying the image of the royalty while silencing the average laity.

2.2. Colonial Period: Colony, Christianity and Social History (of silence)

Sri Lanka entered Western colonialism in the 16th century, during the period of Kings of Kotte, first under the Portuguese who ruled the littoral Sri Lanka from 1505 until that land was seized by the Dutch in 1656.[22] The British replaced the Dutch in 1796 and seized control of the whole island by capturing the King of Kandy and signing the famous Kandyan convention in 1815, which marked the end of the rule by Sri Lankan Kings.[23]

The introduction of Christianity, Western education including its languages (especially English), and the transition from sustainable agriculture to commercial crops brought about the rise of capitalism under a British Governor in palace of the earlier feudal system under an indigenous King. This paradigmatic shift in the economy and the political system transformed the value system of the society and, subsequently, the arts based on and reflecting that value system. Development of the arts in colonial Sri Lanka was shaped by exposure to the foreign lands and

cultures, contact with the Western religions as well as discovery of new forms and genres of artistic expression.

2.2.1. Colonial Rule: New religion and economy

The introduction of Christianity in 1505 brought a new dimension to the religious and philosophical worldview of the Sri Lankans. Its aggression, particularly when unleashed, entwined with the colonial authority, took on the Buddhist way of life and fundamental beliefs, often subjecting the latter to ridicule. This new situation created a new upward mobile class of indigenous people, who converted themselves to Christianity for survival and associated with the colonizers more closely and harvested social and economic benefits in return. Christianization was more popular among the more suppressed castes under the feudal system, bringing about a structural change in the power distribution among the castes, as these upwardly mobile low-country castes managed to acquire, towards the later stages of the colonial period, more power than the feudally superior *Govigama* caste.[24]

The feudal economic structure, which depended mainly on paddy farming, and therefore privileged the farmer caste '*Govigama*', started to shift rather drastically towards a commercial crop based economy, first, with commercialization of coffee and spices, and second, with tea and rubber. The rise of a new trader class disrupted the earlier social order, apart from the contribution made to the same effect on the development of the road network and demarcation of new commercial and administrative areas in line with the colonial policy.

However, instead of eradicating earlier social divisions such as region, caste and ethnicity, the colonial administration reinforced them through divisive and preferential benefits detrimental to the majority.[25] Further, South Indian Tamil labour importation for the growing plantation industry was to form a different ethnicity, in a quasi-slave standard of living.[26]

2.2.2. The Silent Colonial Subject

What change did the change of the ruler from local to foreign bring about in the everyday life of the colonial subject? Did the feudal subject who was present (or absent?) in pre-modern Sri Lanka remain the same, despite the colonial contact? An understanding of the transformations in the silence of the feudal subject (built into generations of peasant life in the pre-colonial Sri Lanka) will shed important light on interpreting how the medium of film (a Western industrial art form) was incorporated into the social and artistic landscape of the island.

In the low country, Christianity and its socio-cultural influence did not evolve independently from the influence of Buddhism and its practical value system. The Buddhist values, socio-cultural outlook, norms and worldview entrenched in the life of the average Sri Lankan could not be completely replaced by the Western colonizers, who replaced one another three times over a relatively short period of five centuries. However, Christianity's largest impact seems to have taken place among the coastal Sri Lankans, whose traditional profession of fishing is deemed as a 'sin' according to Buddhist world view. They were the easiest converts to Christianity and its foremost believers, forming a new religious identity and

espousing a new world view that shed the idea of Buddhist rebirth. This British administration, in particular, with a clear hierarchy, starting from village level representation of the British monarch, and an administration that acted closely with the Church, developed a new social milieu, where the values and philosophy of life may have been different from what existed in the pre-colonial Sri Lanka.

Colonialism, despite its presence for five centuries with increasing influence on the average person's life, does not seem to have been able to cast it in a completely new mould. Many reasons seem to contribute to this: the resistive existence of the Kandyan Kingdom until 1815 for three centuries after the first encounter with the Western colonizers in 1505, and the prevalence of Buddhist education system through an extensive network of monasteries, despite hardships due to the lack of patronage which Buddhism had previously enjoyed from the state. Further, colonialism's contribution to reinforcing and reinvigorate divisions based on caste is captured in Wijesiriwardena's insightful representation of the Sri Lankan society in an inverted pyramid (Wijesiriwardena 2010, p 155).
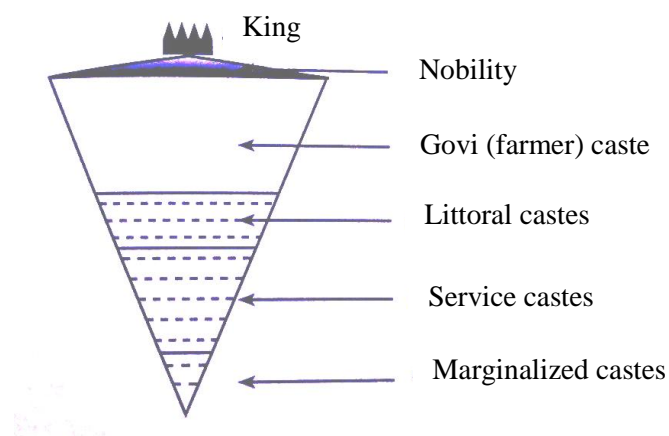
Figure 2

The socially and economically secure *Govi* caste forms the majority, allowing it to apply pressure down the caste hierarchy. The higher the position of a caste, the larger it is in numbers, makes caste mobility a difficult task. Within a paradigm of caste, it is difficult for the castes occupying lower positions in the hierarchy to challenge its higher position holding counterpart, owing to the lack of numbers in the former. The immobility between castes and among caste borders reinforced caste suppression and voiceless bearing up of it. The pre-colonial subject remains more or less intact, despite becoming a colonial subject, marked by caste, religion and other pre-modern demarcations.

2.2.3. Displacement of the colonial subject or revolt and rebellion: against the silence

The colonial period is remarkable for a few instances when the voice of the common people is heard in the form of rebellion or social uprisings of the otherwise timid and silent common man, who has till now not reverted to violent expression throughout his long history. This politically active colonial subject is a distinct sign of the difference between the colonized and the pre-colonial subject. Despite being fiercely more ruthless than the Portuguese and the Dutch, it is the British who was met with the hardest local resistance.[27] The stronger and more organised the uprising, the harder and more ruthless its suppression by all colonizers.

In terms of intensity, the 1818 uprising, led by the nobility in an ill calculated attempt to regain the Kandyan Kingdom, ended in disaster as the British showed

how cruel and ruthless their administration and military could be by eliminating most of the aristocratic rebel leaders, banishing some from the island, and bringing death to thousands of average local males who did or did not volunteer to fight the British. The British civil servant Herbert White describes it thus:

> It is a pity that there is no evidence left behind to show the exact situation in Uva in terms of population or agriculture development after the rebellion. … If one considers that four-fifths of the remaining population after the battle to be children, women and the aged, the havoc caused is unlimited. In short the people have lost their lives and all other valuable belongings. It is doubtful whether Uva has at least now recovered from the catastrophe. (www.lankalibrary.com, n.d.)

The next large uprising of the local people was to occur in 1848, this time as a peasant rebellion than a fight back of feudalism. The repercussions of the 1818 rebellion were so evident in 1848 that the uprising could not find itself a leader from among the nobles, as they had been banished or killed already. At the root of this rebellion were the hardships people faced exacerbated by various taxes.[28] Though the rebellion broke out from *Matale* in the former Kandyan Kingdom, it was led by low country personnel.[29] The rebels did not win, despite the fact that *Gongalegoda Banda*, who had no blood inheritance to the throne, was crowned as '*Sri Wikrama Siddhappi*' the next King of Sri Lanka by the chief incumbent monk of *Dambulla* Temple, Rev. *Giranegama*, on 26th of July, 1848 the day the rebellion broke out. *Dines*, the rebel, was to be named the heir apparent to throne and *Dingirala* as the King of Seven Gravates. The attack on *Kurunegala*, led by *Dingirala*, was lost without much resistance and took his life, and *Puran Appu* was shot dead, while *Gongalegoda Banda* was deported to Malacca, marking the beginning of a long period of silencing of the local voice.

Both major local uprisings attempted to restore the pre-colonial rule by an indigenous King, probably as an alternative was not known to the activists of the time and the feeling of the people that 'their' King was always better than the British king. The symbolic coronation of *Gongalegoda Banda* in 1848 embodies the longing of the indigenous people to be ruled by 'their own' King, dedicated to the protection of Buddhism and controlled by it in return. The failure to realize this wish of the people ushers a long-standing frustration among a population already distressed, shocked by mass murder, the death penalty, deportation, ruthless destruction of dwellings and livelihood, loss, and anxiety, blanketing a large area of the society and leaving unhealed wounds and scars for a long time.

An interesting development of the popular uprisings is the central role that average people occupied in the rebellion, as opposed to the long tradition of leadership by aristocrats. This signals to us the political maturity of the common people and his willingness to break the generations long held back silence. The common people's arrival on stage is an important marker of the transformation that was to take place in the colonial period, as later culminated in the exploits of *Anagarika Dharmapala,* who did not have a claim to royal blood, but nevertheless was a very ardent and a successful mass mobilizer.[30]

2.2.4. The stubborn colonial subject

Colonialism has not brought about a complete turnaround of the arts in the country, despite its substantial presence and noticeable trends set forth specially in the low country areas, where the traditional ritual performances expanded their

scope by carving in new avenues for themselves. Christian religious content and modes of expression such as music and drama have had considerable impact in the coastal areas, which had the largest number of Christians too. Interestingly though, the transformation of content or structure of popular art by the impact of colonialism seems limited.

Traditional ritualistic performances, including *Sanni, Shānthi Karma* and *Thovil* were among the first forms of folk performances to respond to colonialism by incorporating new subplots, plots and characters and subtly creating a symbolic discursive space of the colonial encounter.[31] Besides, numerous temple paintings have easily acquired motifs and themes from colonial experience to enrich the paintings with a taste for the contemporary still remaining within a paradigm of Buddhist cultural beliefs, while folk poems and folk music reflected influence of the colonial contact.

The *Kolam*, a popular form of ritual performance in the Southern parts of the country, incorporated colonial characters, side by side with precolonial characters depicting kings, queens, and messengers and the like.[32] Suppressed by colonial administration and caste pressure, the common man seems to have found, on stage, an alternative space to make a laughingstock out of their very suppressors, whose stupidities were not laughable matter offstage for the average man.[33]

The *Kolam* artist launches a scathing attack on the public service of the time. *Liyana Appu*, (clerk) who asks to be addressed as *Liyana Arachchi*, (Mr. clerk) latter being an address denoting more respect, is sleazy with women but ignorant

of his job. The policeman speaks to people in an English that he does not understand himself but harasses the public. The soldier is a glutton with an appetite that is never satisfied.

Parallel to the transformations taking place in theatrical ritual performances there were also developments in visual arts, especially, in temple paintings in the littoral areas, which came under Western influence and this in turn had an influence on the other visual arts of the country (Hewawitharana 2012).

As Hewawitharana identifies correctly, this incorporation of motifs and design features from Western art, a noticeable change in the content of the paintings, was not to be seen until the last years of the 19th Century. This is probably why, portrayal of a gunman in the *Dambulla* temple painting 'conquering death' (*Mara Parajaya*) is quoted often as examples of Western influence on art.

The real effects of colonial influence were to be manifest during the latter part of the colonial rule and the post-colonial era, which can be called a transitional period of the arts in Sri Lanka. The visual artists who shined by the time Sri Lanka gained independence were those educated in the Western tradition by the turn of the 20th century.[34]

Music of the colonial powers too penetrated into the indigenous people, however with limited effect in terms of geographical or cultural diffusion. For instance, the popular music style of the Portuguese, *Baila* was to soon become popular among the coastal dwellers but remained limited in its reach until the post-independence

period.[35] Christian Church music, on the other hand, was influential as a leaping net for some musicians into the public arena but remained very much limited within the church walls, except in some littoral areas. The most novelty was contributed to Sri Lanka's music by those educated in Indian[36] and Western classical music, as it was to be seen in the independent Ceylon.

However, as in most imperial colonies of the British, the magnitude of the transformations that took place in arts and artistic expression is significantly low, when compared with the role the imperial education plays in shaping the colonial subject, through instructing the colonized in western languages, culture, and science. The British were champions of such crafty moulding of the colonial subject, the intellectual effects of which were to positively affect the arts in the later years, even long after independence.

However, these new developments in art during the colonial period do not seem to have been able to deviate from the position that the union of Sinhala Buddhism and caste basis of art had assigned to arts in the pre-colonial era, by opening new avenues to uplift arts to a medium powerful of socio-cultural discourse. As a proportionally higher section of the new middle class was formed by the low country littoral caste people, some of whom were Christians, a caste and religious divide was created, owing to the fact that the larger portion of the population was Buddhist in religion and *Govigama* of caste. The developments in arts were distant from the reality of the average person to a large extent, making this world of arts more or less silenced and inactive, rather consistent with his pre-colonial

experience. In Liyanage Amarakeerthi's novel *Atawaka Puththu* (Children of the Waxing Gibbous, 2008), when an elderly woman in a farmer family is certain that a newly settled family in the village is 'of the partying and fishing stock', because there are musicians and dancers in the family, she voices an established prejudice about the arts in the country, especially the performing arts.

Constrained by religious, ethnic and caste ideology, the majority of the colonial population does not seem to have developed a free attitude towards the arts or artists. Further, a broad-based ideological movement that would give rise to a liberally strong middle class did not develop on the island, neither under Portuguese or Dutch whose power remained only in the littoral areas of the island (see diagram), nor under the British who gained control of the whole island and created and maintained, nevertheless, a large education machinery. In fact, the rise of nationalism and related discourses towards the latter part of the island's colonial legacy, have contributed to demean arts and restrain its reach.

> The final result of the centuries-long connection between religion and caste has impregnated Sinhala society with an anti-art attitude. This attitude has produced a citizen with a rigid body and mind, alien to the performing arts.(Wijesiriwardena 2010, p. 207)

Sri Lanka enters its independence with this citizen, with a '*rigid body and mind*'.

2.3. 'Freedom' and the Post-Colony

Cinema of the post-independence period was where the proximate causes of many of the ethnic, caste, religious or regional splits and conflicts or youth insurrections, as well as the meanings of many of politically loaded and sometimes hackneyed terms that were to define the social milieu and its

discourses (concurrently being defined by them) such as 'Sinhalese Buddhism', 'Applied Buddhism', 'Sinhalese-Buddhist state', 'Sinhalese identity', *'Jathika Chinthanaya' (National thought),* 'majority or minority politics', 'national identity', 'homeland', or even '*Eelam*', became clearer, against a background of rising nationalisms of the Sinhala and Tamil. Identifying the nature and the values of the post independent Sri Lankan society, as it has been shaped and marked by a three decades long armed conflict and two devastating youth insurrections on either side of the ethnic conflict, which itself broke out mere three decades after the dawn of post-independent era, will set the background in which a discussion on silence in cinema could be rendered meaningful.

2.3.1. Post-colonial Sri Lanka: post-independence as an extension of pre-existent discourses

Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948. Compared to its Indian counterpart, the Sri Lankan freedom struggle was remarkably peaceful and posed a somewhat checked resistance to the colonial masters, compared with its Indian counterpart. The idea of 'freedom' that the islanders were to believe in was a product of pre-existing discourses, which continued to shape the way in which the native people behaved and the values they believed in with regard to freedom even after 1948. As such, religious beliefs, as well as pre-independence ethnic and communal divisions defined how the islanders engaged in the struggle for independence in separated and isolated strokes. The idea of freedom and nationhood were to be perceived in separation rather than in unity by the various ethnic and communal

groups. So, the precolonial notions such as caste, religion and ethnicity seem to have not only prevailed but intensified during the colonial period.

Among the pre-colonial notions that re-articulated themselves strongly during the colonial period and propelled the independence movement, the most influential one is 'Sinhala Nationalism', which, as the terms suggest, is a fusion of Sinhala ethnic consciousness and the Buddhist identity of the majority of the people. Sinhala-Buddhist national consciousness played, arguably, the most influential role in defining the post-independent Sri Lanka's socio-political landscape in Sri Lanka. The roots of Sinhala Nationalism can be traced to *Mahawamsa*, which is the first among many written evidences of the much-publicised *Sihaba-Vijaya* origin myth of the Sinhala race.[37] The myth claims that *Vijaya* is the Buddha-approved heir to the island, whose progeny will protect Buddhism in the island for millennia. This ethnoreligious permutation, when propagated with all increasing rigour during the colonial and post-independent times, rendered it the most strong in reinforcing the 'rightful ownership' of the island by Sinhala-Buddhists. Sinhala Buddhism could be used to unite three-quarters of the population, leaving a quarter of them out of the discourse. The rise of 'Tamil Nationalism' as the counter-ideology to the Sinhala-Buddhist ideology marked the rise of the antithesis of the dominant discourse.

At the dawn of independence in Sri Lanka, it was possible to observe the influence of capitalism and leftist political ideology competing with each other. However, these ideologies and projects too were unleashed and materialized

through already entrenched feudal social divisions of caste, religion, region and ethnicity. Further, these divisions, specially caste hierarchy, had a comparatively larger impact on the Tamil community than the Sinhalese. Therefore, the post-independence Sri Lankan society was a battlefield of feudally delineated and colonially defined power struggles, which had engulfed all communities, among whom some managed to marginalize others across, ethnic, caste or religious identities. The following sub-topics deal with some of the major power-centring ideologies and their gathering in of momentum.

2.3.2. Sinhala Nationalism: Rediscovering '*Dutugemunu'* ('Ideal king') and '*Mahindagamanaya'* ('Ideal religion')

Sri Lanka's Nationalism is unique. As Rampton (2011) puts it, Sri Lanka's version cannot be understood fully by comparing it with those of other countries because what actually is foregrounded in the guise of contemporary Sinhala-Nationalism is the centuries-long claim of the Sinhala people to the island, authoritatively asserted in the *Mahawamsa*, through such iconic and idealised kings such as *Dutugemunu* and confirmed when Buddhism became the official religion of the Sinhala people at the advent of Arhat *Mahinda*. This variant of nationalism further asserted that Sinhala Buddhism, Sinhala language, culture and Sinhala people are inextricably bound together forging a unique religio-ethnic form of nationalism, deviating from the more common form of linguistic-nationalism (Rampton 2011, p. 256).

Before 16th century, if a Sri Lankan was a Sinhalese he was definitely a Buddhist (Obeysekere 1997, p. 355). Therefore, according to Obeysekere, a vivid 'ethnic identity' was found there. But the colonial governance shifted Buddhism, the sole religion of the Sinhalese and added Christianity to the religious repertoire of the Sinhalese. It is with this transition that Sinhala Nationalism arises within an 'anti-Christian' context since 19th century (Malalgoda 1976; Gombridge and Obeysekere 1988; Senevirathna 1999; Jayawardhana 2004). Besides, the colonial masters' policy of identifying the Ceylonese along ethnic categories above any other sort of identity, and sustained policy of favouring the Tamils with state-sector jobs and other privileges such as education and trade was cause enough for the Sinhala population's perception of pro-Tamil discrimination. Supported by the rhetoric of *Dharmapala*, the Sinhala ethnic identity was configured vis-à-vis the Tamil, for which the Sinhala rhetoricians drew inspiration from King *Dutugemunu*'s victory over the Tamil King *Elara* in 2nd Century B.C.

From its colonial reincarnation, Sinhala Nationalism tended towards a parochial and exclusivist 'nationalism'. It resulted in a 'voiced majority' and a 'minority' who were suppressed into 'silence'. The term equivalent to nomination such as Indian, American, and Russian etc. in Sri Lanka was discarded in favour of identifying persons by their ethnicity.[38] The key events and discourses from which this modern political social construction emerged will be outlined below They are the decisive turning points in relation to Sinhala-Buddhist Identity, which found 'Tamil' identity as its 'other'. This polarisation of ethnic identity paved the way to a violent civil war at the end of the 20th century, as argued by Rampton:

> What was produced by these discourses was a social representation of the island of Sri Lanka as quintessentially Sinhala Buddhist, tying together the Sinhala people, the Sinhala language, the Buddhist religion and the conception of the unitary polity and integral territory of the island into a monolithic space in which minorities were to be subordinate. (Rampton 2011, p. 259)

The thriving print media industry during the independence struggle period played a significant role in transmitting such nationalistic ideas.[39] The stereotyping of the Tamils was popular in Sinhala writing as exemplified in the following extract from the novel *Kele Handa* (Wild Moon) by W.A. de Silva in 1950s.

> A person in a Sinhala crowd feels nothing but the fatigue of being jostled. One in a Tamil crowd will have to bear the stench of Tamil sweat which emits from their naked torso in addition to the fatigue of being jostled. (Jayathunga 2009, p. 152)

The propagation of ethnic hatred leads to a series of ethnic clashes starting with the Sinhala-Muslim conflict in 1915.[40] The growing suspicion between ethnic groups metamorphosed the independence movement into one where each ethnic group acted separately from each other and always tried to adopt more peaceful means than their counterparts, in a bid to please the master for prospects of relatively higher benefit. Some incidents that were consequences of the ethnic suspicion and were also contributions to further augmentation of ethnic tension up to the breakout of the armed conflict are discussed in brief below:

a. Sinhala-only Act of 1956: Linguistic Nationalism

The accumulated nationalist sentiment of the Sinhala was expressed in 1956, as the Bandaranayake regime replaced English as the Official Language with Sinhala, within 24 hours of its winning the election, staying true to the election

promise. The policy meant for general public that they received official letters in Sinhala, despite the fact that they may have never learnt or spoken Sinhala. The Tamil speakers in the country were denied the right to be heard, they were thereby 'silenced'. Their long-standing mute state was broken through the outbreak of the armed conflict.

b. Buddha's 2500th Birth Anniversary – Religious Nationalism

Buddha Jayanthiya or the grandiose celebrations of the 2500th Birth Anniversary of the Buddha sent strong signals to citizens of other faiths that Ceylon was a Buddhist country. The strong state sponsorship to Buddhism but no other religions meant that the post-independent Ceylon would carry forward the pre-colonial royal tradition of the King and Monk combination, denying other religions the power to associate with state power.

c. Citizenship Rights to Migrant Indian Workers in the Plantation Sector

By the time Sri Lanka was to gain independence, the Tamil speaking migrant Indian workers in the plantation sector lost their civil rights due to the citizenship act of 1948 that disenfranchised them. By then they were in their third generation in this country. Various agreements and disputes lead to mass deportation of these workers back to India on more than one occasion, only to be kept back by a succeeding government. This successive alternation leads to a confused relationship with regard to citizenship of this Tamil community. The trauma of separation, dispossession and of having to adapt to a 'motherland' they had never

seen and hardly heard of alienated them in what they perceived to be their native land.

d. Shift of Access to Education on to a language-based policy

Successive amendments to the post-independent education policy increasingly limited the opportunities for Tamil students to access state-sponsored higher education, which was the only form of tertiary and university education available. This periodic curtailing culminated in the 1972 district quota system (Welikala, 2008).[41]

e. Extra-parliamentary Politics

Two short-lived but devastating insurrections by Sinhala youth in the South of the island and one multi-faceted and long-standing uprising of the Tamil youth marked the political landscape of the country since 1970s. The cross-cutting terms that unified the ideology of the uprisings on both sides of the ethnic divide were 'patriotism' or 'motherland'. Both *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP), the political party that was at the centre of the Sinhala youth uprisings, and the Tamil youth organisations such as TELO and LTTE adhered to such terminology calling for a militant nationalism that was directed against the state but in isolation.

As the armed conflict gradually, but with distinct escalating points marked by attacks on economic centres in the capital (Central Bank of Sri Lanka), Buddhist sacred places (Temple of Tooth) and Buddhist monks (Aranthalawa massacre) escalated, the divide between Sinhala and Tamil communities widened quickly. This struggle was represented by an analogy to the ancient *Dutugemunu* vs *Elara*

battle. Historians of the popular order, many Buddhist monks and Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists were at the forefront of promoting this analogy, in which the war against the LTTE lead Tamil militarism was easily articulated as a challenge to the Sinhala-Buddhist state. As the practitioners of Buddhism, Bikkhus were no longer seen as mere representatives of a religious body who act in relation to Buddhist philosophy and religion, but a 'guardian spirit' of the 'Sinhala-Buddhist' state, claimed to be the seat of Buddhism as the land was blessed by Buddha himself.[42] The religiopolitical discourse became strident.

2.3.3. Tamil Nationalism: Against the Dominant Discourse

As the post-independence era created a space for dominance of Sinhala-Buddhist ideology, those marginalised and dispossessed by it were pushed to the extreme to the extent that the non-Sinhala groups either organised themselves to counter the Sinhala hegemony as did the Tamils of Northern origin, while others, such as the Burgher community, opted to leave the country for Australia, Europe, or America. These two types of responses to the rising hegemony organised along ethnic lines widened the divide between the communities further. These alternative expressions were equally strong and modelled in tandem with that of their Sinhala counterpart.

Many studies and essays on the rise of Tamil nationalism and its various manifestations after independence point to the successive failure of negotiation-based peaceful and nonviolent struggles carried out by Tamil leaders with democratic governments with a Sinhala-Buddhist majority. This failure included

neglect of the repeated Tamil demands as well as violently curtailing of their voice. The failure of the traditional Tamil political leaders who advocated parliamentary politics made it possible for the brisk rise of the youth lead extra-parliamentary and armed politics of the Tamil. How strong was that violence? It was powerful enough to ring the death toll on many democratic political leaders of the orthodox Tamil political leadership, a category epitomized by the murder of the Jaffna Mayor Alfred Duraiappa in 1975, and to assure the elimination of Tamil liberal activists and advocates of Human rights. This category is perhaps best represented by the assassination of Dr. Rajini Thiranagama, whose book *The Broken Palmyrah* discussed the neglect of the demands of the Tamils by the Sinhala leaders and the resultant difficulties faced by the Tamils for a considerable period of time.[43] She claimed that this was the reason the Tamil community was pushed to resort to violence to fulfil their aspirations. The loss of trust in the democratic Tamil leadership is described by Hoole and others (1992) thus:

> After independence the state gradually pursued overtly discriminatory policies against the Tamils. As Sinhalese Buddhist chauvinism became institutionalized, the pervasive influence of this ideology touched every aspect of Tamil life-employment, land, education and industrial development. The discriminatory policies eroded the mainstay of the Tamil middle class's economic base. This increasing threat to their livelihood in the state structure and in the South, and the feeling that they were being pushed around and treated as second class citizens, frustrated and angered the middle class Tamils. However, being economically dependent, they could not be free. Thus they continued to be accommodating, while suppressing their bitterness and anger. The political parties of this class harnessed this anger to consolidate their power. They also reflected this paradox of conflict between their emotions and the economy. Their rhetoric was fiery and appealing to the consciousness of the Tamils, who considered themselves intellectually superior to the Sinhalese. But the political practice was one of bargaining with

the Sinhalese leadership for parliamentary power sharing- reflecting their dependency in fundamental areas. (Hoole et al 1992, p. 337)

However, it may be wrong to assert, as Hoole *et al,* suggest, that all Tamil politicians of the time of independence just played 'nice' and were happy to please their masters. For instance, the demand for G.G. Ponnambalam for equal representation of Tamil and Sinhala in the House of Parliament, ('50 − 50 representation' as the policy famously came to be known) was an instance where the Tamil politicians broke away from their relatively restrained stance.[44]

Tamil aspirations for self-governance went 'unheard' by the Sinhala majority governments. As many scholars (Thambiah 1986, 1992; Wilson 1988; Welikala 2008) have suggested, had the Sinhala government allocated a little effort in response to legitimate demands of the Tamils, including recognition of their language in public administration and assuring fair access to higher education on educational merit rather than on ethnic or regional basis, the flames of ethnic conflict, which were symbolic and cursory initially, could have been quenched before they became uncontrollable and developed into a feared terrorist organisation.

However, Sinhala-Buddhist rhetoric continued with renewed force during these heated times. Quotations like following are common in the everyday political discussion, spoken by leading politicians and public figures: 'From Northern end to Southern end and from Western end to Eastern end there is only one culture throughout the entire Ceylon. That is Sinhala Buddhist culture.' (Jayawardane 2000, p. 64).

Owing to the atmosphere created by extremist Sinhala nationalism of the typed signalled by the above quotes, political propositions such as the suggestions made in 1972 to the Constitutional Compiling Board by Tamil parties including the Federal Party and progressive Tamil groups went 'unheard' in the cacophony of hateful rhetoric of the South (Guruge 2004). As the fair demands of the Tamils were not strong enough to be heard and responded to, there arose, in place of them, extremist demands charged with an equally forceful rhetoric of violence and brutality. By 1975, the state switched to an 'anti-terrorism mood' by imposing emergency law in the North and making clear the divisions between Tamil national aspirations versus the Sinhala-Buddhist state.

The gradual escalation of militant Tamil nationalism was marked by equally disquieting actions by the Sinhala-Buddhist-centric government. In 1961, the government of Sirimavo Bandaranayake suppressed Anti-Sinhala-only language policy demonstrations by Tamils in Jaffna by imposing emergency law and using military power (Guruge 2004, p. 26). Since then, presence of the military in the North and the use of it for controlling civil demonstrations became a standard practice, while the Colombo centred government continued to establish Sinhala colonies in 'claimed' Tamil areas despite the further eroding understanding between the two ethnic groups. The culmination, the shift of mode of expression of Tamil national aspirations came in 1976, in the famous Wadukkodai declaration, that proclaimed the taking of arms to obtain a separate state for Tamils (Wilson 1988, 1994, 2000).[45]

2.3.4. Sinhala-Buddhism: from religion towards 'domineering power'

In post-independent Sri Lanka, Sinhala-Buddhism is identifiable existing parallel to the state just as in the era of kingdoms and influencing decisively the direction of the state. The view that the stabilization of the protection of Sinhalese and Sinhala race depends only on the protection of Buddhism, is a religion-based discourse repeated and retold in many myths and histories as in the *Mahavamsa* claim that Lord Buddha preached to God *Sakka*, the chief of the Buddhist pantheon, that Sri Lanka is the only place, where pristine Buddhism will be preserved for 5000 years (Geiger 1912, p.55) and the myth of prince *Diyasena* prevails, reinforcing the idea that he will rise from deep waters to the rescue of Buddhism and the land that protects it, whenever their continuity is challenged.[46] The government mechanism of Sri Lanka handles education, social activities, cultural activities and arts, keeping up the relationship clearly with Sinhala Buddhist practice at the centre. In the popular and dominant cultural practices, anything that promotes this relationship is appreciated while those against it are demeaned and discouraged.

The army, which is for the security of the state, takes this 'religio-cultural' ideology as its guide. In a country with a religious history that holds the idea that if the enemy killed is 'non-Buddhist', the slayer commits no sin, this popular ideology of the soldier is understandable. A quote from the *Mahawansa* affirms this idea:

> From this deed arises no hindrance in thy? Why to heaven. Only one and half a human beings were slain here thee, O lord of men. The one had come unto to (three) refuges, the other had taken on himself the five

precepts. Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts. But as for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha in manifold ways; therefore cast away care from the heart. O ruler of men. (Geiger 1912, p. 178)

Even though the term 'Holy war' is not used in the contemporary terminology, the term 'war to preserve the country, religion and race' is often used. The religious discourse based on it does not end in justifying the war in the above way, but presents the king who led the war as a person who is adequately meritorious to attain Nirvana (Obeysekare 1997, p. 360).

Although Buddhism is often considered a very peaceful religion, violence and Sinhala-Buddhism runs surprisingly parallel. When lots of temples and shrines exhibit the hell, *Jathaka stories* and instances of the life of Lord Buddha in murals, brutal violence is depicted within the temple itself (Bell 2000, p. 88).[47] In popular Buddhist rhetoric war is recommended for the sake of the 'country, ethnic group, and religion'. It was common for many temples to have held many a *Bodhi Pooja* to appeal to guarding gods to protect the Army fighting in the North or to bless the 'war heroes'.[48]

Sinhala Nationalism is always expressed in a rhetoric and discourse inseparable from 'Sinhala-Buddhism' and unifies the idea of religion and state. In this light, political history since independence can be read as an instance of reification of the religio-nationalist ideology of the Sinhala and the response of those excluded from that discourse. Sinhala-Buddhism never tolerated being shifted from its dominant position to anything less. The community of priests who came forward

at many decisive political instances including language policy, Bandaranayake-Chelvanayagam Pact, Dudley-Chelvanayagam Pact, etc. did not deviate from the tradition of religion-first policy even by the 1990s. That is how the interim report which adds itself to the report of Sinhala Commission which was brought up in response to the constitutional modification suggestions presented by the ruling government in 1996 started.

2.3.5. Caste and (adjoining) class: As a unique island condition

The text *Caste in Modern Ceylon, The Sinhalese system in Transition* of Bryce Ryan published in 1953 states that all the civil conflicts found in Sri Lanka from the end of 19th century till up to 1925 are based on the issue of caste (Ivon 1999, p. ix). At the end of the colonial rule, even though the ethnic conflicts and crisis holds a prominent place in post-colonial era and the caste gradually became an undeclared but nevertheless present factor, still existing in the social body as a mute but powerful social factor (Ivon 1990; Wijesiriwardhana 2010; Silva 1997, 2005). Thorat and Shah (2007) state that around 90% of the population still consider it important. But the surprising fact is that it never holds a space in any social discourse as a prominent factor (Uyangoda 2000, p. 46).

Caste is a non-global South Asian socio-cultural creation (Silva 1997, p. 14). As already discussed in 2.1, Sri Lanka inherits caste from India. Even though the caste system created a rigid social hierarchy in pre-modern Sri Lanka with a prominent caste-based service system, it gradually transformed into a less obvious and therefore latent structure instead of being overturned as many modernists expected. In contemporary Sri Lanka, caste matters and exists undiscussed in

public, yet finding its expression in marriage proposals, election candidate lists, and in selecting candidates for some jobs, suggesting that caste is still a selection criterion of people in many instances.

The idea of people who are of 'one's own caste, creates a suspicion of the 'other' who is not 'our own' which thoroughly permeates Sri Lankan society. Wijesiriwardena suggests that the caste has become a social syndrome in the sixth chapter titled *Post-colonial cultural challenges* of his book *Purawasi Manpeth* (Citizen Traverses).

> A product of very high exchange price' in the modern nationalistic discourses is 'self-identity'. Developing various interpretations, 'self-identity' circulates in various social domains such as temple, market, and election politics. In order to find initiative definitions once again we must turn towards the reality of caste society. Open and subtle abrasion among castes connecting with a syndrome-like condition, teaches the member of the caste that the 'other' is held in suspicion, must not be trusted and is waiting for a chance to bring about evil to oneself, one's family and generation. (Wijesiriwardhana 2010, p. 160).

His conclusion is important regarding the comprehension of the manner in which the social discourse is directed in the post-colonial era in order to create a silent social institution.

Several social researchers investigating the youth rebellions in the South in 1971 and 1988-89, state that caste acted as a prominent factor (Ivon 1999). It is in no way accidental that the leaders who conducted both these rebellions were not from a dominant caste and that the majority of the young people who were involved in them belonged to rural marginalised castes.[49] Even though the rebellions ended up in failure and coincided with a leftist political philosophy which indicated class

division and pressure, the caste oppression was a definite factor in these rebellions (Silva 1997; Ivon 1997; Samaranayake 1983).

As there was a Hindu caste system in the Tamil community equal to (or tougher than) in the Sinhala community, the caste pressurization regarding the Tamil society created similar roles. As in the Hindu caste system which spread from top to bottom in three main layers as 'Pure Hindu', 'Hindu' and 'untouchable' (Silva 1997, p 26). *Wellala* (The parallel of Govi caste among Sinhalas) became the dominant caste in Tamil community in the North. In a miraculous way the proportion of the *Wellala* caste in the population was also 50%. The caste factor was connected to the youth uprising in the North like in the South, and the young people of oppressed castes who were not given prominent places in political stages gathered around Prabhakaran, the leader who was from a low caste. Economic stability which the marginalised castes both in the South and the North did not possess was a constant factor in the violent genocidal conflicts.

2.3.6. The social and cultural issues created by post-colonial conditions

During the past post-colonial period where convulsive incidents including political uncertainties, rebellions, civil war and genocide were a way of life in this island, the average Sri Lankan lived either facing mistrust, rejection, marginalization or experiencing political procedures such as bribery, corruption, treachery, negligence, and with it experiencing definite factors such as violence, brutality, and terrorism. The post-colonial citizen constantly faced numerous traumas including violent death and dispossession. After the decade of 1990s what

we encounter in the Sri Lankan art-cinema is the life of civilians who are unable to get rid of post-violence trauma even after the war has ended and number of youth rebellions and upheavals have come to an end. We see suffering, with mental regrets including loss of parents and family, doubt, shock and regrets bound to the physical world such as loss of houses and properties, displacement. However, they do not possess a means to express these feelings of abandonment and loss.

Conclusion

Silences signified in a multitude of social and cultural expressions in Sri Lanka are an inseparable outcome of the country's long political and religious history. The native discourses on identity and self-realization are perceived in the double-edged period of nation-building after the independence, as an essentialism inherited and internalised from that long history of pre-colonial Kingdoms, colonial domination and anti-colonial protest, and are articulated with obvious religious overtones. We see how these discourses delimit the conceptualisation of ideas such as 'national' or 'native' in multiple forms of 'minimalism', 'reticence', and 'absence', which, collectively contribute to prioritising exclusive notions of 'Sinhala-Buddhism' and 'Sinhala-Buddhist Nation'. Sri Lankans, who still carry vestiges of caste identities and clan politics have always been walking along a difficult path marked with incessant struggles, ethnic conflicts and civil war. The visual and auditory landscape depicted in the Sri Lankan Cinema of the 1990s is an expression of that socio-cultural historical reality. That is why this study focuses on the aspect of silence in the Sri Lankan cinema.

[1]Even though the ancient Indian epic '*Mahabharat*' mentions a brave king named '*Ravana*' who made Sri Lanka his kingdom and reigned, the chronicles including '*Mahawamsa*' and the archaeology do not prove it.

[2]According to the footnote of the English translation of '*Mahawamsa*' shaving the head symbolizes the taking away of the peace.

[3]'*Mahawamsa*' says that the group including *Vijaya* landed somewhere in North-western coast. Later he entered the country along the *Malwathu Oya* (Malwathu River) and built up communities.

[4]For more details refer to the sixth and seventh chapters of '*Mahawamsa*'.

[5]*Bodhisattva* is the reincarnation of a person who is destined to attain Buddhahood.

[6]The total number of chapters in *Mahawamsa* is 37. The period it covers is from 6th century B.C. to 4th century A.D.

[7]King *Kasyapa* (473 – 495 AD) transformed his kingdom into the impregnable *Sigiriya* Rock fortress after killing his father *Dhatusena* (455 – 473 AD). *Kasyapa*'s reign ended with his brother *Mugalan* (497 – 515 AD) and his armies vanquishing the patricide brother in battle. In the *Kotte* Period the battle known as the *Vijayabakollaya* was the result of an enormous conspiracy of their King *Vijayabahu*'s three sons to kill their father and expropriate for themselves his kingdom. It was a powerful fraternal power struggle ending in the formation of *Sitawaka* and *Raigama* as separate kingdoms.

[8]Lankan society inherits the categorization of social communities depending on castes from Indian culture. The ancient literary texts provide evidence that this system, which divides the society according to a hierarchical system, has existed in the country since the era of kingdoms. '*Poojawaliya*' and '*Saddharmarathnawaliya*' are examples. The categorization of citizens depending on the caste exists even today; the *Govigama* caste is at the highest level and the *Rodi* and *Kinnara* castes are at the lowest level. Fulfilling the tasks allocated to each caste is called '*rajakariya*'. Ignoring it, during the era of kingdoms, was considered a royal offence. There were defined castes for each task such as pottery, lime industry, washing clothes and preparing canopies, jaggery industry, drumming, etc. *Viharagam* are the villages offered to the temples by the king.

[9]*Thupavamsa* – An ancient text which includes the history of the pagodas. It is believed to have been written in 12th century. The author is mentioned as '*Sakala Vidya Chakrawarthi Parakrama Panditha*'. More consideration is given to writing about the legend of '*Ruwanweli Stupa*' constructed by King *Dutugemunu*.

[10]The legend of the arrival of *Arahant Mahinda* shares a large portion in chronicles including '*Mahawamsa*'. Even today on the day of '*Poson Poya*' (Full moon day in the month of June) there are religious festivals to celebrate his arrival.

[11]The Buddhist literature states that the ability to vanish was a power possessed by Lord Buddha and his followers who attained state of *arahant*. The one who possesses that power is able to travel anywhere in the sky. King *Thissa,* who ruled the kingdom of Anuradhapura, acquired a more important position in the history because he was in the throne when Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka (307 – 267 B.C.). After converting to Buddhism he was named as '*Devanampiya Thissa*'.

[12]It is the set of questions about a Mango tree which was nearby that *Arahant Mahinda* asked from the king in order to examine his level of understanding.

[13]*Maha Viharaya* is the monastery which existed in Anuradhapura period and which was based on Buddhist Theravada. *Abhayagiriya* religious institution was based on Mahayana which was contradictory to the indoctrination of *Maha Viharaya*.

[14]The tooth relic refers to a part of the body (a tooth) remaining after the cremation which followed the passing away of Lord Buddha. Sri Lankan Buddhists worship it with utmost piety and consider it the symbol of sovereignty. The king is its guardian. In present it is preserved in the Temple of Tooth Relic in Kandy.

[15]Rebirth is one of the key conceptions in Buddhism. The doctrine says that one proceeds from one birth to another in the circle of rebirths. And in order to overcome the circle of rebirths one must understand the principles of Buddhist Enlightenment. This is a principal value in Buddhism. Cause and effect (*karma*) is also a principal doctrine in Buddhism. It is believed that the present and the future are based on the merits and demerits committed earlier (in this birth and the previous births).

[16]Schism is a disruptive factor among the monks which is based on the caste system and which is entirely contradictory to the doctrine of Lord Buddha. Even though there was a division based on the separation of *Maha Viharaya* and *Abhayagiriya* during the contemporary period, at present it exists on basis of caste system. *Amarapura*, *Siam*, *Rāmanna*, etc. are among the present sects.

[17]The following provide ample records of kings and ministers who patronised and entertained strong relationships with performing arts and entertainment ceremonies: King *Parakramabahu*'s patronage of the festivals held in the worship of the Goddess Sarasvati during the *Polonnaruwa* period (*wesathuruda Sanne*, ed. D.E. Hettiarachchi ___ , p 04, 20, 54 and 118); *Dambadeni* King's Minister *Pathiraja*'s patronage of performing, dancing and singing ceremonies as recorded in the *Poojawaliya* written at the same time period by Rev. *Buddhaputhra* of *Mayurapada* monastery (Gnanawimala ed. 1997, p 422); ceremonies in veneration of Buddha's tooth relic in the *Kurunegala* period patronised by King *Parakramabahu* the wise (*Dambadeni Asna*); vivid descriptions of a multitude of dance and singing festivals that beautified the epistolary poetic genre famously know in Sinhala as Sandasha Kavya (Dharmawardena. ed. 1949: p 79; Wimaladhamma. ed. 1936: 7, Thilakasiri. ed. 2005: 9) of the *Kotte* period.

[18] Information can be found in ancient literary works and *Vamsa* stories, such as *Mahavamsa, Siyabaslakara, Muvadevdāwatha, Sasadawatha,* and *Dharmapradeepikawa.*

[19] Most literary works of these times, including the epistolary poems, and many other prose work including, especially, *Muvadewdawatha, Wesathuru da Sannaya, Sasadawatha, Pojawaliya*, and *Kavsilumina,* are full of such hyperbolic descriptions, whereby depiction of reality is underplayed.

[20] The world of the gods and Brahmas are, in common understanding of Buddhists, places beyond the earth, inhabited by superhuman beings, full of luxury and bounty, as found in the Buddhist literature. They are said to be places where life is millennia long. It is often said in daily life that people who live a righteous life will be reborn in the divine world after their death.

[21]*Kavsilumina* by King Parakramabahu II, *Saddharamarathnawaliya* by Rev. Dharmasena, *Siyabaslakara* by King Meghawanna, *Poojawaliya* by Rev. Buddhaputhra, chief incumbent of the Mayurapāda monastery, the most important one at the time, *Salalihini* Epistolary poem by Rev. Thotagamuwe Rahula, *Hansa* (Swan) Epistolary poem by Keragala Wanarathana, are all examples of the relationship between writers and centralised state power.

[22] The Portuguese landed on the island in 1505. They gradually took control of the littoral Sri Lanka through increasingly demanding agreements and exchanges with the Kings. The Portuguese managed to take control of the northern regional kingdom of Jaffna too, to isolate the Kandyan kingdom. The Dutch entered into an agreement with the King Wimaladharmasuriya I of Kandy, with whose support they seized the Portuguese controlled areas in 1656 and administered them through the Dutch East India Company.

[23] The British East India Company seized the power from the Dutch in 1796 and acquired the control of the whole island in 1815, marking the end of the long history of rule by native Kings.

[24] These low-country castes consist of Karawa, Salagama, Durava and Hunu castes, which occupy the middle range in the Sinhala caste hierarchy.

[25] The British practiced a policy of craftily reinforcing already existing divisions based on region such as upcountry or low country, on caste, and ethnicity, especially through commercial, educational and administrative benefits for one group, often at the cost of another.

[26] Even today, labour supply for the commercial crop plantations in the central parts of the country comes predominantly from the descendants of those South Indian Tamil labourers who migrated to colonial Sri Lanka in the 19th and early 20th Centuries under the British. Serving mainly in tea and rubber plantations, living under the lowest standards of life even today, they gained full citizenship in Sri Lanka only in 2003, after once having been categorically denied it in 1949, in one of the first decisions of ethnic exclusivity that the young independent Ceylonese Parliament made.

[27]K.M. de Silva writes about uprisings against the Portuguese by *Kuruwita Rala* and *Nikapitiye Bandara* in various locales along the *Kelani* valley in his seminal book 'History of Ceylon'. Same book provides a description of the riots of the *Salagama* caste cinnamon cultivators upon disruptions to their livelihood.

[28] The taxes which British imposed were, a poll tax, dog tax, hut tax, shop tax and many others.

[29] Those leaders were Gonalegoda Bandā, Puran Apppu, Dines, and Hanguranketha Dingirāla. Gongalegoda Bandā who was born at Dematagoda, near Colombo, was originally named Wansapura Devage David. After the defeat of the rebellion, which he led, he was deported to Malacca, where he died in 1849. Dines was his brother. Weerahennadige Francisco Fernando, aliased Puran Appu later, was born in Moratuwa South of Colombo in 1812. After the defeat of the rebellion, he was executed by firing squad. Hanguranketha Dingirala was the fourth leader of the rebellion and was in charge of the attack on Kurunegala, the main city in the Seven Gravates.

[30]Anagarika Dharmapala was the public name of Don David Hewawitharana, who was the most successful Buddhist revivalist in Sri Lanka under the British. His writings and teachings fuelled the Nationalist freedom movement and revived Buddhism in a more pragmatic form, able to resist Christianity. He lived from 1864 to 1933.

[31]*Sanni, Thovil* and *Shanthikarma* are forms of traditional healing rituals predominantly present in the low country areas, generally to chase away evil spirits which poses a subject or a village. These performances include extensive mask dances accompanied by expressive drum beats, dramatic characterization of deities, demons, nobles or officials.

[32]*Kolam* is an important form of folk performance that lends itself generously to the development of Sri Lankan drama. All actors wear colourful wooden masks denoting characters. Most notable characters were Vidane (a village level administrative officer), Liyana Appu (clerk), along with a police officer (in Polis Kolama), a soldier (in Hewa Kolama), the white administrator 'Sinno'

(sometimes 'Paraya') and the white lady or ('Nona' in Landesi (Portugese) Kolama) *Sokari* and *Nadagam* were the other two main sub-genres of theatre at the time.

[33] The lyrics introducing Vidane Kolama (the local administrator) to the audience are emblematic of the attitude of the folk artist towards their ruler class: "*Nasa duk path sema – Asadarana karai melesama – Gasa kethwath sema – Me sa ei aratchi kolama*", which translates as: "Destroyer of all the poor – Unfairness is his deed – Usurper of land and field – Here comes the Arachchi Kolama"

[34] Most well-known among them were, George Keyt, Mudliar Amarasekera, L.T.P. Manjusri, Ivan Peiris, M. Sarlis, P.E.P. Deraniyagala, and Richard Gabriel, many of whom were to become the founding members of the famous modernist 43 Group.

[35]*Baila* is a fastbeat dance music genre introduced to Sri Lanka in the Portuguese time, by the African prisoners of war brought and settled here by the Portuguese.

[36] Indian Music schools such as Shanthi Nikethan and Bathkande Music School were popular among the colonial Sri Lankans and alumni of these schools became impactful since the beginning of the 20th century.

[37] According to Mahawansa, Sinhabahu is the father of Vijaya who comes to Sri Lanka. Sinhabahu's mother is a daughter of the King of Wanga but his father was a lion. (See Geiger 1922, pp. 51-53)

[38] Based on nationalism the term 'Sri Lankan' is used very rarely in the country. In the prominent documents such as the birth certificate and personal identity card Nationality has to be classified according to ethnicity rather than as the name of the country. That is to say as Sinhala, Tamil or as Muslim. Sinhala racists show a high resistance to the use of "Sri Lankan" for the category of nationality. Please see if this is what you want to say.

[39] The seasonal magazine 'Sinhala Jathiya (Race)', founded in 1903 by Piyadasa Sirisena, the newspaper 'Sinhala Buddhist', founded in 1906 by Dharmapala and the books of earlier authors such as Piyadasa Sirisena, W.A. de Silva are principal in this regard.

[40] In 1915 the reason for these riots was stones thrown at a procession while it was moving in front of a Muslim mosque. The attacks which emerged based on this incident were ended by the imposition of martial Law by the British government after the destruction of many lives and property.

[41] Sri Lanka, which was under Dominion state became fully independent state in 1972. The drafted constitution which created a Democracy is named as Democratic constitution. Sri Lanka became a Republic in 1972.

[42] Monks are considered as protective gods of the nation in the conversations of the Sinhala Buddhists.

[43] 'The Broken Palmyrah' was written in the late 1980s by lecturers of the university of Jaffna: Rajan Hoole, Daya Somasundaram, K. Sri Dharan and RajiniThiranagama. A lecturer of the medical faculty in the physiology section and an activist of the Human Rights, RajiniThiranagama was shot to death by the LTTE in 1989.

[44] G.G. Ponnambalam was a Tamil politician. The pioneer who established the first Tamil political party, 'the All Ceylon Tamil Congress'.

[45]On the 16th May 1976 at Wadukkodei in the North, the Tamil Liberation Front summoned a conference and pledged to work to establish a separate land for the Tamils.

[46] The mythical concept which is connected to Buddhism says that, after 2500 years a prince called *Diyasena* will be born and protect Buddhism from all the rival religions and forces and protect the nation and the religion.

[47]According to the Buddhism 'hell' is a world where punishment for sinners is given after death.

[48] 'Bo' is the tree where Buddha sat under at the time of his enlightenment. It is a sacred object for Buddhists. Worshipping of the Bo tree to seek various blessings is widespread in the practical Sinhala Buddhism of recent times. The term 'War Hero' has been used widely at the latter part of the Eelam War. It had been used by government forces, Police and all those who had gone to the battlefield.

[49] Rohana Wijeweera who led the youth struggle in the south in 1971. He belonged to the *Karawa* Caste.

Chapter Three

Framing Sri Lankan cinema in the social, cultural and political landscape of Post-Independence Sri Lanka.

"… my mother lived in India,
when she was expecting me
… And today,
when Misinona is about to give birth
to my child, she is in Sri Lanka…"

Thangappu to Misinona
(*Tharanaya*, 1997)

Introduction

Sri Lankan Cinema, despite its claims of origin in 1925, did start as an active art form in 1947, just one year before Sri Lanka became independent.[1] Early local cinema, like at the beginning of many other important social phenomena in the country, followed their Indian counterpart very closely. While this new cinema gradually deviated from the South Indian tradition to depict local life and landscapes, its narratives were expressed against a backdrop of socio-cultural discourses of a post-independence society (Dissanayake and Rathnavibhushana 2004, p. 4).

This chapter has two main objectives: first, to contextualize Sri Lankan cinema within the socio-cultural discourses that were discussed in the previous chapter, and secondly, to propose the basic idea of this thesis that silence was and is a mode of expression in the Sri Lankan cinema. When necessary, it also looks at contemporary

and parallel developments in other forms of art in an attempt to capture the exchanges among the arts. This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part charts the stereotypical of discourses found in popular cinema. The second is a discussion on the art-cinema, that was contemporary but at ideological crossroads with its popular cinema. In the third part, other forms of contemporary art are studied in order to draw thematic parallels with cinema after 1990s. The fourth and final part examines the tendency in the Sri Lankan cinema towards adopting 'silence' as a unique mode of expression. Through this one could perhaps see how the sociological and the political spheres interact with the aesthetic domain of the art cinema.

3.1. Popular cinema in Sri Lanka: as a propagator of dominant discourses of the post-independence era

Sri Lanka's cinema was able to enjoy the patronage of a large audience within a short period since the first sound film was made; it remained almost exclusively a 'popular' art during the 50s. It followed a quite rigid formula reflecting its affinities with the South Indian cinema. Dissanayake and Rathnavibhushana describe the period thus:

> By this time, a formula for popularity had been worked out by local filmmakers: melodrama, song and dance, bawdy humour, simple morals, faces of urban living, physical combat and so on figured prominently in this formula. (Dissanayake and Rathnavibushana 2000, p. 12)

The stereotypical worldview presented in these films look very distant from the 'reality' of the contemporary society. However, a microscopic investigation of them would reveal traces of the dominant socio-political ideologies that were discussed

in the previous chapter. This intimacy with the hegemonic discourses such as those dominated by 'Sinhala Nationalism' and 'Sinhala Buddhism' was a defining feature of the popular cinema, not only of in the 1950s, but in later times too. For instance, the increasingly popular 'religious and historical' and 'war' feature films as well as other genres of cinema in the popular strand deal with narratives that reconfirm the dominant discourses to various degrees. In the following section, dominant discourses of the popular cinema are charted, in order to be juxtaposed with those of art cinema in the second part of this chapter, so that the extent of dominance of hegemonic discourses in popular cinema will be distinctively mirrored by art cinema. Further, this juxtaposition will bring to light how the theme of this study 'silence' dovetails with outcomes of deviance control measures, such as censorship, protest, rejection, and negligence whenever a contemporary work of art, including cinema, try to transcend the borders of those dominant discursive spaces.

3.1.1. 'Tainted' urban woman and the 'pure' rural woman

A student of the early Sinhala films is overwhelmed by their ideological baggage, especially, anti-colonial rhetoric marking the last phase of colonial rule and claims of Sinhala-Buddhist identity that was on the rise in the post-independent 'Ceylon'. In this period of rediscovering identities, the film narratives projected a polarised image of two major groups namely, on the one hand, those who were in close contact with the coloniser or their culture (urban, sometimes Christian-'converts', rich and powerful)and on the other, those with traditional Sinhala-Buddhist rural values, mostly presented as poor and 'authentic' people. This binary opposition was brought on screen, more often than not, through a melodramatic depiction of a

female lead character pair, one urban and 'tainted' versus rural and 'pure/uncorrupted' (Jayamanne 1992).[2]

The Melodramatic genre of Sri Lankan popular cinema helped build up the depiction of impoverished and doomed peasant life. The peasant girl's humbleness in accepting her ill-fate imposed upon her by her rich and sophisticated urban counterpart won the audience's sympathy. The 'innocent village girl', a mythical or idealised cultural category, reinforced a culture's value system in relation to femininity defined within the melodramatic genre of that cinema. Wimal Dissanayake identifies this sympathy for suffering within the Buddhist ethos:

> The idea of suffering is central to the narrative discourse in Sinhalese melodramas. Indeed, the trope of suffering underpins the narrative discourse and subtends the metaphoric system of the film. In a country in which the Buddhist ethos pervades, it is hardly surprising that the idea of suffering should strike a deep cord of response in moviegoers. After all, according to Buddhism, suffering (dukkha) is the inescapable fact of life. (Dissanayake 2010, p.178)

The 'tainted' urban girl on screen since the first decade was representing a perceived class of locals who aspired to resemble the coloniser by adopting his lifestyle, religion and culture. In opposition to that culture 'stained by mingling with the Western', the rural and the peasant were upheld as the place where 'uncorrupted', or 'pure' moral standard are preserved. Thus, the simplistic dichotomy: the village is the sanctuary of Sinhala-Buddhist cultural ethos, and the city is the place of the hybrid character, who transgressed the norms of the order of caste and purity of Buddhism by embracing Christianity. Therefore, in these narratives, the city is equated with decadence, vanity and cultural erosion

(Uyangoda 1993, p. 8). The 'real' nationalist essence, it was claimed, was to be found in the village and its ways of life. In fact, this notion of hybridized urban life was depicted as an extension of the colonial cultural forms and power discourses. Breaking away from the earlier tradition of silencing the feminine, the female body became a contested site in the post-independence era, in the above dichotomy of 'tainted urban woman' embracing the norms and morals of the outsiders versus the 'unspoiled rural woman', who is a 'conveyer of pristine Sinhala-Buddhist traditions'. In a way, this depiction also set Buddhism against Christianity in the popular imagination.

> Look at how our cinema showed the image of the woman on the screen. It was very stereotypical. The image of the 'good woman' was inseparable from the rural agrarian concept 'village, temple, and the lake'. On the other hand, the urban woman was depicted as a 'black character', sophisticated, ill-behaved, and taken to smoking and drinking, dances with men and visits to pubs, and loses on sexuality. On the contrary, the village woman was a 'white character' shown mostly as the simple, well-mannered, charming, polite, and respectable. A film like *'Pitisara Kella'* (Rural Lass) was emblematic of this trend of the 50s of depicting a stereotypical and incomplete imagery. (Fonseka and Yusoff 2012, p.7)

Contrary to Jayamanne's proposition of this to be an incomplete image, one may also consider it as an integral and complete image when placed against the larger canvass of Buddhism nationalism associated with the village, temple, and the agrarian culture. It is a complete image in relation to the contemporary ideology. This image of the 'hewn to fit the norm' Buddhist village girl was the ultimate affirmative response to the demand made by the forces Sinhala Nationalism and Sinhala Buddhism that defined the colour and the intensity of the post-independent social change. The humility of the village girl was emblematic of a 'non-protesting'

society 'passively accepting' its fate. The many characters of this type contributed to generalize the imagery of the submissive rural women as a social reality (Wijethunga 2000, p. 4). Consequently, the image of the acquiescent lead characters dovetailed with the propagated tenets of 'non-confrontation' and submission by Sinhala Nationalism and Sinhala Buddhism. It is this ideological complacency that makes the depiction of the 'submissive' young rural woman a 'complete' image.

In the films of the 50s and 60s, it is this ideology of the unspoiled rural woman that was to be promulgated even in the titles of popular films.[3] The image of the village and its dwellers created an atmosphere that idolized Sinhala-Buddhist Nationalism. The lead female character, a young village woman, always associated with connotations of submissiveness managed to idolize the hegemonic narrative, with or without direct symbolism such as of Buddhist temples.

> In the early days, this female idol role was played by Punya Heendeniya. She walks and talks so mild, that she never looks up when she speaks. She looked timid and soft. Her demeanour was emblematic of modesty and diffidence of a young woman. However, behind this seemingly innocent imagery unleashed a highly stereotyped ideological narrative. (Wijethunga 2000, p.7)

On the social vision suggested by the stereotypical depiction of the rural woman by Punya Heendeniya and her contemporaries and later actresses who replaced her in the role, Rani Savarimuttu proposes that: 'Characters she played lifted the image of the Sinhala rural women and limited her characterization to that of an untainted rural woman who embodied country values' (Mahindapala 2012, p. 16). This is why, in the film *Parasathu Mal* (Another Man's flowers 1966, Gamini Fonseka), two sexually lose female characters *None* and *Maggi* are depicted as doomed while

Kamala is presented as the role model of the good woman. *Bonny Mahaththaya*, the errant male lead, seduces the former two but idolizes and yearns for *Kamala* as the only woman he truly falls in love with. This is one instance of Punya Heendeniya's presentation of a 'dignified' Sinhala woman. Not only her parents and close circle of associates, who appreciate her physical and cultural purity, but also the likes of *Bonny Mahaththaya* who propose the antithesis to her conduct, idealizes her ways. Therefore, the discourse *Kamala* represents becomes the dominant one, as everybody unanimously subscribe to it, including the deviants. By extension of this discourse, the mother becomes the *Raththaran Amma* (Mother is Golden, 1975, Dharmasri Kaldera) and *Gedara Budun Amma* (Mother is the Buddha at Home, 1988, Roy de Silva), or the wife becomes the *Sundara Birinda* (Graceful Wife, 1960, Yoganathan) and *Semiya Birindage Deviyaya* (Husband is Wife's God, 1964, W.M.S. Thampoe). What gets negated in these stereotypes is not only the real representation of the Sri Lankan woman, but the potential for multiple readings that might have been able to transcend Sinhalese-Buddhist hegemonic discourse.

3.1.2. From Film Hero to War-Hero

Whenever the narrative representing the hegemonic discourse ushered by the 'unblemished village woman' stereotype is challenged, it is common in Sinhala cinema for a restorer to emerge and re-establish order. Without exception, this was a male hero in the lead role. In the earlier cinema, even if he did or did not fit into the role model of a hero, he would invariably manage to save his mother, and

girlfriend/ spouse (or both). In turn, he protects not only his family and loved ones, but also the hegemonic discourse shaped by Sinhalese-Buddhism I discussed above.

The hero in the popular cinema was not a combatant with a progressive socio-political view, but an usher and the guardian of Sinhalese-Buddhist value system. These screen heroes never stood against the hegemonic ideology that was unleashed to repress Tamils or other ethnic groups. Nor were they to transform into critical reviewers of their environs.

Though it was common for Sri Lankan popular cinema to have a male hero who emerges victoriously towards the latter part of the narrative, there was, specially in the decade of 1960, a sub-genre of films, where a hyperactive and harsh action hero would take violence back to its perpetrators or villains. *Ranmuthuduwa* (Pearl Island, 1962, Mike Wilson) and *Getawarayo* (Lads, 1964, Mike Wilson), laid the foundation for this hyperactive heroic male lead, whom the audiences were to see in many films, in some of which the title was a compound of *Suraya* (an equivalent of 'hero').[4] Most of these heroes were unassailable challengers of injustice and unfairness, as the promotion campaigns and hoardings frequently proposed and fore-grounded. The hero's rich adversary, who represents evil and loses at the end of an 'Aristotelian narrative', would suggest that the competing parties are the corrupt rich and the good-hearted poor. However, what the hero restores and protects after a life-risking battle are the perceived long-standing traditions and ideals.

Over a few decades on screen, this restorer-hero role expanded to be manifested in a wider range of domains such as the religion, kingdom, motherland and war. In these wider domains, when the role of the hero transformed to that of a 'protector-King' or a 'war-hero', the earlier role of the 'mother' shifted to protecting 'the motherland'. To connotatively associate 'mother' with 'motherland' is common in Sri Lanka's parlance in both Tamil and Sinhala. Further, as the concept of 'motherland' recalls one of religion and state, the role shift from the 'hero' affirms linear connection to the central discourse.

This new strand marking the shift in the role of the hero came at a time of the end of the war with the LTTE. It can be divided into three categories: 'historical epics', 'religious tales', and 'war-pleasure films'.[5] The historical and the religious films combined to superimpose the Sinhala centric historical narration of the *Mahavamsa* on the modern concept of the nation state. This was achieved by bringing on screen a series of historical characters and events that have a direct impact on the way the concept of nation is understood by the common man. In this attempt, Kings most of whom were great patronisers of the temple such as *Siri Perakum, Dutugemunu, Pandukabhaya, Devanampiyathissa,* and *Vijaya* or important religious events such as 'the Advent of *Mahinda*', or 'the Acquisition of the Buddha's Tooth Relic' were depicted.[6] There are also occasions such as the making of the film *Kusa Paba* (Sunil Ariyarathne, 2012), from the Buddha's previous birth (*Jathaka*) stories to reaffirm the contemporary nationalistic discourse. These films collectively contributed to negate the claims Tamils have to the land and isolated Tamils' nationalistic aspirations and proposed the 'Army soldier' as the unquestionable protector of both

Sinhala, as well as Tamil populations. In a way, all these films separated the war from the political and cultural causes of it.

These post-war films claimed the Sinhalese-Buddhist state's superiority as absolute. Instead of looking back at the past with a critical and open mind to learn from the past, these films concentrated on re-establishing the very myths and ideologies that were at the core of the ethnic divide. These films were very successful among the Sinhala speaking audiences they targeted, in terms of income as well as propagation and transmission of hegemonic ideology. Their success was hardly challenged and their ideological stances were hardly questioned.[7]

> For these filmmakers (?), the only evil that disrupted the beatitude of the Sri Lankan in the days of the Kings was foreign invasions; and the invaders were the Tamils. Or it was a Moor wife of a Sinhala King or her son. Sinhala Kings have always ruled their country exemplarily and never exploited or looted their subjects, nor raped their women. It is for this reason that the Tamils and the Muslims, who have been a menace to the happiness of the Sinhala people, deserve to be eliminated. Sinhalese have to outplay the Tamils in conspiracies, which is their own game. That and that only would assure a happy life for the indigenous Sinhalese-Buddhists. (Wickramarathna 2013).

This hateful philosophy worked hard to popularize a simplistic and divisional worldview, in which all non-Sinhalese-Buddhists were labelled despicable 'others'. These ideologies that received institutional support of religion and state education system asserted themselves to the status that the hegemonic view of history is definitive and irreplaceable.[8] Instead of looking with an open mind at Tamil and Muslim communities, or reviewing Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism critically, or resisting caste-based discrimination or executive-presidency centred political system that borders authoritarianism, these films were busy reassuring the very

agents of oppression, i.e. Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism, all-powerful political leadership and military victories.

The film *Siri Perakum* represents a burgeoning trend in 'Sinhala cinema' than what can be called a 'Sri Lankan cinema'. In other words, it is the cinema that glorifies a history of the Sinhala people, which they were assumed to have, based on the Vamsa records…These films are about the so-called 'golden era' which we were supposed to have enjoyed. We do not want to reproach that bountiful era. However, our problem is the misappropriation of that era's claimed prosperity to glorify a Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalist line of thought in order to cheat, misinform, and fool our people to believe in vanity. (Senevi 2013).

The films in the 'war-pleasure' trend subsided the traumatic experience of the war and clinically exalted the 'majority-victory' and justification of bloodshed on the screen. In most these films, with footage from original archival shots from the last phase of the war, the army was depicted singularly as a brave, adventurous, and a victorious bunch of soldiers, while the LTTE was demeaned to a villainous, guilty and cowardly group of gunmen and women.[9] The one-dimensional narrative that was to mark the Sinhala cinema since independence can be seen to continue even after six decades of freedom, as this cinema does not deviate from the ideologies promulgated since the earliest of Sinhala cinema, without opening its eye to the root causes of the three decade long war.

'war-pleasure' cinema's latent structure not only served the Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism, but also elevated the president in power at the time of the end of war to a position of pre-colonial King, and re-established the *Mahavamsa* notion of a unified Sinhalese-Buddhist state under one flag. As an extreme example of this, the audience was to see in the film *Selvam* (2010, Sanjaya Leelarathna), a large hoarding carrying a picture of the President rising over a Buddhist shrine house

under construction, somewhere in the Northern Province. This hegemonic discourse combines and places the ruling power and religion above everything else to mute and push aside all other forms of alternative discourses. It searches all historical and current ingredients to fabricate a seamless narrative disregarding many academic studies that shed light on this issue (Wijebandara 2011).

3.2. Approaches in Art-cinema: as concealed social struggle

The need to break away from the tradition of duplicating Indian films was first articulated by the nationalists in 1950s in a bid to protect the 'indigenous' culture from decay. Then, in 1960s, the leftists saw the need for an independent local cinema to prevent anti-revolutionary invasions (Uyangoda 1993, p. 9). These arguments, however, did not provide an impetus for an art cinema. The pioneer in developing Sri Lanka's art cinema, Lester James Peiris, on the other hand, was not a direct sympathiser of any of the above arguments. This first step of his long career in Art cinema was the film '*Rekhawa*' (Line of Destiny, 1956, Lester James Peiris) that marked the first distinct turning point in Sri Lankan cinema.[10] Though it was not a wonder in terms of narrative, the film's unmistakable style that stood squarely against the rising tide of popular cinema, brought about a revolutionary change, and shed light on the path for the realistic cinema that was to come. [11]

The two films, *Rekhawa* and *Gam Peraliya* (The Changing Village, 1963, Lester James Peiris), the films that became role models for a lot of later filmmakers, have to be identified as first attempts made in artistic cinema to challenge the then dominant meta-narrative.[12] Though *Rekhawa* is often seen as a work that came to

light within the social change of the year 1956, that social change later developed along the lines that strengthened the Sinhalese-Buddhist core, making traffic between the two strands increasingly rare and difficult. Therefore, interestingly, *Rekhawa* despite being released the same year as the '56 Revolution', was, in fact, to launch a trend of counter reading of the power-centres.

The new realistic trend in the films of the 1970s (that *Rekhawa* inaugurated), transcended the bounds of being 'another reading about the village' and discussed critically wider issues related to urban life and youth, contextualizing them in the contemporary socio-political atmosphere that problematized the stereotypical representations of them. As the themes of these 1970s films engaged directly with major contemporary issues such as unemployment, sexual oppression, youth unrest, and economic disparity, they kept a good distance from the Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalistic myths and claims.

However, developments in the political and social spheres in the country assured that the art-cinema was not allowed a free voice, especially when it tried to criticize society. Checks and controls on filmmakers' expression and intermittent censorship meant that zones of silence were left intact further.

3.2.1. The Village in '*Rekhawa*' and 'Caste' in '*Gamperaliya*'

In making *Rekhawa*, critics point out that (Mahindapala 2012, p. 12), was not able to penetrate all the drawbacks and prejudices that the cinematic narratives of the time were imbued with. However, *Rekhawa* did introduce the Sri Lankan audiences to real and lively realistic characters, whom they had not encountered in

contemporary cinema. The lead character, the boy called Sena, saves the wallet of the wandering performer from muggers of his own village, Siriyala. It is his own father, who tries to trick the people and make a quick buck, having heard about Sena possessing 'some miraculous healing powers'. Finally, calling him possessed by a devil, Sena gets beaten and chased away from the village by the same villagers who loved him and at first. Peiris brought on screen despicable villagers, who are not usually represented.

The popular cinema's hero overcomes caste and other repressive social institutions that the upper strata of the society enjoyed to keep the lower strata under immense and inescapable pressure to victoriously walk away with upper class the love of his heart, the story *Gamperaliya* brings us is an antithesis. *Piyal*'s proposal to Nanda, or lower class to the upper, is rejected with disgust by *Kaisaruwatthe Muhandiram*, very powerful father of the heroin, saying "who gives a woman *to them*?" *Hulawali* (The Untouchable Maid, 1976, W.A.B. De Silva), *Sathweni Dawasa* (The Seventh Day, 1981, Hemasiri Sellapperuma) and *Mihidum Sihina* (Misty Dreams, 1982, Daya Wimalaweera) were films in the popular strand and engaged the theme of caste pressure.[13] However, their discussion was limited to those of the lowest strata of caste hierarchy and was somewhat clichéd. Dharmasiri Bandaranayake engaged this theme much later in two art house films, *Bhawa Duka* (Sorrow of Existence, 1997) and *Bhawa Karma* (Karma of Existence, 1997) but had refrained from mentioning names that denoted the caste of the characters. This self-imposed censorship is parallel to the general practice of not talking about caste in public, thereby reassuring the power of the upper class. The hegemonic power of the upper

strata of the society was, therefore, symbolically depicted by the huge mansion those powerful people lived in.[14] It is no wonder that the above mentioned famous discriminatory utterance by *Nanda*'s father "who gives a woman *to them*?" was said within the high walls of a mansion.

The art cinema pioneered by Peiris had often to deal with such aspects of the society, which remained unspoken of. On the other hand, the popular genre cinema was silent on the increasingly aggravating social issues in the society. When caste oppression was a launching pad for youth insurrection, Sinhala-Buddhism became the main rudder in deciding the political and social direction. The Tamil and other ethnic groups were displaced beyond recovery from the centre of power, and all these were bringing about so many social and political volatilities as a cumulative effect of all the above, the popular cinema remained, more or less, in a state of limbo.

'*Rekhawa*' proposed to its audience that the real world was actually a far different place than how the popular films depicted it. *Gamperaliya* also supported this view. In stark contrast to the genre-defining song of the house-aids, "*Nonage ale – Ge meda sale, Api dennage ale – Methana kussiya mulle*" (Madam's loves is the living room, Love of the two of us – is in the corner of the kitchen), *Gamperaliya* brings a completely different narrative. Not even the servants at Nanda's mansion, but even her first husband felt the difficulties of the changing economy and poverty. Post-independence social changes were dissolving the feudal structures and superimposing the power of money on it. This period was full of discontinuities and

instabilities, which a new generation of film makers after Peiris, from the decade of 70 were trying to address.

3.2.2. Denim and Bellbottom – Beer and Whisky

Dharmasena Pathiraja and his contemporaries, Vasantha Obeysekere and Dharmasiri Bandaranayake collectively lead a concerted attempt to break away from the formulaic and the static cinema to explore new dynamics. However, the developments in politics and arts did not allow this young and vibrant generation to finish the sentence they were writing in their language of film. Reviewing Pathiraja's career, the book published by Sumathy Sivamohan on the occasion of Pathiraja's 2010 film was titled '*The Incomplete Sentence*'. It signed off a silenced zone of cinema that was yet to be explored or was never completed writing.

Pathiraja's first feature film, *Ahas Gawwa* (One League of Sky, 1974) brought a new narrative style to cinema and presented three female characters, all of whom had lost their identity.[15] They were representing the identity search, not of merely random characters, but every person in a society beaten up by ideology.

> Most of these films did not attract much of an audience. Yet, they were all very close reflections of the immense social injustice and the insurrection in 1971 that had a lot to do with those injustices (Gunarathna 1995, p. 41).

Due to the youth insurrection of 1971 as well as the huge political insecurities in both the South and North of Sri Lanka, everyday life deteriorated. Social hierarchies burned and corroded both upper and lower classes at a heightened rate. It is in this context that Pathiraja's critical understanding of the village as a place very much in

opposition to the stereotypical image depicted in popular cinema marks a new direction in cinematic engagement in the country.

> There are temples and big pagodas in the villages. Yet, the villagers distil alcoholic spirits, they gamble, and they commit murders too. Pure and Innocent Sinhala-Buddhist village is a myth. I don't believe in that dogma. (Mihindukula 2000, p.15).

'We are like thrown away twigs of castor oil plants, no roots, but sprout.' (Thilakasena 1985, p. 30) is a line that Chandare utters, the male lead of Dharmasena Pathiraja's '*Para Dige'* (On the Run, 1980).[16] Chandare is a vehicle seizer who is forced to marry his girlfriend, without the slightest preparation, because he could not find the money for her to have an abortion. When she asks him 'Chandare, where are we to go now?', when they came out of the registrar's office into a busy street in Colombo, Chandare replies 'I don't know' (ibid, p. 56). His answer does not change, even though, the question was asked a few times right through the film. The film ends with a long shot of this newly married couple vanishing amidst the bustle of thousands of men, women and vehicles.

The social, cultural and economic complexities of the post-independence Sri Lanka were best represented in cinema in the film narratives of Chandare and others of that generation. Since the colonizers left the country, the different but convergent attempts to rebuild a state as perceived to have existed as claimed by *Mahavamsa* myths have failed and left us a country of which the direction or the destiny is left to mere chance. In the bipolarity of village versus the city, neither had won nor had either place produced a safe haven for the youth. The beer-drinking, clubbing, and urban life was equally insecure as the village of unemployment, coercion and feudal

censure. The bellbottom and jeans counterpart of the sarong and sari wearing rural youth had all become mere twigs of rootless but sprouting castor oil plant.

Pathiraja's films show his understanding of this cultural construct. In his film language, previous hitherto existing symbolism of bellbottoms and denim trousers, as well as beer and whisky shatter. In his depiction of the urban in '*Soldadu Unnahe*' (Old Soldier, 1981), it was possible for the 'mad soldier', the drunkard, and pickpocket and the prostitute to talk about a new 'freedom and sovereignty of people', which associated wide-ranging political connotations among its audience.

3.2.3 Zones of silence

In the preface to "Incomplete Sentence´ referred to above, the editors state that:

> It is an aspect of the tragic history of our country that two of his films *Shelton and Kanthi* (1982) and O*pen Prison Camp (*Sirakandauru, 1983) were lost when the studios were burnt down in the riots of July 83 (Sumathy and Others 2009, p x).

What was thus lost was not only two films of Pathiraja, a leading film director of the second generation, but also two perceptive explorations into the contemporary socio-political space in Sri Lankan cinema. They were readings that could have been positioned outside the discourse on authoritarianism. We also lost indirectly cinematic and artistic creations that directly empowered the geopolitical history of Sri Lanka including July '83 and other definitive events and the socio-political character before, after and in between. Such phases have to be treated as zones of silence.

Although art cinema shifted the monolithic format of the generic formula films it did not address issues of authoritarianism but stayed outside them except on very rare occasions. There was only a small number of Sri Lankan films that directly addressed "Sinhala nationalism and Sinhala Buddhism". The films that did address issues of race, caste and religion that fundamentally altered the social landscape were subjected to stringent censorship.[17] Similarly, the protests and interventions that arose from within social groups were vitiated.[18] Mainstream film criticism very often, in the early stages, urged filmmakers to go in search of the "real national Sinhala culture" in the face of criticism that "wrong impressions" should not be created in the minds of foreign audiences (Silva 1986, p27). However, what was of utmost importance was the self-censorship that filmmakers imposed upon themselves.

Working against the accepted social discourse, many filmmakers of their own volition restricted their important characters and incidents within boundaries and forestalled adverse responses and comments rather than going against the stream. The director of *Duhulu Malak* (Floating Flower, 1976, Vijaya Dharma Sri) demolished the myth of the traditional aristocratic lady by portraying her sexual behavior but ended his film with a conclusion that protected aristocratic values.[19] Similar "caution" can be observed in many instances in contemporary films. This is also a marked feature of Sri Lankan films that can be described as "middle path" films.[20] Sunil Ariyarathne's film *Sarungale* (The Kite, 1979) was the first film that threw this caution to the winds and dealt with the ethnic conflict.[21] It discussed the problems faced by the Tamils and also focused on the caste phenomenon.[22]

After *Sarungale* and up until 1990 not a single film had talked about this subject

of great importance.[23] The subject of Tamil caste was not the theme of any Tamil

film apart from *Ponmani* (1977) directed by Dharmasena Pathiraja, Ariyaratne's

colleague of the Department of Sinhala in Jaffna University.[24] Tamil cinema

dealing with the social problems and sensitivities faced by the Tamils is a subject

falling within the Zones of Silence. In 1962, Henry Chandrawansa produced

Samudayam but fifty years later only 28 Tamil films had been produced. Among

them, only one Tamil film was produced after the 1983 riots.

> The Tamil problem of the past raised its head as an ethnic conflict that
> merged close with the thoughts of the people. It tolled the death knell of
> Tamil cinema as it breathed its last in the face of death. (Galappathi 1997, p
> 25).

The cinema from a female perspective was the other point of view that received

little space for expression. Despite the fact that the first female director started work

as early as 1967, to date there have been only four Sri Lankan women feature

filmmakers in the industry.[25] Consequently, there has been only a very limited

women's perspective in the cinema. Just as the Sri Lanka's female voice has been

muted in the country's socio-cultural history, so has it been in the cinema too.

What is the background to the emergence of these zones of silence? It can be

observed that the relationship between cinema and state was one factor that

definitely contributed to the silence. It is also clear that the common crises faced by

the national cinema throughout the Asian region impacted on Sri Lankan cinema

both overtly and covertly. It was suicidal to bring to the screen narratives that

harmed the production, distribution   and screening. This, in turn, impacted on

financial investments in production. The industry that disregarded authoritarian forces did so at a price. The industry therefore persistently depended on the patronage of a state that espoused 'Sinhala-Buddhist-nationalism' and thus screened films that fitted into that mindset.

Exploring this background is important for understanding the post-1990 generation of Sri Lankan cinema and their work. On the one hand, in the presence of a community molded by a philosophy based on a long *Mahavamsa* tradition it was complex undertaking to engage in creative work. On the other hand, releasing to society their narratives under the censorship, obstacles and restrictions imposed by an establishment created by the same philosophy is also a difficult undertaking. This is the onerous task the new generation post-1990 is handling. Before identifying the scope and dimensions of that task let us examine the reach and positions of contemporary arts.

3.3 Other Arts of the post-Independence era: controlled and deviant forms

Ahalya Sathkunaratnam in the introduction to her doctoral thesis submitted to the University of California in 2009 titled *Moving bodies, navigating conflict: practicing Bharata Natyam in Colombo, Sri Lanka* stated that in January 2007 when the civil war was at its height, even the city of Colombo experienced the fear of war.[26] Sathkunaratnam describes a magnificent pageant of Bharatha Natyam conducted in a hall in Colombo (Satkunaratnam 2009, p. 1). Susan Reed begins her article titled *Performing respectability: The Berava, middle-class nationalism, and the classicization of Kandyan dance in Sri Lanka*, in the May 2002 issue of the

scholarly journal, Cultural Anthropology, with the statement that when the well-known Kandyan dancer *Nittawela Gunaya* died, one of his sons set fire to his father's set of masks and some of the other paraphernalia of his father's profession (Reed 2002, P. 246).[27]

On the face of it, these two incidents do not show a direct connection relating to dance but they do reflect a confluence of a number of unmatched symbols relating to Sri Lankan arts. Both writers in their introductory statements provide their respective theses, but their symbols acquire enhanced relevance covering many more dimensions. The post-Independence social milieu in which the arts outside cinema operated is examined in the following section in light of the "magnificence of the Bharata Dance" and the "burning of the set of masks".

3.3.1 Magnificent Bharata Dance: its superficial thesis and contradictory antithesis

Sathkunaratnam continues her description of the Bharata Dance scene thus:

> Behind them lies a brightly coloured panel of religious architecture: a minaret of a mosque, a stupa of a Buddhist temple, a gopuram of a Hindu kovil or temple and a steeple of a Christian church (Satkunaratnam 2009. p. 1).

Although Bharata Natya (Dance) has no connection with Buddhism, Islam or Christianity, this pageant incorporates them on the stage of the auditorium. Bharata Dance has only Hindu connections, but its core value system has apparently been destroyed in the face of the 'Sinhala-Buddhist' ethos of a nationalist regime that perpetrates the myth of religious co-existence. The Sinhala nationalist paradigm has

continuously discounted other religions, and the display of Buddhist symbols alongside other religious symbols on the same stage is, to our knowledge, outside the pale of reality. At the end of colonial rule and also in the post-colonial era most of the Sinhala artistic creations were nurtured by Sinhala nationalism. They preached not multi-religious co-existence but a monolithic model.

Poetry, fiction, music, art, drama, and dance all reflected an anti-colonial mindset from the last decades of the 20th century as a fixed ideology. It rejected everything to do with the colonial ruler and always espoused Sinhala nationalism and Sinhala Buddhism. There were sporadic attempts in some creative fields to break away from this ideological stranglehold, but the status quo persisted. Ultimately, while literature, art and dance showed some awakening, other creative aspects remained entrenched in their set ways.

At the end of the 19th century, the novel, which emerged as the main literary mode, evinced a definite anti-religious propagandist stance. Early novelists Piyadasa Sirisena and Simon Silva wrote in response to Christian propagandist publications. Christian preacher Isaac de Silva wrote to the magazine *Ruvan Maldam* (Garlands of Gems) an article titled *The Blessed Family and the Cursed Family*. Two publications, which can be considered the first works of Sinhala fiction, were 'The Tragedy of a Family that Rejected Christianity' and 'The Triumph of a Family that Accepted Christianity'. Piyadasa Sirisena's first novel *Blessed Marriage or Jayatissa and Rosalin* was a rejoinder to them. Before long, the religious controversy engaged in by Sirisena and other novelists became part of Sinhala

nationalism. The following is an excerpt from the writings of W.A. de Silva of that persuasion:

> The behaviour of the Tamils is a fine spectacle for her. She likes the group of Sinhalese. Those who are crushed among a group of Sinhalese suffer only the oppression of being crushed. One who is crushed by a group of Tamils has no protection from the stench of Tamil perspiration, too. (Jayatunga 2009, p. 152)

Writing on the aims and forms of those writers of his persuasion, Sirisena observes in the introduction to his book titled *Yantham Gelawuna* (Just Escaped) in 1934:

> There are many books we have written in order to direct the Sinhalese along the proper path. Although "New Writing" is a term currently used, there is nothing new in our writings outside matters of righteous concern. (Sirisena 1934)

After Independence, our foremost writer who joined the ranks of Sinhala nationalism was Martin Wickremasinghe.[28] Although Wickremasinghe was not an ardent adherent of the nationalist campaign, just as Sarachchandra adopted a nationalist outlook in his drama, Sinhala poet and ideologue of Sinhala nationalism of recent times, Gunadasa Amarasekera writes as follows about Wickremasinghe.[29]

> After Anagarika Dharmapala, the Sinhalese scholar and thinker who thought about Sinhalese nationalism was Martin Wickremasinghe. Without exaggeration, he spent his entire creative lifetime teaching the Sinhalese people about our national identity, our national ethos and our national culture. (Amarasekera 1988, p. 13)

The contrast between village and city in *Gamperaliya* and the encounter of a young man from a Sinhala Buddhist family with the modernization phenomenon in *Viragaya* (Renunciation) cannot be positioned in the philosophy of nationalism but that is what happened in practice. The indigenous drama from *kolam* and *sokari* underwent change down the ages and after much research on these forms, with *Maname* and *Sinhabahu*, Sarachchandra ushered in a new dramatic genre.[30]

Amarasekera goes on to say:

> In the father-son relationship in *Sinhabahu*, our nationalist psyche was roused. Sarachchandra achieves triumphant success in this regard by dramatizing the great bond between a Sinhala father and a Sinhala son. The arrow fails to strike as long as the father has loving-kindness within his heart for his son. (ibid, p 11)

In more recent times, renowned writer Simon Nawagattegama and dramatist of fame Sugathapala de Silva were denied their rightful place by the forces of nationalism.[31] Wickremasinghe and Sarachchandra enjoyed the privilege of having their books prescribed in the school curriculum and thus gaining recognition for long decades.[32] Sri Lankan artistic appreciation and literary criticism were relegated This search for the reality of nationalism impacted on other aspects of art, and creative writers had a hard time liberating themselves from it and moving forward.

In the second decade of the 20th century, the *43 Group* through the anti-colonial Paris school of thought and the Sri Lankan art group with the patronage of the British government used their paint brush against scholasticism and Orientalism.[33] The school of thought that emerged from both the Ceylon Arts Council and *Shanthi Nikethan* of India worked from a nationalist standpoint and the progressive sections of the *43 Group* were subservient to politics. When modernism came into the ken all three groups followed a village centered school of thought. (Weerasinghe 1997, p. 253)

Although the "Magnificent Bharatha Dance" and its staging in 2007 in a city hall that Sathkunaratnam mentions is a visual symbol, its linguistic and religious component of nationalism is not a portrayal of reality. The nationalism that

developed over several decades and its impact on art is reflected in the following radio song and similar expressions that display a narrow linearity that exhibits the inability to transcend narrow domestic walls:

> My daughter, born into the honourable Sinhala race,
> Harken to the counsel I give you.
>
> Right, Mother tell me.
>
> From ancient times, we wore the beautiful saree;
> The saree, not the short frock, is what suits you, my daughter.
>
> True, true, how true!
>
> Nothing but household work, sewing and knitting;
> Playing tennis and dancing are not for you, my daughter.
>
> Of what use are foreign ways for us?
>
> Work all day long with a happy heart;
> Do not go arm in arm with young men in the dark.
>
> That is ugly for us, Sinhalese. [34]

This is a good example of an exhortation to a life within the narrow confines of nationalism, devoid of women's liberation, love, play and the arts only limited to religion and the home.

3.3.2 "Burning the set of masks": against caste, tribal and religious confines

Reed focuses her research on the social and political background and realities of the burning of the set of masks of *Nittawela Gunaya*.[35] When *Gunaya* died in 1979, it was 31 years after Independence and seven years after Sri Lanka became a republic. However, *Gunaya*'s son burns his father's masks because the caste connotations of Sri Lankan dance had not changed even at that point in time. It was not only a

protest against the hegemonic rule over the *Berava* who was a servant caste but also a statement of the underdeveloped status of society even after three decades of independence.

> *For even as their aesthetic legacy, the Kandyan dance, has been elevated as a national symbol of Sri Lanka, the traditional dancers and their families have increasingly become marginalized within the sphere of nationalist popular culture. At least, this is part of the history.* (Reed 2002, p. 246)

In the record of the power of the Sinhalese history of Sri Lanka, the figure of the Kandyan dancer with his mask occupies pride of place. He is accorded power and prestige in currency note, lottery ticket and postal stamp as memento and plaque and welcome to foreigners (ibid. 248), However, when these items that signify Sinhalese nationalism are forgotten, what the artiste of the *Berava* caste receives is different. Reed provides evidence to show that in religious and social observances and practices he is belittled by Buddhist monks, the high caste, and artistes. (ibid. pp. 262-266)

Not only in the traditional arts but in other arts and in the case of secondary artistes too this kind of extremism had to be endlessly faced. This was confined not only to caste but also to religion and race and not only to Kandyan mask dances but also to many other art forms. The hegemony of the socially entrenched powerful *Govigama* caste and of the Sinhala-Buddhist sector determined the boundaries of artistic expression.

Traditional dance including Kandyan and low country dance was condemned to only follow traditional paths owing to this hegemonic oppression. After the 1956

revolution, Kandyan Dancing was included in the school curriculum and artistes of all castes found open ground. However, Sinhala nationalism had its say on the political stage as a result of which mainly upper caste artistes were involved in the training of students of dance in school and university.[36]

Although not to the same extent as dance, Sri Lankan music too faced many crises in the post-colonial era. Because of the anti-colonial movement, in the Anagarika Dharmapala era the piano and *baila* and *kaffringa* were despised. The search was for Arya Sinhala music and they found in *nadagam* and traditional dance forms a North Indian influence. *Shanti Nikethan* and *Bathkande* played their part in the decades of the forties and fifties. Only Sunil Shantha and a few others fell in line.[37]

Premasiri Khemadasa made a special contribution in this respect.[38] He moved away from the nationalist groove and enriched the metre of Sri Lankan music. Through cantatas such as *Pirinivan Mangallaya* and *Nidan Mankollaya* and operas such as *Manasa Vila* and *Agni* he opened fresh progressive vistas. His music direction of the films *Golu Hadavatha* (Silent Heart, 1968, Lester James Pieris) and *Nidhanaya* (The Treasure, 1972, Lester James Pieris) devoid of a single song and *Bambaru Aewith* (Wasps are here, 1978, Dharmasena Pathiraja*)* gave new meaning to music.

However, Khemadasa's was a lone endeavour that failed to completely destroy the nationalist dimension or break down the barriers caused by racism and casteism. Only identities hidden in individual characters and concepts came through in zones of silence.

> William D. Albert Perera, perhaps the most popular Oriental music violinist and singer since the 1940's, promptly dropped his Samkara[foreign] name,

which drew attention to his Karave heritage as a Moratuwa furniture tycoon's son, and continued as Amaradeva. (De Mel, 2006, 197)[39]

How this social extremism intruded into the space of poetry (and the lyrical creations based on it) and of theatre is open to investigation. Traditional poetic literature and foreign poetic traditions imbibed during the colonial era came under the impact of social, political and cultural realities and can be traced to Sinhala poetry. In other literary features, the critical approach was absorbed into poetry and the development of lyrics of a later stage enriched the music.[40] Similarly, in drama, cinema, music and dance the opportunities for social communication were minimal. Tamil and Islamic art received space through literature, especially poetry.

Drama did not give in to the prevalent structural limitations imposed by social crises and tragedies in a time of sensitivity to them. Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, political campaigns and the dreadful tragedies of the civil war engaged the attention of dramatists. Ranjani Obeyesekera deals with the intervention of drama in her *Sri Lankan Theatre in a Time of Terror* where she investigates drama, especially satire, in regard to the silence that communicates what cannot be communicated in silence that is audible.

> Silenced by the increasingly authoritarian government's control of the press and media and by the threat of personal violence from a multiplicity of sources around them, the Sri Lankan literate, highly politicized population turned to the theatre as both a reflection and critical commentary on their socio-political world. There, in the safety and anonymity of a darkened auditorium, they could hear the unspeakable spoken, through often symbolic terms, see violence, however brutal, re-enacted in a distanced, contained, safe space, and laugh at the pretensions and (transient) powers of petty politicians and figures in authority. (Obeyesekera 1999, p. 150)

Torture chambers, disappearances, the massacre of youths and nationalist politics were all portrayed in the theatre of the 1980's, thanks to the impact of the various readings of the drama of the decades from the sixties to the seventies. After 1990, the age of the cinema which is the subject of our investigation experienced a political awakening. The following extract is from a powerful drama, also not lacking in humour:

> Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Amarawansa. I am a labourer. I live in Milleniya in Horana. This incident begins in the time of terror in 1989. At that time, my elder son was studying for his GCE Advanced Level examination. Oh, my God, he suddenly disappeared. (On the verge of tears). The boy has disappeared. (Brief silence). Now, my wife and I are making a frantic search for our boy everywhere. We feel we are going mad. We went to every temple, church and kovil that was known to have special powers to help us in our plight.[41] (Sighs), Oh God, don't they say there are 33 million gods. That means a country where there are more gods than people. None of them was able to even find a hair of our son. We have spent more on looking for him than on feeding him and bringing him up. (Karunaratne 2001, p. 229)[42]

This mediation in drama was not confined to the auditorium only. It reached the street. The Street Theatre Group was active during all the periods of terror and dealt with political concerns in a simple form.[43] The street drama group called *Open street theatre group* produced a drama, '*Cyanide*', where two characters faced each other, one called '*Sinhalaya…*' (Singhalese) and the other '*Demala...*' (Tamil). In its climax, both characters meet with their death. The group leader addresses the audience with these words: 'Ladies and gentlemen, please help us by putting these two dead bodies into a manure bag… to help me attend a round table conference.' (Fonseka 2010, p. 107)

Poetry covered many themes and brought social mediation under its ken in a significant way. From Amarasekera, who introduced the concept of national identity, to Parakrama Kodituwakku and others who adopted a militant stance and from the aesthetic poet Mahagama Sekera to Siri Gunasinghe, who wrote on complex social meanings, and A.M. Nuhman, who represented the minorities, made use of the communicative space.[44] Nuhman writes on the burning of the Jaffna library thus:

> In a recent dream of mine
> The Buddha died of gunshot wounds.
> Soldiers in civilian clothes
> Had shot him.
> His noble body lay in a pool of blood
> On the steps leading to the Jaffna library. (Cassim 2006)

The title of the poem is *The Massacre of the Buddha.* Ethnic, caste and religious conflicts were grist to the poets' mill. Ratna Sri Wijesinghe writes about the fisher caste in the low country south and extremist conflicts associated with them[45]. 'We came from the low country to offer flowers, Holy Dalada come down to the lower floor,' he wrote while Mahinda Chandrasekera wrote about the discriminatory treatment of pilgrims to the Sacred Bo Tree:[46]

> We gathered firewood, we kept awake at night,
> We kept vigil by a camp fire.
> Why do you treat us differently?
> Jayasri Lord Almighty? (Pieris, 1998) [47]

The burning of *Nittawela Gunaya's* set of masks by his son was a personal protest against the caste hierarchy, but there were no serious questions asked about why

other social divisions had been ignored. In many cases, dissent was confined to the

matter in hand. The burning was kept under wraps and much of the space for

burning was itself burnt out. Ratna Sri Wijesinghe had to write:

> The convent in Mannar was open
> And I came along the sandy road.
> Near the Pesali junction
> At the foot of the kaneru tree
> You were withered and fallen,
> Blood flowed from the chest.
>
> Don't get up – get up and go where?
> So Kovalan? so Kovalan?
>
> There is no country to burn…
> the country has finished burning. (Wijesinghe, 18) [48]

3.4. New generation cinema of the nineties

'Cinesith', the publication of the Asian Film Centre, devoted its double issue 41/42

(2001) to theme of the *Third Revolution in Sri Lanka Cinema*[49] Asoka Handagama

is singled out as the pioneer film director in this revolution. Sri Lanka's film icon

Dr. Lester James Peiris writes about Handagama's *This is My Moon* in these words:

> This is how today's young generation views their country. Sri Lanka now is
> very different from the Sri Lanka we knew then. A new flow of images is
> needed to present the love, hate, politics, interpersonal relations, sex, values
> and ethics of contemporary Sri Lankan society. Asoka not only projects this
> new imagery but also challenges the established Asian film language.
> (Wijetunga 2001, p. 4)

Peiris wrote at the time the People's Bank, a leading Sri Lankan bank, had decided

to withdraw the loan promised to Handagama on the grounds that Lester James

Pieris his film was an inferior production.[50]   The Head of the National Film Corporation subjected the film to a review of its creative quality.

The credit for the cinema revolution after 1990 belongs not entirely to Handagama, but he certainly played the most prominent role in it. Other directors who figures in constructing a new idiom and imagery for the screen in the changed Sri Lanka that Peiris refers to above are firstly Prasanna Vithanage together with Buddhi Keerthisena, Sudath Mahadiulwewa. Sudath Devapriya. Prasanna Jayakody, Linton Semage, Inoka Sathyangani and Satyajith Maitipe. To this list must be added Vimukthi Jayasundera followed by Sanjeewa Pushpakumara, Chintana Dharmadasa, Udaya Dharmawardena, Aruna Jayawardena and Athula Liyanage.

3.4.1. Is it a different Sri Lanka that we meet in 1990?

What is the different Sri Lanka that Peiris talks about vis a vis Handagama? In the decade of the 90s Sri Lankan society enters into a time of bitterness and hate on the one hand and new social and political aspirations on the other. Disappearances, abduction and murder in addition to tyre pyres and corpses on either side of the road and on river banks that signalled the period of terror of 1988-89 were coming to an end but not entirely. The terrorism and bloodletting of the end of the eighties were under control. A social wave of opinion to end UNP rule, and discourses on human rights and peace signified a changed Sri Lanka.

A powerful political change took place in the first two years following the assassination of President Ranasinghe Premadasa during whose presidency the Indian Peace Keeping Forces were sent away and the northern battlefield assumed

a different complexion.[51] Also, the election of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga as President two years later altered the political landscape[52]. The quest for peace and the associated *Sudu Nelum* Movement, the Peace Train, anti-war organizations, the *Sadhu Jana Rava* Concerts and petitions signed to urge an end to war were prominent elements of change.[53] The 'University Dons for Human Rights' organization of the University of Jaffna which published 'Someone else's War' and other similar interventions considerably altered the Tamil social perspective (Silva 2000, p. 35). It showed that the Tamils suffered the greatest degree of oppression at the hands of the LTTE.

The 'Mothers' Front', a formidable organization questioned the terror in the South, the excavation of the mass grave at *Suriyakanda* under the leadership of Presidential candidate Kumaratunga and the revelations of the background to it were powerful protests against terrorism and drew the attention of and created space for artistes and civil society activists.[54]

A new avenue was opened for communication particularly through art, installation art and drama. The new approaches to art acquired the status of a popular 1990's trend and a repository of memories of terror (Perera 2007, p.1). Chandragupta Thenuwara in his *Barrelism* an art and installation exhibition initiated a social discourse that extended to *Neo-Barrelism* and *Post Barrelism.*[55]

 Kingsley Gunatilleka's *Year Planner* portrayed a public lament over the impossibility of planning community life because of the war.[56] These artistic creations and the work of other young painters were outstanding contributions to

the discourse but what captured the public imagination most was the installation titled *The Shrine of the Innocents* displayed along the road to the Parliament.

Attention was drawn not only to the epitaph for students killed in Embilipitiya and buried in a mass grave at *Suriyakanda* but to all other disappeared people. The site for the memorial near the parliament and state patronage were provided on a background that looked at the past with sympathy and acknowledgment of wrongdoing.[57]

Interpreting is this Lester James Peiris's "changed Sri Lanka" as correct may be plausible but after many years the disappearances and terror take on a new significance in terms of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. Kumaratunga's peace effort was not successful. Nor did the discourses on peace take on new meaning. Furthermore, the promise made to both the north and south to abolish the executive presidency remained a broken promise. The murderer of the Suriyakanda victims were not brought to justice and the arts were suppressed.

Together with the resurgence of art in the nineties, an erstwhile group of dramatists took to the stage. Dharmasiri Bandaranayake, who figured in theatre in the decades of the seventies and eighties, staged Euripides' *The Trojan Woman* in the nineties. Although anti-war drama did not come under the censorship of the state the "citizens of Troy" came under a series of severe threats to life and limb. Director Bandaranayake faced endless death threats. Goons entered his music director's house and cut off his and his wife's hair, threatened them with death and tried to set fire to the house. They were compelled to flee the country for safety. The house of

popular actress Anoja Weerasinghe, who played the role of *Hecabe*, was completely destroyed. The media referred to the assailants as "unknown persons".[58]

After the decade of the nineties, Handagama and his generation did not use the camera to portray a "changed" Sri Lanka but to protest the evil of the post-colonial period that pursued Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism without end. Up to the end of the nineties, they used the medium both fearlessly and powerfully. After 2000, however, there were some variations, showing a parallel with the end of the civil war in 2009.

3.4.2 The new post-1990 cinema generation: Who are they?

Lester James Peiris, who marked the first turning point in cinema in1956, continued his film career in the nineties. Although critics opined that after his films of the early eighties showed a slight decline his prowess in the use of the medium remained unchallenged. In the 1970s, the film looked at both village and city, at youth and life. Dharmasena Pathiraja pioneers of the new Sri Lankan cinema of the 1970's reappeared on the scene in the 1990s with *Mathuyam Davasa* (Someday in Future, 1998) while his contemporaries Vasantha Obeyesekera and Dharmasiri Bandaranayake were also still in business.[59] However, it was the new generation of film-makers that took the limelight.

They were young people who had not only grown up in an environment of fear and hallucination but also experienced Sinhala nationalism and Sinhala-Buddhism and their political and social consequences of the 1970s emergency rule, war and revolt. It was not a known cinema world that they handled.

At the turn of the century, the young generation of Sri Lankan filmmakers gained attention first and foremost for their frank stance on the bloody ethnic conflict that besieged their country as well as their attempts to tackle the taboo topics that until then could not be addressed on the big screen. (ibid, p. 152).

Ice on Fire a black and white film of 1992 brought Prasanna Vithanage into the limelight as the pioneer of this group. Later he directed six films in all of which he explored the hidden recesses of the human mind and the human conscience. However, his films also had political undertones and overtones in his characters that were firmly positioned in Sri Lanka's social milieu. Thus, many of those characters did not ultimately fit into the 'formula' film category. They, on the surface, appeared to emerge from the prevailing social environment but on deeper examination, it is clear that they represented the socio-political structure. The background of several of his films is the war, but almost all their narratives reside outside the war. As much as lover, mistress, wife, mother, daughter, prostitute and sister, his other characters including the woman contacted on the telephone are portrayed in the characters he created. Also, among his male characters are father, husband, brother, lover, secret lover, politician, labourer, journalist and soldier and also the nondescript character. Without offence to aesthetics his close up, medium and distant shots were connected to his narrative. In many of his films, he incorporated the techniques of colour tone and scene building foremost is his sensitivity to Sri Lanka's geopolitics and religion.

In Sri Lanka, religion is not merely a way of life, to a full life. You are fully aware that Buddhism is firmly institutionalized and that the sangha is in the forefront of the Sinhala majoritarian movement. Therefore, Buddhism is an institution using various strategies. (Phillips 2000, p. 79)

Asoka Handagama is the other principal filmmaker of the same period. He began his film career with "*Chanda Kinnari*" (1994) and followed it up with six other films.[60] He broke away from tradition and follows an identity of his own. At times (T*his is my Moon*) his image frame is static. Though a character moves out of the frame, the camera never follows the character. At other times (*Flying with One Wing*) all his characters speak outside the frame. Within the frame, they never utter a single word. What is noteworthy is that unlike Vithanage's characters, Handagama's characters and incidents do not reach surrealism. Handagama debunks the hegemonic readings about village and religion.

Dharshana Liyanage observes that, his early films show image grammar of aesthetics of illusion and loneliness of non-life in a world without life, society and reality (Liyanage 2001, p. 45). At the time that Liyanage wrote the civil war had gone on for twenty years and there was hope building up of an end to the revolt. It was perfectly natural to write as Liyanage did. However, Handagama's "non-life" was more and more invisible than the life without life, society and reality than the invisible than the Sinhala nationalism that marginalized life. Handagama who looked for a cinema idiom that suited this context finds still frames and dialogue outside the frame (Handagama 2001, p. 14).

Besides Handagama and Vithanage, there are several other filmmakers who focused their lens on contemporary social events and characters before the end of the nineties. Boodee Keerthisena in his *Sihina Desayen* (Veils of Maya, 1996) deals with people who live in the midst of death and in *Mille Soya* (In Search of Mille,

2004) explores youth who flee a regime in collapse to foreign dream worlds. In Sudath Devapriya's *Tharanaya* (The Crossing, 1997) we meet the growing multi-culturalism and the Sri Lankan social history associated with it and in *Udu Gam Yaamaya* (Against the Tide, 2007) the 88-89 terror. Linton Semage of the same generation directed two films. The first was *Padadya* (Bastard, 1999), which deals with the nationalist hype that destroys the village. The second was *Mage Vam Atha* (My Left Hand, 2001), which compels us to review family and inter-personal relations. Inoka Sathyangani in *Sulang Kirilli* (The Wing Bird, 2003) portray the plight of women in a market-driven economy while Sudath Mahadiulwewa in his *Sudu, Kalu saha Alu* (Shades of Grey, 2005) examines lives affected by civil war and its geopolitics. Satyajith Maitipe's *Bora Diya Pokuna* (The Lotus Pond, 2004) looks at life from the standpoint of Buddhist philosophy.

After Vithanage and Handagama, in an interesting first film *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land, 2005) by Vimukthi Jayasundera brings to the screen the subject of sexual stress resulting from the war. He uses images never used before in Sinhala cinema –long range shots, ultra-distant shots and light and shade that form a Tharakovsky-type series of frames. This was the first Sinhala film to be awarded the Camera d'Or award at the Cannes Film Festival. Jayasundera's second film *Ahasin Vaeteyi* (Between Two Worlds, 2009) explores the life on an island.

The second stage of films of the generation that begins with Jayasundera in the 90s consists of artistic films directed by several new filmmakers. Prasanna Jayakody's *Sankara* (2007) is related to Buddhist Philosophy. Udaya Dharmawardana's and Chintana Dharmadasa's *How I wonder what you are* (2009) is related to nihilism

and gives a new dimension to the cinema while Sanjeeva Pushpakumara's *Igillena Maluwo* (Flying Fish, 2011) turns to the self-image that faces the turmoil of war.[61]

From Vithanage to Pushpakumara the work of several filmmakers appeared in the two decades after 1990. Their work taken separately and together reveals special creative features.

This generation has faced more social and state opposition than did Peiris and Pathiraja. Vithanage had to have recourse to the law to have his *Death on a Full Moon Day* released. Handagama faced several crises. Discourse on homosexuality faced opposition from moralists, scenes showing characters smoking faced opposition from the anti-tobacco lobby, *Flying with One Wing* met with severe opposition while *Letter of Fire* remains censored. With the Cannes award in hand and without discourse on the war, Jayasundera's *Forsaken Land* faced attempts from outside to prevent it being screened while *Between Two Worlds* was kept away from auditoriums. Discourse on the war and related matters brought death threats to Vithanage, Handagama, Jayasundara and Mahadiulwewa. Maitipe's film has not yet been released for public screening. The director of *Flying Fish* as well as its stars, was questioned by the Criminal Investigation Department over the use of army uniforms without permission. The film has been banned from being shown abroad and all copies of the film have been taken into custody.

Sri Lankan films are constantly subjected to sanctions by the state. But it is noteworthy that in the face of it all, the majority of these filmmakers continue to

produce their films. The patronage for such films needs to be studied in order to discover their other strengths.

The war and youth revolts are the leading themes of this generation of filmmakers. There are secondary themes too of a wide range such as religion, personality, gender and political and economic matters. While this generation's interests range from the use of aesthetic cinema to new experimental configuring of the cinematic image, the younger group are engaged in studies in cinema schools or through universities. This generation has also received more international recognition and more awards than the previous decade.

The characters in several of Vithanage's creations are close to being in a state of limbo or choose to be silent on given occasions. In Handagama's films, many characters do not engage in dialogue. In the works of members of the early group such as Devapriya and Semage and of the second group the silences disturb the auditorium. If characters are not silent, both the absence of music and external noise, vastly empty frames and the absence of action and also the non-fulfilment of final expectations add to the silence directly or indirectly.

Conclusion

In its short history, Sri Lankan cinema has traversed a long road past definite time periods which filmmakers had some awareness of and on which they based their creations. From the beginning of this thesis, we were able to understand the response of the cinema to Sinhala nationalism and Sinhala Buddhism. The cinema at times collapsed under the social realities which besieged the world of

contemporary art. After the 1990s, Sri Lankan film took a new turn. The trauma of war, destruction and death and the heap of broken socio-economic and cultural images were the creative themes of the new generation. On what basis can we recognize silence in them as a common phenomenon? That is the subject of the rest of this thesis.

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[1] Although the first local silent film named "*Rajakeeya Wickramaya*" was exhibited in Singapore after it was completed in 1925, it is mentioned that it could not be exhibited in Sri Lanka as it was destroyed due to a sudden fire (Dissanayake and Ratnavibhushana 2000). The first Sinhala talkie film, '*Kadawunu Poronduwa*' was exhibited on January 21, 1947.

[2] For her post-graduate research, Laleen Jayamanne has seen 102 out of the 400 Sri Lankan films produced in the early stages and she has categorized 78 out of them as genre cinematic works. According to her classification, 35 of them are based on marriage and ending with the settlement of problems arising in married life. She has identified 30 films as 'boy- girl' type stories. She points out that 13 more films which do not come under that category are of a genre nature. Only the balance 24 films are author cinematic works. See: Jayamanne, Laleen. 1992. Hunger for Images, Myths of Femininity in Sri Lankan cinema 1947 – 1989. South Asia Bulletin, Vol. Xn No. 1 (Spring - 1992).

[3] *Amma* (Mother, 1939, Sirisena Wimalaweera), *Gambada Sundaree* (Wijegunaratna, 1950), 'Seedevi' (Wimalaweera, 1951), 'Pitisara Kella' (Wimalaweera, 1953), 'Sujatha' (Sundaram, 1953), 'Purusha Rathnaya' (Nagarajan, 1959), 'Sundara Birinda' (Yehanandan, 1960) and 'Samiya Birindage Deviyaya' (Thampo, 1964) are some examples.

[4] *Sooraya* means a term equivalent to 'hero'. 'Soorayangeth Sooraya' (Lenin Morayas, 1969), 'Hatara Denama Soorayo, (Neil Rupasinghe, 1971), 'Api Kawadath Soorayo (Wimaladasa Perera, 1971), 'Edath Sooraya Adath Sooraya' (Lenin Morayas, 1972) and 'Sooraya Soorayamai' (Lenin Morayas, 1975) are prominent among such 'Sooraya' (hero) films.

[5] 'Abha' (2008), based on the childhood of King Panudukhabhaya, produced by Jackson Anthony, Sugath Samarakone's 'Wijaya Kuveni' (2010), based on the arrival of Wijaya to Sri Lanka and Somaratna Disanayake's 'Siri Parakum' (2013), based on the childhood of King Parakramabahu, have been exhibited and Jayantha Chandrasiri's 'Maharaja Gemunu', based on the story of King Dutta Gamini Abhaya, Sugath Samarakone's 'Ehelapola Kumarihamy', based on the story of the last King of Sri Lanka and Sudath Rohana's 'Senkadagala Rajasinghe' are scheduled to be screened in the future. Sanath Abeysekara's 'Mahindagamanaya' (2011), narrating the story regarding the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka, Sunil Ariyaratna's 'Kusa Paba' [2012], based on Kusa Jataka story, Saman Weeraman's 'Sri Siddhartha Gautama' (2013), based on the life of Buddha and Sanath Abeysekaa's 'Siri Dalada Gamanaya' (2014), the story regarding the bringing of the Sacred Tooth Relics to Sri Lanka, have now been exhibited and preparations are being made to produce some more films on Buddhist stories. War related films began with Thushara Peiris's 'Prabhakaran' (2008). Chandram Ratnam's 'Alimankada' (2009), Benett Ratnayake's 'Ira Handa Yata' (2010),

Sanjaya Leelaratna's 'Selvam' (2011), Sarath Weerasekara's 'Gamini' (2011) and Buddhi Keerthisena's 'Matha' (2011), are considered as creations coming under the category of war related films.

6 'Siri Parakum' is a film regarding the childhood of King Parakarmabahu 11, a powerful king of the Dambadeniya era. The film 'Daladagamanaya' is regarding an important event in the history of Sri Lanka, the bringing of the Sacred Tooth Relic of Buddha to the island. It is said that King Subha Seeva, who reigned in the kingdom of Kalinga in 371 A.D., sent the Sacred Relic through his daughter and son-in-law, 'Dantha and Hemamala', as it was feared that it could be robbed by enemies.

7 Majority of these films received state patronage and blessings of the Maha Sanga and state officials, including the President. With state intervention and approval, the Ministry of Education had to make it compulsory for school children to see such films.

8 During the recent past, the trend in the Sri Lankan films has been to produce and exhibit films related to historical and religious stories with the approval and sponsorship of the Buddhist clergy and for the Ministry of Education to recommend them for school children.

9 The civil war ended on May 18, 2009 with the LTTE organization being militarily defeated after fierce fighting in Nandikadal and Wellamulliwaikkal (Mulativu coastal area). Many LTTE leaders, including Prabakaran, were killed in the conflict.

10 'Rekava', a film containing the story of a small boy named Sena who lived in the village called Siriyala, his family and some other families living in the village, was recommended for the Palme d'Or award at the 1957 Cannes film festival.

11 In 'Rekawa' there were many progressive characteristics such as 'going to the village' or filming on realistic locations without going to Indian studios, using characters and dialogues familiar to the ordinary people of this country, not adhering to the accepted formulas and plainness, natural setting, natural lights, amateur actors etc. (Wickramage, 2000; Gunawardhane, 2005).

12 G.D.L.Perera ('Sama' – 1965, 'Dahasak Situwili' – 1968), Siri Gunasinha ('Sath Samudura' – 1967), Mahagama Sekara ('Tun Man Handiya' – 1970), Gamini Fonseka ('Parasathu Mal' – 1966), Tissa Liyanasooriya ('Sara Vita' – 1965). 'Gamperaliya', the first out of the trilogy of Martin Wickramasinhe, renowned Sri Lankan novelist, contains a story regarding a Muhandiram family in the southern coastal area of Sri Lanka. It depicts the rise of capitalism and the fading away of the feudal system. This film, which was produced without usual songs and by leaving all formula characteristics, represented films festivals such as Cannes and Moscow and at the New Delhi International film festival, it won the Golden Head of Palenque award.

13 Nanda and Piyal are main characters in *Gam Peraliya*. Nanda's father, Kaisaruwaththe Muhandiram rejected Piyal's marriage proposal on Nanda as Piyal is not from there caste.

14 Walawwa is the residence of members of high-class families. In her work 'Sinhala cinemawa magagedarin polowata', Sunila Abeysekara states that from the film 'Gamperaliya' up to 90s, the film makers have been using the wallawa, caste and class differences. According to her, the

filmmaker who brings Walawwa symbol more realistically, utterly fails in depicting the residence of those of oppressed and low caste classes. She alleges that Walawwa became a permanent feature in quality films of later years. See: Sinhala Cinemawa Mahagedarin Maha Polowata?, Sunila Abeysekara, Chitrapata October – December magazine ; pages 14 – 19.

[15] "Ahas Gawwa' is a film about three young men who are pressurized amidst the struggle for survival. The film which does not have a specific story, depicts employment problems, sexual abuses etc. of youth.

[16] 'Para Dige' was Pathiraja's fifth creation. In this film   the girlfriend of a young named Chandare who 'cease' vehicles, becomes pregnant suddenly and it shows their attempts to find money for an abortion. Not receiving any money after several attempts, Chandare gets married to his girlfriend. After signing the marriage registration, once again they turn to the road.

[17] Under the Public Performance Act, passed in 1951 and improved by amendments made in 1961, 1964 and 1969, all films (and all dramas) should be viewed by a Public Performance Board appointed by the Government and a certificate should be issued before being exhibited for the public. (Galappaththi, 1997, 76). Public Performance Board comprises   a maximum of 25 members. Inspector General of Police, National Information Bureau, Criminal Investigation Department, Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Higher Education are represented on this Board.

[18] Removing from exhibiting the first Sri Lankan cartoon film, 'Dutu Gemunu', produced by Givantha Arthasad after it was released to cinema halls for a day or two, is still a mystery. It is a creation based on the life of King Dutu Gemunu, for whom Mahawamsa has given the highest coverage.

[19] 'Duhulu Malak', directed by Wijaya Dharma Sri, was a film which received wide criticisms and much viewer attention. In it we see the manner in which Nilu, a young mother with one child carries on, unknown to the husband (a conservative minded university lecturer), a secret love affair with a young man.

[20] 'Meda Mawatha' (Middle Road) is a trend which started from the latter part of the 1970 decade. Presenting artistic films whilst using some aspects of the popular stream to some extent were the characteristics of such films. Although it was argued that viewers who are not attracted by films which discussed more complex situations are attracted toward such mixed films, what was more significant was the story value.

[21] 'Sarungale' was a film directed by Sunil Ariyaratna. It is the story of a Tamil government servant, named Nadarajah. When it was revealed that his younger sister, Thangamani, has fallen in love with Rasan, a youth of a different caste, she committed suicide and thereafter Naddaraja leaves the north. He falls in love with Susila, daughter of Karunaratna, one of his Sinhala collogues and he realizes that caste is more important factor than the nationality. But his nationality was against him. Nadarajah, who was fervently against   nationalism, was killed by Sinhala extremists.

[22] In this context, H.D.Premaratna's films were very prominent. Devini Gamana, which questioned the traditional Sri Lankan social process of examining female purity and the marriage and dowry systems, Sikuru Liya, which discussed the problems faced by women in male dominated society and

Palama Yata, which discussed the struggles of the oppressed classes living in the suburbs of the capital city, are creations which had simple endings.

[23] Although the crisis in the north was mentioned in 'Kotiwalgaya', produced by Gamini Fonseka in 1986, its story does not permit in-depth discussions about the conflict. It contains a story of a Police officer, who has to survive amidst the armed struggle in the north and among the ordinary people of the area and also amidst the decadent political system in the south.

[24] Dharmasena Pathiraja and Sunil Ariyaratna served in the Faculty of Sinhala in the University of Jaffna and with their experience in the north, both of them have made films regarding the lives of the Tamil people. 'Ponmanee' directed by Dharmasena Pathirajah, is recognized as a prominent creation in the Sri Lankan Tamil cinema. It is about Tamil community life, which is connected to the caste system.

[25] Ruby de Mel directing a film named 'Pipena Kumudu' in 1967, was the beginning of the women's cinema in Sri Lanka. After that, feature films were produced only by Sumithra Peiris, Malini Fonseka and Inoka Sathyangani.

[26] Bharatha Natya is a dance form with a South Indian Tamil origin. This dancing tradition, which was discovered from the northern area of Sri Lanka, later became very popular among both Tamil and Sinhala communities.

[27] The art of dancing in Sri Lanka falls mainly into three categories of dance forms, as Kandyan, low country, and Sabragamuwa and Kandyan dancing is regarded as the foremost dancing form of the county. Dancing was considered as a task entrusted to a low caste known as Berawa and the recognition given to the dancer was very low. *Niththawela Gunaya* (1905–1979) was a distinguished dancer belonging to that caste. *'Ves Thattuwa'* is a set of ornaments worn by competent Kandyan dancers. To wear it, the art of dancing should be properly mastered and 'Ves' ornament would be ceremonially placed on the head of the dancer as a symbol of dancing, after he has mastered the art of dancing.

[28] Martin Wickramasinghe (1890–1976) is considered as the main symbol of Sinhala literature. "Gam Peraliya', produced by Lester James Peiris, was based on a novel of the same name written by Wickramasinghe. He made an immense contribution to the post-colonial literature of Sri Lanka. His trilogy including 'Gamperaliya', 'Kaliyugaya' and 'Yganthaya' and 'Viragaya' were the most prominent among his works.

[29] It is very important to consider Ediriweera Sarathchandra (1914 – 1996) mainly as a dramatist. He was also a novelist, poet, and a literary critic. He was an academician who played a leading role in the Peradeniya School, based on the Peradeniya University. 'Maname' and 'Sinhabahu', considered as unique creations among them Sri Lanka stage plays, were produced by him. Gunadasa Amarasekara (1929) is a literalist. Professionally, he is a dentist. What is mainly taken into consideration in this context is the concept called 'Jathika Chintanaya', he presented in the 1970 decade. 'Jathika Chintanaya', presented by Amarasekara was later brought forward by Nalin De Silva with certain alterations. Its main theme is Sinhala Nationalism.

[30] '*Maname*', which was presented in 1956, was a drama with a stylistic tradition. It was a result of research on dancing forms including *Nadagam* of Sri Lanka, Japanese and Indian dance forms and

Tamil *Thirikuththu*. Its story is based on a *Jataka* story named, *Chulla Dhanuddha Jataka*. 'Sinhabahu' drama belongs to the same tradition. The story of 'Sinahabahu', which was first produced in 1962, is based on the *Mahwamsa* legend regarding the origin of the Sinhala race. Its main character is prince *Sinhabahu*, whose mother was a royal princess and father was a lion. According to the legend, *Sinhabahu* was the father of prince *Vijaya*.

[31] Simon Navagttegama is recognized as the most progressive writer of the post-colonial era. Navagaththegama, who was also a short story writer, a novelist, and a dramatist, applied the realistic themes of western literature for creations of Sinhala literature, in an exemplary manner. Critics are of the view that impacts of post-modernism could be identified in his later works. When the stylistic drama tradition introduced by Sarathchandra, was being recognized as the local drama tradition, Sugathapala De Silva was successful in uplifting local natural acting standards to an optimum level and to present translations of foreign dramas in a more effective manner with Sri Lankan social and political contents.

[32] Martin Wickramasingha's '*Gamperliya*' was for a long time the literary work recommended for the subject of Sinhala for advanced level. Subsequently, it was replaced by Ediriweera Sarathchandra's '*Malagiya Aththo*' and '*Maname*'. Thereafter, '*Pemmatho Jayathi Soko*', a work by Sarthchandra himself, is being used for the study of Sinhala Drama.

[33] '43 Group' was an Arts Society of high-class personnel, formed when Sri Lanka was getting nearer to independence. This society, which was formed on the initiatives of Lionel Wend, comprised Harry Peiris, Ivan Peiris, George Keyt, Justin Deraniyagala, Obrei Collete, George Classen, L.T.P. Manjusri, Jefry Beling and Richard Gabriel. Majority of them were Sri Lankan with European origin.

[34] A song which was broadcast over Radio Ceylon in the 1950 decade. It was sung by Rukmani Devi and Priceela Opatha.

[35] This is only a brief research paper by Susan Reed. The Thesis titled "*The Transformation of Ritual and Dance in Sri Lanka: Kohombakankariya and Kandyan Dance*" on Kohombakankariya, which is the main performance feature of the Kandyan Dance, brings out many valuable facts regarding its social and cultural aspects.

[36] In several universities including the University of Visual and Performing Arts (This was established in the 90 decade. Prior to that, it was known as the Fine Arts Institution), dancing can be followed as a main subject. This social difference are seen among the staff members also.

[37] Although Sunil Shantha came after studying music at the Bhatkande University, he is recognized as a person who, after joining the Radio Ceylon, looked at local, Indian and western musical traditions with a research perspective.

[38] Premasiri Kemadasa (1937 – 2008), who was known by the honorary name of 'Kemadasa Master', was the person who placed Indian, western, folk music as well as other forms of music on Sri Lankan music. He displayed his music in a wide range including music for films, dramas, tele dramas, opera, and cantata.

[39] Amaradeva (1927) is one of Sri Lanka's foremost singers. He is a musician and an instrumentalist. Was educated at the Bathkande University.

[40] Although lyric writing can be considered as a single aspect of literature, it is the writers of poems who take a prominent place in the Sri Lankan song literature. At the time the song was established in the Sri Lankan identity, the poem was in a more advanced literary level and the song directly became it shadow.

[41] Throughout the island, there are many religious places of worship, which it is said have the powers to solve various problems by mysterious methods. When there are problems which cannot be solved, even Buddhists and those of other religions going to such places, is commonly seen.

[42] Dhananjaya Karunaratna is a young dramatist. This dialogue is from the short drama, named 'Last bus eke kathawa'. It is presented to the audience as an act by a single actor, portraying the grievance of a drunkard whom he met in the last bus.

[43] This is Sri Lankas' oldest street drama. It was launched in about the year1975 and the producer was Gamini Hatthtotuwegama.

[44] Parakkrama Kodituwakku is a distinguished Sinhala poet. He belongs to the poetic generation which came up in the 1970 decade Mahagama Sekara (1929 – 1976) was the most distinguished Sri Lankan poet of the 1960 – 1970 decade. Sekara, who was also an artist, a novelist and a lyricist, produced 'Tunmanhandiya' (1970), based on a novel written by himself, as his only film. Siri Gunasinha (1925) is a Sinhala poet of the highest grade, a novelist, art historian and an art critic. His only cinematic work was 'Sath Samudura' (1967). Professor M.A.Nuhman, who is a well- known Tamil poet is also a short story writer, a critic and a leading intellectual. He was the former Dean of the faculty of Tamil Language in the University of Peradeniya. Among the poetic works written by him, 'Thaththamarum Perarhalum' (grandfathers and grandchildren), 'Aliya Nilalhal' (un-fading shadows) and 'Malei Natakal warum' (rainy days will come) are prominent.

[45] Rathna Sri Wijesingha is a poet, a literalist and a lyricist.

[46] Mahinda Chandrasekara is a lyricist, poet who comes from Rajarata (Anuradhapura) area.

[47] The question raised by this writer, is connected to an incident of an extreme nature which is being done in the caste hierarchy of provincial areas. The poet who is referring to the Sacred Sri Mahabodhi, questions as to why the people who bring firewood throughout the night and make fires to protect the sacred Sri Mahabodiya from wild elephants and other hazards, are being kept at a distance on Poya days.

[48] Mannar is a small town situated on the north western coast. Kovalan is a Tamil name. It is the name of the main character in the story of the South Indian heroic poem, 'Seelappadikaram'. According to the story, Kovalan is killed on the suspicion that he has stolen the queen's slippers.

[49] Asian Film Centre is a Colombo centered cinematic organization. Researches, workshops and compiling of books are being carried out. 'Sinesith' is a cinema periodical which is being published by it from a long time.

[50] During the time (1999 – 2001) Tissa Abeysekara, a prominent cinema personnel, was the Chairman of the Film Corporation, a programme was implemented to provide loan facilities for quality films in order to assist in film productions. It was under it *Me Mage Sandai* obtained assistance from the Peoples Bank.

[51] Whilst walking during the 1992 May Day rally, President Pemadasa was killed by a bomb attack by a suicide bomber.

[52] Chandrika Bandaranaike was the daughter of Prime Minister S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike who was assassinated in 1959 and Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who came to power thereafter. Chandrika's husband was Vijaya Kumaratunga, popular actor and leftist politician, who was assassinated in the 88 – 89 era. The removal of the United National party which came into power in 1977 after a rule of 17 years, was then interpreted by anti-U.N.P. forces as the end of the 'Seventeen year curse'.

[53] *Peace Train* was proposed by the Canadian Development Agency and Neelan Thiruchelvam Trust. Although the train did not run up to Jaffana, the Peace Train traveled up to Vavuniya, which was then the terminal. A group named "Artistes for Peace", displayed messages and pictures regarding peace. Sadhu Jana Rava is a collection of one man song recitals by a singer named Jayathilaka Bndara, was presented in many areas of the island during the 90 decade.

[54] A mass grave with dead bodies of many school children of the Embilipitiya area, who were abducted and killed by government forces during the 1988 – 1989 era, was found at the top of the *Sooriyakanda* mountain.

[55] An artist of the 1980 decade in *barralism*, Thenuwara identifies the manner in which barrels used for boiling tar for road repairs in day to day life, has been mentioned in a hegemony statement. Thenuwara brings to the art gallery barrels camouflaged as road blockades during war times.

[56] Kingsley Gunathillake is another contemporary visual artist. What is found in *Year Planner* is a collection of rafters stolen from the Temple of the Tooth Relic, which was destroyed by LTTE attacks. Gunathilake who brings 12 burnt rafters of various levels, also kept a fax machine, which brought war news regularly.

[57] From the documents relevant to the monument, it is revealed that President Kumaratunga who helped to build the monument, was also the chief guest at the opening.

[58] Rukantha Gunathilake was the music director of this play. He is a popular singer and his wife, Chandraleka Perera is also a singer. Anoja Weerasinghe is an award winning actress.

[59] After 1990, Obeysekara produced seven films from *Marutaya* (1995) to *Aganthukaya* (2007). Bandaranayake brings *Bawa Duka* and *Bhawa Karma* in the year 2007.

[60] Handagama's second film, *Sanda Dadayama* (Moon Hunt, 1996) was not released for exhibition and his fifth creation, *Aksharaya* (2005) was prohibited. *Me Mage Sandai* (2000) was exhibited as

special shows on an alternative method with only one copy. His last creation was in the Tamil language.

[61] Vimukthi Jayasundara has followed courses on cinema at the Film and Television Institute of India and at Fresnoy in France while Chintana Dharmadasa has studied at the Lodz Film School in Poland. Sanjeewa Pushpakumara at present studying for a post-graduate degree on cinema at Chung –Ang University, South Korea.

Chapter Four

Listening to 'silent' characters: silence as "weapon"

> *" ... I'll come home as soon as I get my vacation.*
> *When I come this time, I want to*
> *complete the house and have*
> *your wedding.*
> *Tell that to father too. All in our unit are*
> *ready to go now. I've got to go too.*
> *May triple gems bless you all."*

> Bandara writes to his sister before being killed in the battle field.
> *(Death on a Full Moon Day,* 1997)

Introduction

There are many manifestations of silence in the post-1990 cinema. The rural landscape with dried up wasteland, empty little huts with the sparsest of furniture, mansions where silence and darkness reign, buildings destroyed in the war, the city marked by dark and silent spaces, little houses with discoloured walls, an atmosphere bereft of hope where nothing happens, form the mutely eloquent setting of many of these films. Above all the loudest silence comes from the characters who appear in them. It becomes apparent that there are unknown reasons for the silence of the characters which at first glance may simply seem like a deliberate refraining from angry words or perhaps due to not having a chance or reason to open one's mouth.

This chapter discusses the remarkably silent characters in two films; Wannihamy the father in *Purahanda Kaluwara* (Death on a Full Moon Day), and the 'Tamil

girl' in *Me Mage Sandayi* (This is My Moon).The shots and scenes of cinematic creations will be examined with a specific focus on the socio-cultural indicators of the silence. Their theoretical implications will also be drawn out. For the purpose of a more meaningful discussion other audio-visual creations in the narratives too will be included, where necessary.

The primary examination relates to identifying how silence makes a meaningful entry into the theoretical forms of the subject of socio-cultural silence. Especially in the face of the indestructible socio-political formations of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism and the hegemony of hierarchy of power, it seems that the characters who appear as subject citizens or the ruled under extremist forces, use silence as a defense mechanism. Accordingly, based on the theoretical frameworks suggested by Covarrubias & Windchief, and Glenn, an attempt is made to approach these character-bound silences that become the 'language', as well as the safe-zone of the powerless. This analysis addresses the question of how silence is responded to by those who encounter it in parallel to how a verbal expression receives its listener's verbal or physical response.

This discussion will make a few suggestions about silences in the Sinhala cinema of the 1990s. First, it would suggest that the character-bound silence is a silence proposed by the socio-cultural context of the characters, to which silence becomes a useful device. Actively using silence as a shield, some of these characters hide themselves from the hegemonic power asserted by Sinhala-Buddhist Nationalism and its political manifestations. It is further argued that, transcending the 'resistive silence' identified by Kennan Ferguson, these characters would use silence not only

as in resistance but as a medium 'active resistance' in the face of hegemonic socio-cultural expressions. In conclusion, I will suggest how silence becomes an 'active-resistive-response', in which silence is not only a defensive shield, but a weapon of aggression too.

This chapter has three main parts. The first presents an introduction to reading 'silent' characters and discusses the selection of the two main characters that are analysed in the following parts of the chapter. The second part takes us through a detailed discussion how the Tamil girl in Asoka Handagama's film *This is My Moon* adopts and employs a complex strategy of silence in the face of myriad obstacles she has to face. In the third, the breadth and the reach of the silence of Wannihamy in Prasanna Vithanage's *Death on a Full Moon Day* is explored as a mode of communication and a strategy when communication fails.

4.1 Reading Silent Characters

The Post 1990 generation of filmmakers presents many characters that engage with silence. The first encounter of these was Annette in the Prasanna Vithanage Film *Ice on Fire* (1992), who remains mostly silent against social castigation and legal allegations that she killed a child. Instead of claiming that she had no 'murderous intentions', she turns to silence in response. Vithanage's next films, *Dark Night of the Soul* (1996), *Walls Within* (1997), *Death on Full Moon Day* (1997), August *Sun* (2003), *Flowers of the Sky* (2008) and *With you Without You* (2012), present, without exception, characters that embody silence in some form or another. Silence or silent characters dominate or set the mood in recent films such as Ashoka

Handagama's *This is My Moon* (2000) and *A Letter of Fire* (2005), VImukthi Jayasundara's *The Forsaken Land* (2005) and *Between Two Worlds* (2009), Prasanna Jayakodi's *Introspection* (2006) Sanjeewa Pushpakumara's *Flying Fish* (2011), and Chinthana Dharamadasa and Udaya Dharamawardena's *How I Wonder What You Are* (2009). Among these films, it is in *This is My Moon* and *Death on a Full Moon Day* that we come across characters that engage fully with silence, which in turn meshes with the main narrative and its signifying processes.

The first of these characters is a Tamil girl without a name. The second is an old Sinhalese man by the name of 'Wannihamy'. Their engagement in silence is caused by the losses and dilemmas they experience. However, their losses are different from one another. The girl loses the reference to her 'identity'. For her, silence is a tool to come to terms with the loss of her identity due to factors beyond her control such as state power and contestations for it in a context of war and the breakdown of self-confidence in individuals caused by such struggles. The silence of Wannihamy is the loss of his voice. His voice gets muted and his right to be heard as a member of a democratic society is denied in a hegemonic cacophony. Faced with these, they adopt silence as a defensive shield and an evasive technique to save themselves from the outside world.

The broad reach of these two characters and their adept embodiment of silence warrants a chapter dedicated to them. Further, they provide an agency to issues related to the relationship between Sinhala and Tamil communities as well as of gender relationships. These two characters directly engage the outcomes of the armed conflict, which was the key outlet for the Sinhala Buddhist hegemonic

power. Finally, most themes present in other cinematic narratives associating silence, such as loss or dispossession of identity or voice and marginalisation are subtly meshed into the text and narrative style of these two characters; thereby becoming a rich site for theoretical and analytic explorations.

The Tamil girl in *This is My Moon* is denied her voice as well as identity because she loses contact with her language, culture, religion and family. The war had killed her people and her life. Even when she is in a no-war zone, she has no need to engage in any communications, as it implies the existence. Wannihamy goes through an identity crisis as a father when he encounters his son's premature death but sees no corpse to prove his death. He is unable to make sense of the world around him as his son dies before accomplishing the cultural duty that a father entrusts to his progeny in the Sinhala-Buddhist male-centric society and because the occurrences around him are events beyond his control or understanding.

The approaches to reading silent characters are informed by the two types of losses above. Given that both types of silences are based on socio-cultural factors, the silences themselves are socio-cultural.

4.2) The Tamil girl in *This is my Moon*: silence as a defensive shield

In our second chapter, we looked at *The Broken Palmyrah* as an analytical treatment of the ethnic war. It sums up the views of the Tamil people leaving the horrors of the war zone and going to the interior of the region to save their lives. One such view is as follows:

> We could no longer face the plight we were in. We decided to leave in the direction of the interior of the land…We left behind in their homes the old people who were too feeble to travel. (Hoole et al 2006, p. 33)

The opening scene of *This is My Moon* is in a medium close- up. It is a night during the civil war and we see a soldier inside a small bunker. Dressed in a camouflage uniform and carrying a machine gun in his hand, he listens to the stuttering gunfire outside. He dusts off the sand that falls on his body as the land shakes under the burst of fire. In the long shot that follows we see two other soldiers standing on either side of the seated soldier. In the still frame, we see them running away from the bunker and we hear the soldier whistling and hooting with glee as he stands up and shouts and shoots at random with no target in sight. Seated in the bunker again he wipes the dust off his body and gets ready to whistle when in the midst of gunfire he hears wailing and weeping outside. He aims his gun again and what he sees at once is a young Tamil woman jumping into the bunker to escape the war. She is shivering in fright. The soldier points his gun towards her. She removes her gold chain from her neck and offers it to the soldier with a plea that he does not shoot her. He still does not lower his gun. The woman raises her long skirt and covers her head with it laying bare the lower part of her body. A series of medium and long shots shows the soldier's eyes focus on the woman's legs and her pubic region in a close-up. There is also a close-up of the woman's covered face. The scene ends with the soldier putting down his gun and covering his face in a shiver. The woman is standing on the right in a static medium long shot. An extreme long shot shows arid land with a few palmyra trees against the blue of the sky amid mournful sounds of

wailing and weeping amidst gunfire that drowns the sound of the woman's fear-filled shivering. Mellow notes are heard on a violin.

We see the soldier and the Tamil girl, the two principal characters, as the narrative unfolds.[1] We do not know their names and until the final sequences the Tamil girl does not speak. In the extract from *The Broken Palmyrah* above there is no indication of its exact setting except that its anonymous character steps out to go south. In the film, there is nothing said about the nameless Tamil girl except that she has come into the bunker to escape the war; her identity (her face) is denied her. The bunker is a construct of the Southern political authority, a symbol of power. The Sinhalese soldier reflects the entirety of the phenomenon of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, the Southern political authority and the South. In the face of it all, the Tamil girl without a name, nameless, and without a face, faceless, and without language, dumb, has only her genitals, her sex, to define her femininity.

This is my moon, which begins with the above episode, is a surrealistic film based on the country's civil war. Just as the soldier and the Tamil girl have no name, no other character has a name; the village too has no name.

A day or two after the opening episode, the soldier who has been in the bunker with the Tamil girl deserts the army and makes his way to his village. The girl follows him to the village. The village is symbolic. On the side of the approach road to it is a small boutique. Its owner sells cigarettes and chewing gum to the village youths. The soldier's mother and father are squatting opposite their half- built house gazing vacantly. His younger sister is a schoolgirl. Two schoolboys (the soldier's

sweetheart's brother and another boy) seek her love. She prefers the soldier's sweetheart's brother who likes to join the army. The soldier's sweetheart is appalled that the soldier has returned to the village with a Tamil girl, but she is more appalled that he has deserted the army. The soldier's elder brother is a bookie; he has not paid off his only customer the bet he has won. The middle-aged monk of the temple spends his time helping those who have lost their sons in the war to come to terms with their loss by preaching to them about the impermanence of life and bestowing the blessings of the Triple Gem on those youths who join the army. In the disconnected fragmentary narrative, the soldier tries to cultivate the parched land in an unforgiving war with nature during which he is arrested by the army and taken away. The Tamil girl speaks to nobody except to the middle-aged monk to whom she says a few words in Tamil once in a way. The man who was not paid his winnings by the bookie attacks him with a sword, but he does not die. The soldier's sweetheart's brother joins the army. As the film ends, on one journey back to his village on leave as usual the soldier sees the dead body of his sweetheart's brother. His sister and sweetheart weep. The Tamil girl elopes with the monk of the temple. In the place of the first monk, the bookmaker brother has begun a life of a monk in the temple.

On behalf of the nameless characters of Handagama's creation of a nameless village and the happenings there, Lester James Peiris, whose epoch-making film *Rekhawa* is set against a village called '*Siriyala*', joins the discourse to question the action of a leading state bank that provided funds for Handagama's film and of the National Film Corporation that questioned Handagama's creation:

It is my belief that a film director should have the right to create a film according to his vision. Everything in this film is what is publicized on television and in the newspapers every day as news. Why doesn't the film-maker have the right to recreate such news? (Seneviratne 2013, p. 405).

Peiris's creation of Siriyala in1956 can be considered as belonging to the end of the colonial era. It is a village peopled by characters with names and identities. Forty years later Peiris himself approves of Handagama's film without names.

In truth, in 'This is my moon' he deals a severe blow to the so-called Sinhala Buddhism, nationalism, our gallant soldiers (rana viru), innocent village life, upbringing, morality and such metaphysical notions … His film (in the final stages of the war) is not a recreation of the village …What he presents before us is the aggregation of human relations in a Sri Lankan village, its system of social values system, it's life habits. (Liyanage 2001, p. 46)

Accordingly, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism silences other narratives and creates the Sri Lanka of the decade of the nineties. There people's self-identity is replaced by the specific roles they have to play: for the Sinhalese youths. the war; for the mother and father, wife and loved one, the death in battle of husband or lover and compensation payments; for the monk, sermonizing on the inevitability of death and invoking the blessings of the Triple Gem on the young men who go to war. Within five decades, the narrative of the nationalism that was gradually developed marginalizes the Tamil girl and gives her no role in this space. Nevertheless, *This is my Moon* positions that non-existent role in the aggregation of the hegemonic era of Sinhala Buddhism.

For a long time after arriving in the village, the Tamil girl in the film does not speak with anybody. The filmmaker shows in sequence how she arrives in the village and meets the village folks. In the static frames of the film, she meets the

boutique-keeper, the soldier's sweetheart's brother, the man who comes to the bookie to place a bet, the soldier's mother and father, his sister, the monk of the temple, the bookmaker brother and the soldier's sweetheart. In all these meetings, her early responses are devoid of verbal utterances, avoiding looking anybody in the face, scowling, listening in silence, going away without listening; and something or other happens.

Throughout the film, we see the position of the Tamil girl in relation to the war which was the creation of a long-drawn-out process of imposing Sinhala Buddhist nationalism upon her native habitat. In this regard, the monk who is the representative of Sinhala Buddhism is of prime importance. The soldier, the Sinhala woman and man and the Northern manifestation of the war as a creation of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism is an inescapable cyclic phenomenon in which the Sinhalese village is caught up. This village stands against the Tamil girl. She at first hides from the power of these animate and inanimate structures, using silence as her shield.

The Tamil girl is denied her identity, not because of the languages she uses, her religion, her culture, her land or livelihood but by the denial of her sexual satisfaction. These interconnected matters, her silence as a shield and the inconveniences and crises that the man who comes into her presence experiences are the subject of this study. It appears that they facilitate our study. The silence that is pointed to is in part connected to the inner mind and in part to the interrelations with the other. The theoretical examination of silence leads to the

phenomenon of socio-cultural silence because, as Bruneau explains, it is related to prior elements of socio-cultural silence (Bruneau 1973, p 36). The inner mind of the Tamil girl is the space containing the post memories and the traumatic experiences of the civil war; it is a cultural warehouse. The person she meets and the village she goes to are symptoms of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism that contributes to the construction of the crises of that space.

In the middle of the film when the Tamil girl and the soldier endeavour to till the parched land we see several touching marks of her lost identity. The scene begins with a distant shot of the soldier struggling to cut down the *mana* grass that has grown tall well above his shoulders. The entire surroundings are wrapped in the heat of the scorching sun. Dressed in a pair of knee-length khaki trousers and vest of his army uniform and his back to the camera, he cuts down the clumps of *mana* grass. The Tamil girl is standing in the foreground to the left of the frame and looking ahead. For the first time, we see her wearing a T-shirt of the soldier's camouflage uniform. Her normal dress is a skirt and a black shawl over her right shoulder. She is still chewing the gum that the soldier had bought at the boutique at the beginning of the film when he returned to the village. Across the mid close-ups of the two characters, we continue to see the parched land on which they stand. Especially in the second shot of the mid close-up of the girl's left profile the background is nothing but dead dark brown stunted trees and lifeless creepers. There is greenery only far away in the distance. In a moment, the soldier is seated on the ground and what he sees is the girl striking a mammoty with all her might

into the stubborn earth. In a shot-reverse-shot, he gazes in awe at her physical strength.

The soldier gets up, takes the mammoty from the girl and digs the earth. He turns his head and sees the girl squatting on the ground. Keeping the mammoty aside, he breaks the silence that has prevailed so far. He speaks:

"There is a girl I love. Can't you understand?

I did not bring you here. You came behind me…

I could have shot you dead. But I didn't.

That is not because I love you. But just…"

The shots of the two characters that were up until then distant shots now change into mid close-ups showing the girl's face. We can see clearly now the upper part of her body covered in a camouflage T-shirt. She looks the soldier in the eye in an angry frown. Seated on the ground, he murmurs:

"Just…"

She walks ahead slowly, saying nothing. As the soldier cuts down the shrub again he asks her as if in response to the angry emotions of her silent face:

"Why? Can't a man think like that?

We shoot not because we are angry.

We refrain from shooting not because we love. Just...

Only just…Just like the wind…"

After this decisive statement, we hear the girl screaming in pain. The soldier turns back and sees the girl clutching a thorny shrub from among the parched shrubs and inflicting pain on herself. The soldier comes from the left into the middle close-up and tells the girl who is staring at him, groaning in pain:

"I thought you were dumb...

Come on, speak. Speak up..."

Laughing, he orders the girl as he squeezes tight her hands that are clutching the thorny branch. She screams in pain.

"Come on, speak… Speak up…

Speak in a language you know…"

She does not speak; she only screams in pain. He embraces her, kisses her wildly, rolls her down on the rocky ground and makes love. In this scene, we only see, as before, her face covered with her skirt.

Speech requires language. In Chapter 2 we discussed the "Sinhala Only" Bill of 1956 that made Sinhala the official language, driving a wedge between the Sinhalese and Tamils.

What language does a Tamil girl who only knows Tamil come across in the Sinhala zone? This question was not discussed until the decades of the nineties in film. With the silence of the Tamil girl in Handagama's film, silence comes into use as a response to the power of the Sinhala language; language communication goes out of use. *This is my moon'*s Tamil girl does not speak in "the language she knows". The language she knows, namely, Tamil, is thrown into limbo by the soldier who

is bound to uphold the power of the Sinhala Buddhist state. Communication is not born merely out of an order to use the "national language". On the other hand, what does discarding language communication mean? According to Athukorale Seneviratne (2013), *"Discarding intercommunication between the two main races of Sri Lanka means war."*

With the advent of the war, she begins to lose her identity. She does not speak her language but ironically, as it were, the camouflage uniform that covers her upper body signals how it goes against her identity; it is the uniform of the army of the state. In the first round, within the bunker that camouflage uniform inflicted the power of sex on her body. Now notwithstanding that it covers her body, the power of sex, it is clear, is let loose on her in a security zone embedded in it. The camouflage uniform does not appear as protection to her[2]. It covers her and the shawl covers her face laying bare only her sexuality.

The camouflage dress and her space do not give her protection but raise questions. To that space belongs the power to examine her body by removing her clothes to signify her Tamil identity.

> On one hand, by stripping the woman naked, the authorities are trying to ascertain that she is not a suicide bomber who would normally wear a vest or belt of explosives beneath her clothing. On the other hand, at a semiotic level, the act of disrobing a woman who is thought to be a Tamil Tiger suggests that her body would offer a straightforward answer to the soldier's search in the form of evidence to support their assumption that she is Tamil. (Jayasena 2010, p.122)

This excerpt from Jayasena's writings shows that the Tamil girl is denied her sexuality. It is a show of political power which violates her. Although in the above

scene she does not use language, the thorny branch that she clutches with her fingers until she bleeds marks her only satisfaction. For the girl who lies prostrate on the scorched earth the masculinity of the man who enters her by force is not satisfaction. She uses the only thing left of her identity, namely, her feminine sexuality, to save her life in a transaction of silence.

> "This is my Moon uses female sexuality as a weapon or a lure to preserve the desiring self. When the Tamil women jumps into the bunker of a Sinhalese soldier, who is confused whether or not he must pull the trigger, finally relinquishes the feigned military spirit, as he is wooed by the helpless self-surrender of the Tamil girl, who literally invites him to rape her in exchange of her life." (Gosh, n.d.)

Dispossessed of her native land, inside the bunker built in her own land she is compelled to offer her body in silence to the soldier who has come from the South, her identity concealed in her cultural clothes. Land is the principal factor in the physical background of the war (Dewasiri 2013). The rejection of the Sinhalese state power of the demand of the Tamil militants for their right to their land gave rise to the war, which also denied to the Tamil girl her land with all its cultural symbols. The second chapter dealt with the dominance of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, which led to the development of Tamil nationalism marked by parallel violence and counter militarization. It signalled a path that discarded most of their cultural norms and practices and denied their identity (Cheren 2009, pp. xl-xlvi). Examine the following poem titled *Vaanathiyin Kavithaikal* by the poetess Vanathy that reveals the LTTE vision. She suggests that the Tamil girls should discard the *kunkuma thilaka* and *thaliya* which are symbols of the Tamil woman, and come forward in support of the war.[3]

> Her forehead shall be adorned not with
> Kumkumam but with red blood
> All that is seen in her eyes is not the sweetness
> Of youth but firm declaration of those
> Who have fallen down…
> On her neck will lay not thaali, but a
> Cyanide capsule… (De Mel 2001, p. 208)[4]

The Tamil girl does not go to war with the militants of her race but she faces the same authoritarian power that faces all Tamil women in common.

> Not only is this woman driven beyond the boundary of the Sri Lankan (Sinhala) state, but her subsequent disrobing accentuates the centrality of the body to the discourse of Sri Lanka's conflict. In the absence of one state-sanctioned method of affirming the woman's ethnicity, the soldiers resort to another method, which fits comfortably with the nationalist attitude espoused by segments of the Sinhala state (Jayasena 2010, p. 122).

The Tamil girl who arrives in Sinhalese territory is without family, mother or father. It is not that it is not possible for the mother in *The Broken Palmyra* to be her mother. This is how the following excerpt talks about being dispossessed of mother:

> We buried her in the garden, stood around and sang a hymn and said a prayer...she was shot dead in the kitchen, with a half done sambol still on the grinding stone (Hoole et al 1992, p. 357)

The soldier's mother once and his father once tried to make her get inside the house ordering her, "*Get in the house*" The soldier's sister asks, "*Have you never laughed, Akke (elder sister)?"* She responds in silence. The war did not happen for a personal reason of theirs and the soldier's mother and sister have no innate hatred for the Tamil girl. However, the above excerpt tells of their feelings. The Tamil girl is wrapped in the memories of her traumatic past. According to Marianne Hirsch,

> Post-memory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through representation, projection, and creation—often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible . . . It is defined through an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by the unbridgeable distance that separates the participant from the one born after . . . Post-memory characterizes the experience of those who . . . have grown up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the powerful stories of the previous generation, shaped by monumental traumatic events that resist understanding and integration (Morag 2008, p. 123)

We do not see in the film the memories of the past trauma of the Tamil girl who has lost her self-identity. But what the soldier tells the monk, "Her mother, father and home are all gone", sums it all up. She does not wail and weep aloud but hides her pain within her. As Susan Sontag suggests the female character taking into consideration her loss of mother, father and brothers and sisters or their absence, the Tamil girl's silence can be thought of as *"voluntary mutism resulting from trauma and as a way to communicate pain"* (Kaplan 2009, p. 159). However, it is not only a spontaneous communication of pain, but a reflection of her socio-cultural and political deprivation together with her personal deprivation of language and land. Consider Sigmund Freud's thoughts in his scholarly treatise titled *Mourning and Melancholia*.

> Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. (Freud 1917, p. 243)

Accordingly, the Tamil girl's mental pain has to do not only with her personal loss but also with socio-cultural and political factors. Silence is her medium for engaging in complex social transactions along with different uses for it. According to the discussion, so far it is not wrong to say that the Tamil girl uses silence to hide

herself or as a shield. Silence gives her space to escape from situations that she cannot face and also space to think of answers.

It is in the second half of the film that the answer that the Tamil girl formulates in the secrecy of her silence comes alive in two ways. Using her mother tongue and her body aggressively and powerfully, she goes into action before the offending symbols of those responsible for and guilty of the inventory of her dispossessions. Also, she begins to use in a pleasant manner the language and actions that she encounters in her present zones and the human compassion concealed within her traumatic experiences and her loss of the mother, father and sister.

The Tamil girl's silence and the religious and state symbols of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism -the monk and the soldier- that she constructed in the face of her personal mental pain are important for understanding the decisions she made in the time she spent behind her shield of silence and the discourses that broke that silence.

The monk is the semiotic representation in the film of Sinhala-Buddhism. At the beginning of the film the monk sermonizes on the need to continue the war that created Sinhala nationalism. He preaches that the soldier who deserted the army should surrender, that the pregnant widows of the dead soldiers should give birth to sons and that the dead soldiers should not be mourned -in tune with the tenets of Sinhala Buddhism and the *Mahavamsa*. Accordingly, the Tamil girl who came to the village with the Sinhalese soldier "should go back to where she belongs without sinning." The leading stance of Sinhala nationalism was that Tamils had no right to a homeland here. Then, what is the land she belongs to? If the land that she

belongs to is where she started life, it is the war that destroyed its culture and surroundings. The refugee camp is what the government of the South proposed for the Tamils who lost the land where they lived when the war ended. At one point in the film, the monk tells the soldier:

"Take her to a refugee camp…

In this Sansaric journey, we are all refugees…

They have refugee camps. We have temples!"

The refugee camp is the territory of those who have lost their identity. The Sinhalese soldier tells the Tamil girl that "*a refugee camp is a place where women and men sleep in one heap. They become pregnant in no time.*" It is stressful for the monk in this dilemma to remain silent. The Tamil girl refrains from worshipping the monk and falls silent. Anne Kaplan recalls the words of Sontag on the subject of women in films.

> She saw healing as a return to language which for her was not gendered. Sontag's interest lay in the psychological interplay between men and women, in examining their tensions, their often deadly power games (Kaplan 2009, p 159).

The Tamil gives up her defence-in-silence against the monk, when she suddenly narrates in her mother tongue Tamil many incidents from legendary and sacred texts Ramayana and Bhagawath Geetha, where she quotes a speech of God Krishna to Arjun.

> Be in peace in pleasure and pain, and gain and in loss, in victory or in the loss of a battle. Prepare for war with peace in thy soul. In this war, there is no sin (song 2.38, Bhagawath Geetha)

This quotation from Bhagawath Geetha braces her shield of silence. The Buddhist monk, a definitive symbol of Sinhala Buddhist hegemony, remains incapable of starting a dialogue with the Tamil girl's remnants of speech and short comments. If the silence is her shield in the fight against the monk, sexuality, her last bit of self-identity, is her sword.

"Why didn't you come to the Devale (temple)?"
"I have nothing to ask from God."
"It's very cold here in the Temple."

The Buddhist monk who awaits the Tamil girl to come to the worship of the Hindu Gods housed in the Buddhist temple premises loss to her sexuality being employed as a weapon. When the monk decides to disrobe, the silence of the Tamil girl achieves her second triumphs over the Sinhala-Buddhist ideology, as the soldier too had already been overcome.

"The female lead in '*This is my Moon' shows love through hatred*" (Handagama 2001, p 11). The soldier is confused with this love expressed through hatred which blends with the girl's silence. Not only the soldier, but the military police officers, who come in search of the soldier to arrest him, are baffled when the Tamil girl, after her long silence marked with sharp short verbal responses. The girl confronts the military police officers to shield the soldier running away from the Army. Her response: "*I followed the Uniform. Sun, Rain, darkness, light - nothing matters. Only my life; If you spare my life; do anything you like*" is as equally strong as action, when she marks, *(*reminding us of the Hindu wedding rituals) a *pottu* on the

forehead of the officer, who was looking for the soldier at the Hindu temple premises. Her silence, random utterances and deeds, become powerful weapons that render the masochist Sinhala Army powerless.

After her long-observed silence, she firmly announces "I am not going to the camp!" By this time, both soldier and the monk, Sinhala nationalism's key symbols, have been defeated by her silence. Her silence triumphs. This reminds us of a parallel observation by Silvia Montiglio's with regard to Greek drama (2000): 'But in the world of killing action, where heroes fight and compete with one another to assert themselves, silence is experienced as a form of violence'.

4.3. Wannihamy: Silence as an aggressive weapon

In the Mahavamsa, when Vihara Maha Devi, prince Gemunu's mother asks him why he sleeps curled in bed, the prince replies: 'Over there beyond the Ganga are Damilas (Tamils), here on this side is the Gotha(mute)-ocean, how can I lie without stretched limbs?' (Gaiger 1912, p. 154). *Kavanthissa*, who ruled the Southern part of the island, was his father. The chronicler depicts him as a coward, as he wanted his sons not to fight King *Elara*, the King of the Damilas, and he himself did not come to the battlefield (ibid, p 154). Recent Sinhala nationalist reference to the legend, always prioritised the son *Gemunu*, the slayer of *Elara*, over his 'coward' father. Sri Lanka Army named one of its regiments after his name. The proposition of heroism towards the end of the civil war period was evident in calling all military personnel, from foot soldier to highest ranking officer, a '*Ranviruwa*' or 'war hero'

in English. The narrative of heroism was historically built, always referring the Damilas or the Tamils as the 'other' against whom the heroism was to be unleashed.

'Bandara is one among many youths in Sri Lanka, who enlists with the Army charged with that heroism' (VIthanage 2010, p. 47). Wannihamy is his father. We meet them in the film *Death of Full Moon Day*. The lead character is not the 'heroic' son, but his ailing father. Even by the time the film's story starts, Bandara is already dead. Although the film was complete by 1997, it came to the Sri Lanka theatre on 11th of October, 2001. The reason was the ban on the film by the government Minister of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Development of the Northern Region. The minister announced the ban thus:

> In term of the powers vested in me under Section 6 of the National Film Corporation of Sri Lanka Act. No 47 of 1971, I hereby direct the National Film Corporation to defer the exhibition of the film "Pura Sanda Kaluwara". (Vithanage 2010, p. 151)

The ban was lifted in response to a verdict of the Supreme Court made on August 2, 2001 in a case filed by the director of the film. The verdict stated that the Minister and the officials of the Film Corporation had violated the law and the fundamental rights of the director by banning the film (ibid. pp. 197-199).

The film had been banned by the authorities in view of the war situation in the country at the time (ibid, pp. 151-152). It appears that the authorities thought that the film would create distress and disenchantment in the minds of the three armed forces and their relatives at a time when the war was on. However, it was not a film that portrayed the bloodshed, murder and horrors of war in its narrative. It is the story of Wannihamy, a blind, aged father, and his sorrow over the loss of his son,

whose body is brought home in a sealed coffin. It is only the penultimate scene of the film that defines the mental turmoil of the father. Wannihamy digs up his son's grave to clear his doubts about the death of his son. He opens the sealed coffin only to find in it not his son's body but a few stumps of banana trees and some rocks.

There is not a single scene that portrays the war but rather it is a film about a blind old father. When we first meet him he is living with his younger daughter Sunanda in a little cadjan-thatched wattle and daub abode in a border village in the North Central province. We also learn, as the narrative develops, that Wannihamy's elder daughter Yamuna is married and living separately elsewhere, that his only son Bandara, the sole breadwinner, is enlisted in the army and engaged in battle as a soldier, that their little house is being rebuilt with brick, that the younger daughter is engaged to be married to Some, a young man from the village. Although blind, Wannihamy is a man of resolute character with an instinctive awareness of the changes taking place in his environment, which qualities become evident in the short discourse with Some in the eighth scene. This discourse takes place when he stumbles along digging his walking stick in the earth dried up in the drought and collects a pot of water from a pool not yet dried up and meets Some who arrives in a tractor to collect water. The printed version of the film says thus:

"*Wannihamy Mame, I could have brought a container of water if you had told me.*"

"*What? Did you think I was a paralytic?*"

Wannihamy stands up with the aid of his walking stick, looks up at the sky and says,

"Some, my boy, tomorrow we have to thatch our hut."

"In this dreadful heat?"

"The way it looks, it will rain in another four days."

Wannihamy faces his lot in life with an iron will but what devastates him is shown in Scene 13 after 9.30 minutes of running. The scene begins with a distant shot of him standing up from where he was seated on the ledge of his hut, his head almost touching the low cadjan-thatched roof, and walking a few steps with the help of his walking stick. "*Brother, oh my brother*" we hear his younger daughter wailing. In the background and on both sides of the brown-coloured hut is withered vegetation but what the larger space of the frame shows is the sandy soil that covers the foreground. After a cut, midway in the frame, we see a group of soldiers and villagers carrying a coffin covered with the national flag, walking slowly from the left to the south towards the hut. The only bright feature of the scene is the red, golden, yellow and dark green of the national flag against a green, brown and white space. The villagers are dressed in rather discoloured white clothes while the soldiers are dressed in their usual green coloured uniforms. A few village children are carrying a pair of elephant tusks and coconut oil lamps that are traditionally placed on either side of the coffin at a Sinhala Buddhist funeral. A few men and women and the wailing Sunanda being consoled by Some follow behind them. As they walk past Wannihamy, on his right towards the hut, the camera stays focused on him as he turns slowly and silently. His body is bare. Again, after a cut, we see in the background the group preparing to take the coffin inside the cadjan-thatched

hut. "*Now lower it,*" we hear somebody say. As they lower the coffin a little we hear a thud as the coffin strikes the door frame in a shot taken from within the hut. We hear in the background instructions such as "*Take it a little back, turn it a little, and tilt it a little*" before we see the last shot of that scene. Close-ups of Wannihamy are seen with the focus on his face with the grey beard. Leaning on his walking stick, Wannihamy remains silent but is deep in thought. There is a trace of doubt and questioning about him. That scene ends and after 10.30 minutes the next scene appears. It takes only about a minute to show the event that totally changes the rest of Wannihamy's life.

The narrative of this film is based on this unexpected event. Wannihamy is not prepared to accept that his son Bandara has died purely because a sealed coffin has been brought from the battlefield. Wannihamy's dilemma is that to accept his son's death is to face a crisis of identity, of his self-image. Although it is not suggested that a denial of death is suggested through the Sinhala Buddhism, it is suggested that the untimely death of a member of a family living a righteous life is not possible.[5] Also, the *Mahavamsa* tradition suggests that the one with Sinhala blood meets not with failure but success. That too is not without a mention of the body. Wannihamy responds to this tragedy by making a frontal assault on it. The weapon of his assault is silence. The director of the film himself says he created this aggressive character with a full sense of awareness.

> "I like characters who when pushed against the wall turn back and attack. When a social system more powerful than them tries to subdue them they turn back and attack." (Vithanage 2004)

The social system that Vithanage suggests is not one that Wannihamy can deal with by himself, alone; it is a system that Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism has constructed. The civil war is the final end result of that nationalism. Asking for his son's body is a protest against that social construct.

However, the irony of it all is that it is the self-same social system that requires the observance of funeral rites and burial or cremation associated with death and the dead body. The dead body is the essential and inseparable legal physical entity. Furthermore, from close family ties to social ties interpersonal and societal bonds reinforced by the various forms of personal and social behavior –mourning, weeping, keening, keeping vigil and reviving old memories of the one departed – are centred on the dead body.

Crisis in Sri Lankan society has taken the form of youth unrest and civil war as a result of which many citizens have undergone the terrible trauma of losing a member of the family or of the community and more importantly not being able to see the body of the departed. It is an intensely tragic and devastating personal experience.[6]

> "Experiences of unnatural and violent death (particularly those involving an absence of a body), and the narratives of such experiences have to be understood in the context of a language of incompleteness, suddenness, darkness and endless unfulfilled continuity." (Perera 1997, p. 8)

A person who dies in the backdrop of a revolt in the South and whose dead body is not found is deemed a "disappeared person" but this term is only rarely used in the case of soldiers from the south sent to fight in the civil war in the north. The

coffin of a soldier who even dies in a bomb blast is sent to his home, sealed and covered with the national flag, assuring the living that the dead body is inside it. This is the assumption that Wannihamy questions. The other characters in the film, in contrast, abandon this questioning after asking one question or making one statement.[7]

Bandara is not one who can die within Wannihamy's phenomenal world and he is also the one who has to take over from him the family responsibilities when he is gone. Therefore "*Bandaraya did not join the army to earn compensation from the state but to build a house and become independent of you*", he tells his daughter. (Vithanage 2010, pp. 39-40). This is also a reason why looking for his body is important to him. However, the pressure exerted by his family and society represented by the *grama sevaka* (govt. agent for the village) and the chief priest of the temple that he should sign the form to apply for compensation drives Wannihamy towards gradual silence as his medium of expression, as it destroys his identity as a 'father'. But before that, his final statement is also his first question. "*I am blind. You all are not. Did they show his face at least to you all?*"

The scene where this decisive statement is made begins with a distant shot of Wannihamy seated on the ledge of their hut with the little child of his elder daughter Yamuna, who is playing with a top improvised from a little coconut. The misshapen doorframe of the derelict rundown hut is seen in the background. In a while, Yamuna appears from the other end of the ledge as the child turns the top several times and she walks into the hut. Next the scene divides into Yamuna coming out of the hut from the right with a file in her hand as Wannihamy is shown in the

middle of the shot leaving space for her to walk towards him from the left. She tries to extend the folded file to her father. The space between them is filled with the form of the decaying roof at the rear of the hut projected through the door. "*Appachchi, the only thing needed to complete the application for our brother's compensation is your signature.*" she says as she keeps holding the file towards her father. He says nothing but only turns his head back slightly. Later, as the shot splits Yamuna's slight close up shows her keeping her gaze fixed on her father. Once again, the picture is of the wattle and daub hut. The wall is cracked. Yamuna, her gaze still fixed on her father, leans in pain against the wall. From the side of the hut up to the height of Yamuna's waist on the right and behind Wannihamy is the next shot. Wannihamy is staring ahead of himself, engrossed in thought and silent. Again, in the foreground is a medium close up of Yamuna's tear-filled face.

"*Does Appachchi think that only you love our younger brother? Our younger brother is dead… He is not going to come back,*" says Yamuna. Meanwhile, we see a side of Wannihamy's face in a close-up. It is suffused with unspeakable emotion, deep reflection. It is special as Nalin Jayasena suggests:

> Take for instance a standard method of shooting a scene—a shot-counter-shot. Wannihamy's blindness eliminates the "counter shot" and, as a result, the camera focuses more on him revealing the point of view of others. (Jayasena 2010, p. 127)

It is at this moment that Wannihamy's final and defining statement referred to above is made: "*Did they show you people his face?*" His last statement. He turns his face to the right and faces the camera when he asks his question. For the first time, his question becomes a question directed at the audience.

From a similar angle, the camera focuses on Yamuna's emotion-filled face. Wannihamy gets up and prepares to walk forward and Yamuna's face again comes into view at waist level. "In a day or two we will not be able to redeem our mortgaged house," reminds Yamuna and Wannihamy get up and walks away from the frame. We see again a close up of Yamuna's weeping face as she complains that "*Appachchi is trying to put an end to those who are alive, too,*" when we see the final special shot. Wannihamy walks out but stops suddenly. He pauses a second or two in the same posture and then departs in silence and the scene ends with a close-up of Yamuna.

This scene that reflects Wannihamy's voluntary mutism gives substance to what was so far a series of insubstantial scenes of indeterminate form and establishes the determinateness of the plight of Wannihamy's family. The hut that forms the setting of the entire scene is in a state of severe disrepair. It does not have picturesque backgrounds but can yet withstand the arid weather. Its ownership is going to be claimed by the *grama sevaka*, the mortgagee, who is a government representative. Redeeming it means accepting that his son is dead and abandoning the search for his body. The daughter's appeal that the lives of the living be saved is determined at that point. The dilapidated hut thus symbolizes Wannihamy. But Wannihamy walks away. In this way, he drops the idea of placing his signature, of giving an answer in the medium of language.

After this defining scene, Wannihamy does not speak again. We can summon Freudian psychology to understand this melancholy.

> "Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition. It is also well worth notice that, although mourning involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition and to refer it to medical treatment." (Freud 1917, pp. 243-244)

However, Wannihamy's final obstinate rebellion defies Freudian analysis.

On that day, Wannihamy leaves his hut and does not come back. The villagers go in search of him. They find him at night, fallen on the river bank. Even after traditional treatments his silence cannot be broken. After a long silence he prepares to dig up his son's grave again –the film's climax. A village lass has seen him and Wannihamy cannot do it by himself. However, Some and other village lads help to take the coffin out and he is able to break open the government seal. The banana tree stumps and some rocks in it instead of Bandara's corpse to some extent confirm Wannihamy's belief. The film ends with the scene of little children playing in a tank. A slight smile comes to his face at the sound of the children playing –a sign that he is satisfied.

But nevertheless, Wannihamy's silence questions the hegemony of authority. *"Now how can we claim compensation?"* – the final question of the government representative- says it all. Compensation is the monetary value the state gives, when the military life it creates ends in death. Its worth is one hundred thousand Rupees. Refusal of this money is a rejection of the authority of the state machinery. Further, it is a moment when a process launched by the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism is questions by a humble Sinhala Buddhist villager, who employs silence as a fierce

weapon to overcome his own identity crisis as a father whose son is lost and as a villager whose voice is not heard.

Conclusion

In the wartime, no young Tamil woman could go from one end to the other end of the country without being questioned or stopped by many a checkpoints and camouflage uniformed soldiers (Jayasena 2010, p.121). Further, despite the regular arrival of sealed coffins in Sinhalese villages in the South, and everybody sensed that the body was not there in the coffin, nobody refused the state compensation on grounds that their son was not dead. Both films, *Death on Full Moon Day* as well as *This is my Moon* are films, that try to create a cinematic reality out of real-life unrealities. They raise questions that otherwise are impossible to ask within the Sinhala Buddhism nationalist realm of power alienating a young Tamil girl and an old Sinhala villager.

The young woman in *This is my Moon* finds refuge in silence, until she recovers from her trauma and gathers some mental remnants of her lost family and culture, and till she draws together a response to the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism's symbolic statements of power. Wannihamy's silence differs from that of the Tamil woman only by a thin margin, although he belongs to the Sinhala majority. His Sinhala-ness brings him no benefit within the stratified society. Experience of shock is what envelops him, when forced to agree that a sealed coffin carries his son's corpse, which makes him eligible for compensation.

Both these characters engage in a struggle to defeat an unbeatable and huge machinery of symbolic state power, which threatens their identity or cultural milieu. The walled castle within which they shine their armour is silence. First, silence is a safe site for them. In silence, they find the necessary time to regroup and recollect their next courses of action. The young Tamil woman remains in 'muteness' until she starts speaking in Tamil with the monk. She comes back to verbal communication, only when she has re-gathered her armour in the safe haven of silence. Her behaviour confirms Kennen Fergusson's concept of silence as 'resistance'.

When the Tamil woman comes out of her silence gradually with pricking brisk answers, Wannihamy sinks deeper into a silence. Deeper she dives in silence, stronger her protests against the authority. Although his first use of silence is to avoid the paradox of the coffin, his refusal to sign the compensation application form is a moment when his silence becomes responsive. His silence culminates when he refuses to explain why he avoids signing. He then undertakes a course of action that explains his disbelief in what the coffin contains. This transcends the 'resistive response' proposed by Fergusson and takes the form of an 'active-resistive response'.

Active-resistive responsive silence' can be a choice of action by a powerless person. It brings two fold benefits to him/her. First, it shields the proposer of silence from the authoritative power and its ideology, against which he/she choose to fight.

Secondly, silence creates a space for the proponent to regroup his/her actions and responses. In that sense, silence empowers the weak.

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[1]A few critics of the film had identified the soldier's character as Samitha. See: 'Imaging the War in the Sinhala Cinema of the 1990s by Sunila Abeysekara – Cinesith: No 1 – 2001, pages 04-05. However, this name is not used in the film. Besides, the first name Samitha, does not reveal any particular information about the character apart from the fact that he's a Sinhalese male. Among the Sinhalese, it is one's family name gives an indication of his or her caste or other information.

[2] Chammika Jayawardena's 'Camouflage Landscapes', as well as Ravibandu VIdyapathi's 'Linga as Link' performance opens a discourse on the role of camouflage vis-à-vis the society (like Thenuwara's *Barrealism*) and the Tamil community in particular. For more details read: Sasanka Perera, "Artists Remember; Artists Narrate: *Memory* and Representation in *Sri Lankan Visual Arts* (2007) and "Drushya Kala Adyana" (2008) by Social Scientists Association, Colombo.

[3]*Kunkumam* means the Saffron bindi on a Tamil girl's forehead. *Kunkumam* is supposed to bring prosperity and good luck in Hindu culture. When a man decorates the forehead of a woman with a saffron bindi, he announces his care of the woman. Therefore, *Kunkumam* is a symbol of love as well. *Thali* is gold jewellery that a man ties around the neck of his bride.

[4]LTTE soldiers had a cyanide capsule around their neck. In a case of getting caught by the opposition, they were supposed to bite it and commit suicide.

[5]In the *Dammapala Jathaka* story in Buddhist literature, the young prince Dammapala does not cry when his mate and teachers' son dies. When inquired why, he explains that he had never even heard that people die at the young age and that in his home area, nothing of the sort ever happens. Hearing this, the teacher determines to verify the child's words. He stacks goat-bones into a bag and shows it to the prince's father claiming that his son dies. The father does not believe the teacher's words and says laughing that no one in his family dies premature and explains the reason for their long life as 'correct behaviour' according to the Dharma.

[6]Disappearance or absence of a corpse became the theme of many works of art and scholarly writing writings after 1990s. A few of them are: the film *Udugam Yamaya* (Against the tide) by Sudath Devapriya (2004), which is about a lost father, Dhananjaa Karunarathna's stage drama *Last Bus eke Kathawa* (Story of the Last Bus, 1998), where the plot revolves around a disappeared son; His play 'The Jury' (1993) bases the story on a torn apart piece of an ear of a person murdered; Sasanka Perera discusses disappearance in "Societies of Terror: Absence of Body and Problems of Mourning and Coping (1997)". Read the first chapter of 'Matters of Violence' (2008) edited by Jayadeva Uyangoda.

[7]When the school principal requests from the Army officer "Sir, all villagers would like to see the real corpse", he is coldly responded "My victims' bodied are always sealed" and Yamuna's demand "I want to see the face of my brother" subsides unanswered (Vithanage 2010, pp 21 -22).

Chapter Five

Reading the 'silent' space: Background setting of the Sri Lankan art cinema after 1990 as an expression of socio-cultural silence.

"You know what a keti kirilli (a female bird) is? It is exactly
like 'Batti'.
One day, giving the keti kirilli the last measure of rice
remaining, her parents told her, Child, We are unable to find
dowries or a husband for you. You must go somewhere to find a
matching one. So she walked through villages to search for a
man who would like to marry her. But no one was willing to
marry her. Yet she continued to walk.
As she proceeded, she met a group of farmers tilling in a field."

Piyasiri to Batti
(Forsaken Land, 2005)

Introduction.

The expression of silence in the Sri Lankan art cinema after 1990 takes a multiplicity of forms. Apart for the characters who work for the expansion of the episodes, the background settings of the films contribute as an active, essential cinematic feature in exploring the theme of silence. In many films made after 1990, where the characters based in the city and the village contribute to the content of the film, the external (city/village) scopes are marked by direct and indirect signs of silence. Nearly all these

scopes, with the minimum use of sound, that is music and dialogues and figurative use, that is bright colours and substances filling the space, contribute to the making of ideas generated by 'silent' composition.

This chapter reads the said background scopes. In many films of the discussing stream, background scopes deal with silence. But this chapter instead of examining the background scopes of the said films, attempts to analyze systems of scopes in general in the film stream. Under the sub-themes of this thesis, attention was drawn first to the open rural environment and its dilapidated buildings and second to the urban environment and its spaces. The first was examined in Asoka Handagama's *This is My Moon* PrasannaVithanage's *Death on a Full Moon Day,* Vimukthi Jayasundera's *Forsaken Land* and Sanjeewa Pushpakumara's *Flying Fish* and the second in Prasanna Vithanage's *August Sun* and Chinthana Dharmadasa and Udaya Siriwardena's *How I wonder what you are*.

The chapter suggests that the transformation of the active, melodious, live village and city into the inactive, silent, inanimate one is not limited to the episodes of the films but also has socio-cultural connections as well. The internal monologue of the characters met in the episodes is seen as general to the social system to which the character belongs and the chapter examines how the 'weapon of silence' identified in chapter four above becomes a common instrument of the social system.

5.1. Reading of the 'silent' village.

Displacing from the 'active' village of early times, villages which are extremely silent and inactive zones can be identified in the films made after 1990. Both the village in which Wannihamy lives in the film *Death on Full Moon Day* and the Sinhala soldier's village to which the Tamil girl enters in the film *This is My Moon* discussed in the fourth chapter are silent vacated villages with a dry tank, barren land undergoing a drought, decayed huts and the houses halfway built. The villages in which the characters act upon in the films *Forsaken Land* by Vimukthi Jayasundara and *Flying Fish* by Sanjeewa Pushpakumara resemble the villages mentioned above except for the slight difference where some scopes like temples are not seen. Duminda's house in the village in *August Sun* by Prasanna Vithanage carry the common feature of silent and vacated nature despite their geo- physical differences. The village is depicted fairly differently in the film *Dark Night of the Soul* by Vithanage. But many scenes depicting the village in this film are in retrospection and in his present world the village is depicted as with the same silent and vacated nature.

The village, in the history of Sri Lankan cinema, is the exemplary figure signaling the Sinhala-Buddhist nationality used in the central nationalist dialogue. This exemplary figure for the island is used for the village which is a part of it, as well. See this newspaper extract appearing after three months of the end of the 'Black July'.

> This island has once been an island where peace reigned and the kindness overflowed. It was a country which was blessed with the touch of the saffron robe and flourished under the comfortable shade of the Sthupa. The land was fertile. The nature was generous. It sufficiently gifted its treasures for the

flourishing of the people who suffered. But they were not greedy and they were simple, contented and ascetic like. …. (*Editorial* 1983)

This ideal village form was created in studios well before *Rekhawa* was made in 1956 by taking the equipment out of the studio into the natural light and space of the island. In the search of the ideal village that background, physically encountered is brought into Sinhala film. This rural background was full of temples with devotees engaging in religious rites, tanks filled with water and green fields. The soundtrack with the dialogue of the active villagers and scenes with fertile nature constantly depicted the village as an active background. The idealism of the setting was materialized by the characters themselves including the calm village girl as discussed in the third chapter and many films ended with the defeat of the antagonist who broke the harmony of the ideal village.

However, when we come to the films of the post 1990's examined in this thesis, we notice the breach of the ideal model village. Tanks in the background of the villages we see in these films have dried up. The land has become arid. The paddy fields and the vegetation were not fertile. In temples, in place of the devotees performing religious rites there are relatives invoking blessings through *Bodhi Pooja* on their loved ones who had gone to the battle field. These are the signs of death in place of life, darkness in place of light, with the reign of a deep silence.

5.1.1 Open environment of the village: Silence as a 'backdrop' expression

The director of the film *Death on a Full Moon Day* (in which the character of Wannihamy discussed in Chapter 4 is introduced), says the following about his journey to a village in the arid zone in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka for the film's pre-production:

> When I reached there, it had not rained in three years. So, no paddy farming was in sight. Youngsters had only one choice in front of them. Either enroll in the Army or come to Anuradhapura looking for a job. Parents, children both knew that they could get killed while serving in the Army. But parents could not stop their children because the families would benefit from the compensation they get when the children get killed. In other words, these youngsters were ready to sacrifice their life for the survival of their families. (Vithanage 2000, pp. 78-79).

This village experienced by Vithanage is the opposite of the 'aesthetic' village romanticized by the mainstream song, poem, fiction, tele-drama, newspaper as well as cinema for a long time. The main works of all of the above art forms are a proof of the fact that the Lankan village is a geographical boundary safeguarding the stereotypes and norms proposed by the eminent authoritative vision, nourished by the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. In the Lankan community which evolved post-independence by giving prominence to the language and religion of the majority race and marginalizing the minority races and by building itself on elements including caste and religion, it is not possible for a majority of villages which are uniform in one way or the other to exist. However, the above works of art attempted to purport that such a thing did exist. However, the irony was that in the ideal village extraneous features to the Sinhala-

Buddhist image which helped elevate the latter did not exist. Instead, it only seemed to glorify the agricultural lifestyle and traditions based on the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism.

Since the early kingdoms and settlements were established in areas close to tanks and stupas, it made some sense to use the integrated term 'tank-stupa-village-temple' to refer to the system. However, after the fall of kingdoms, villages were re-created with the characteristics unique to each area through settlements during political eras, after colonization and independence. However, the initially glorified concept of the village gained momentum with the post-independence nationalistic ideology. Rather than projecting the village as a smallest geographical unit which had social strata based on caste, where land rights were hereditary and which protected the prevailing hegemonic authority, it was projected as a geographical unit inter-related with the environment, full of tanks and paddy fields, where the temple and the Buddhist monk were given prominence. It was supposed to be excellent, but did not exist in reality. It was a myth reinforced by cinema.

In *Death on a Full Moon Day*, Vithanage films the converse of this. The reality of this village is further projected in his own *August Sun*. Not only that, the villages established with the final results of the post-independent era are implied on screen by Asoka Handagama in *This is My Moon*, by Vimukthi Jayasundara in *Forsaken Land*, and by Sanjeewa Pushpakumara in *Flying Fish*. The villages seen in these films depict

geographical spaces and their population tormented by the agonies brought forth by the political crisis in the post-independent era.

The long scene at the beginning of *Death on a Full Moon Day* where Wannihamy is introduced was briefly discussed in Chapter 4. It seems important to discuss the background of the scene again at length for the beginning of the analysis of this silent village. Before the scene starts, a shot of a hawk soaring in the sky is shown from a distance. Its screaming is also heard. Immediately afterwards, the scene in which Wannihamy walks up to the tank to fetch water begins with a semi close-up shot showing his walking stick hitting the cracked soil of the dried-up tank basin. The slow moving walking stick and his feet walking forward can be seen in the unfolding shot. After a long time, a shot is shown from a distance where he is walking to the water margin of the tank, turning his back to the frame. The basin of the dried tank and water, dead trees with greenery here and there form only a brown picture with a touch of green. The ambience is silent; the only sound which can be heard is the sound coming from Wannihamy's walking stick hitting the dry ground.

In the *Death on a Full Moon Day*, the tank does not serve its main purpose of irrigating the soil or nurturing the lives of villagers who earn their living by agriculture. The silent backdrop associated with the dried up tank, without merely being silent, contradicts the village created by the authority of the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist discourse. As the film progresses, it generates 'polyphonic' meanings by making use of silent shots not

only of the tank, but also of abandoned paddy fields, barren land, temples, roads, graveyards, etc.

The youth, including *Some*, take muddy water from the puddles in the tank basin shown in *Death on Full Moon Day* in order to make bricks. Tank water does not irrigate cultivations any longer. It is more economically stable to assume the role of a soldier fighting the war created by the authority than to farm with water from the tank filled by scarce rain. Through this occupation, the village youth who serves in the army (in *Death on Full Moon Day* it is Bandara) hopes to be able to build a house out of bricks, which is stronger than the small hut thatched with coconut leaves which are shown in the film. The youth who remain in the village could only make bricks for those houses and sell them. The ground which was previously used for agriculture by the villagers is now being used to make clay for bricks.

"*Bricklayer boy … how long would you take to finish it?*" asks Wannihamy from the bricklayer about the house that Bandara was building. Next, a shot is shown in which he is weeding in the front yard of the half-built house, standing quietly at one end of the village. However, even though Wannihamy does not accept it, everybody including the audience knows that Bandara was killed in the war front. The village ground which was first dug up in order to make bricks for Bandara's house financed by his soldier's salary is now being dug up to bury his coffin. The silent funeral procession carrying his coffin proceeds along the edge of the tank basin casting reflections on the water. The rain falling after a few days fills up Bandara's grave which awaits his coffin. In

the second turn of the film, where Wannihamy enters into total silence, he is seen lying unconscious on the barren land near the tank basin.

Just like the characters of a single grand narrative evolving in numerous cinematic narratives, the basic backdrop shots including this tank, land and ambience are quietly repeated in different films of this period. Even though the roles of human characters change, the role of this lifeless, silent backdrop is a constant in definite forms.

The backdrop footage of the anonymous village in *This is My Moon* where the Tamil girl discussed in Chapter 4 is introduced, is another example. There too, the tank is associated with war, not with agriculture. That is where the corpses of the soldiers from the village killed in the war are cremated. The quiet backdrop of the tank intensifies the meaning of the short dialogues in the foreground. Following is a dialogue between the moaning widow and the father taking place while a dead soldier is being cremated:

"Uncle, why are you crying?

Why are you crying?

I am crying because he is dead…

I am crying because he was born!"

Life has lost its meaning. Fathers are often made to experience the death of their sons, before their own. The tank basin is a repository of memories of death because that is

where cremation takes place. At another locality of the same tank basin where the corpse of the soldier is being cremated, a village youth says this to another.

"Had bread for breakfast ... 18 years old ... training ... can go to the Army!"

As the agricultural economy based on paddy farming fades in the backdrop of war, bread replaced rice and warfare replaced farming. Announcing his decision, '*I can join the Army'* says a character while walking on the same meadow of the lake in which we see his corpse being cremated at the end of the film. As the cremation ground of his body, the lake's meadow transforms into a storehouse of memories of death instead of symbolising lavishness and fertility. The imagery of silence embodies a new symbolism of loss and despair.

The village carrying newer symbols in *This is My Moon*, is not a definite village like '*Siriyala'* re-created by Lester James Pieris in *Rekhawa*, which was discussed in Chapter 3. It is a template. Its backdrop shots begin in '*Death on Full Moon Day'* and evolve across each film because of its nature as a template. All village backdrop shots, including the tank, are parts of that template.

> ... Apart from the village monk, the bucket-shop owner, and the two families in the film, there is nobody else. Perhaps this may not be the actual village. But this village could exist somewhere in somebody's mind (Handagama 2001, p. 15).

What does 'somewhere' mean? A place where a particular template exists cannot be a definite place; therefore it should be 'somewhere'. As Darshana Liyanage records its

features, he confirms what its space is and also confirms that is can continue to move across a grand narrative as silent characters.

> "In fact in the film 'This is My Moon' ... He mercilessly attacks the so-called metaphysics like Sinhala-Buddhist thinking, patriotism, war heroes, innocent village life, decorum, and virtue. His film is not a re-creation of the village (near the war front) ... He produces us a common component of 'human relationships', 'social value system' and 'lifestyle' of the Lankan village" (Liyanage 2001, p. 46).

Common components such as 'human relationships', 'social value system' and 'lifestyle' could be considered as one single unit, which is the socio-cultural body. The template of the village containing this socio-cultural body evolves across *Death on a Full Moon Day* and *This is My Moon*. Sunila Abeysekera comments on it as follows:

> "In both Death on Full Moon Day and This is My Moon, the village is much more critical to the narrative and in fact could be said to occupy centre-stage in terms of the ways in which it shapes the lives and the choices of the individuals that live in it. Through their particular depiction of the dry zone village, both Vithanage and Handagama set out to challenge the traditional image of 'the village' in the Sinhala cinema, which is almost always represented lush and green and full of promise, a safe haven and the site of all that is positive about our culture and our traditions." (Abeysekare 2001, p. 05)

Though Wannihamy and the Tamil girl terminate themselves at the end of each of their narrative, the image of the village backdrop continues to evolve from one film to another, suggesting that our discussion on socio-cultural silence is applicable not only to the silent characters, but also to silent backdrop spaces.

Space surrounding village environs is again used in Vimukthi Jayasundara's *Forsaken Land*. This village too is anonymous, just like the village in *This is My Moon*. As usual, backdrop spaces play their silent roles in this film too. Scrublands, woods, tanks, lanes

spreading all the way to the horizon develop their narration together through a few human characters acting in front of them. War tanks and vehicles which look as if they are part of the environs and which move back and forth, render meaning to the image of the deserted, quiet village.

> Jayasundara uses long, static shots and a visual composition that places particular emphasis on the deserted landscape in which tanks, army trucks and school buses emerge as the only sites of communal gathering; armed men, schoolchildren and women are rare human figures in motion. the shots are dominated by the slow rhythms of everyday routines, and diegetic sound and silence echo the despair of abandoned women, children's fears and the neuroses of traumatised soldiers, as well as a sense of unease that reveals that, in spite of the armistice, life has not and will not return to normal. (Trbic n.d., p. 57)

The limited number of characters acting in the '*Forsaken Land'* space are a soldier in the Civil Defense Force during the cease-fire in 2002 named Anura, his wife Latha, the wife's elder sister Soma, a soldier-friend Palitha, an old soldier of the Civil Defense Force Piyasiri, and a girl in the village Batti. It is more a series of incidents occurring during a cease-fire than a clear narrative with a beginning, a middle and an end. There are incidents which are not directly related to each other such as Anura being bullied by Army soldiers and his depression, Latha's illicit affair with Palitha, Soma's sexual restlessness and loneliness, Piyasiri's loneliness, Batti's lingering around the loneliness of Soma and of Piyasiri and her fear, Anura being asked to kill a man tied inside a sack.

The extra-long, silent footage depicting these incidents are common in the '*Forsaken Land'* film. The single shot in the middle of the film showing a group of soldiers taking

Anura from his security post in an army truck, stripping him naked and throwing him into a stream is 2.23 minutes long. It seems that Anura resembles the guardian of the village, who is defenseless in front of Army soldiers, who occupies the lowest rank in the hierarchy of the Army, and who is often recruited from the relevant village itself. Stripping him naked and throwing him into the water is not just fun; it shows the oppression directed towards the lower ranks in the Army. As the soldiers take off in the truck after throwing naked Anura in the water, all noises heard so far fade away and only a cawing of a crow remains. The faded noise belongs to the Army. It is coming from the soldiers and the truck. Then the silent, long shot captures Anura from a distance emerging from the water in fear and taking his fire-arm and hurrying out of the frame, still naked. The shot is cut into a silent mid shot of Anura at the bottom of the frame on the right-hand side, looking away, holding his fire-arm, naked. It lasts 27 seconds on screen. There is a trunk of a tree on to his right. There are green shrubs behind, onto his left and in front.

Anura's silent, naked shot which is divided by only a single cut and which lasts nearly 3 minutes between two long and middle distance shots depicts his loss of power in the backdrop of the sky, the earth, the stream, and the wood. The outer space overpowers his character. In the '*Forsaken Land*', in most instances where the supporting characters are introduced, the power is only drawn towards the 'silent' external space. *Soma* comes back home after work in a distant shot giving prominence to a sprawling, lonely meadow. When Latha runs through the wood after seeing a man having sex with

a pregnant woman, prominence is given to the wood. While Piyasiri relates the folk tale of the cuckoo bird (the story which is quoted at the beginning of the Chapter) to Batti, Soma aimlessly walks across the barren land, losing herself in the space. The external space equally overpowers the characters of Batti, Piyasiri, Palitha in the shots in which these characters are seen.

Immense, silent backdrop spaces are a cinematic imagery of the psyche of the characters submerging in these spaces. Loneliness, anxiety, fear, insecurity are hidden in these shots. It is not irrational to consider these backdrops as a common space of the internal monologue of the characters because they depict all reflections of the dissatisfied, empty lives of those characters. In '*Flying Fish'* too, similar common backdrop spaces are again seen.

> I spent my childhood and my life in a village, which was controlled by the government security forces during the day and, by the LTTE during the night. So, under these circumstances I noticed how the lives of the ordinary people, who were not involved with the army, were becoming militarized. As a little child, I understood how this 'militarization' led towards creating insecurity and vulnerability in the society we were living in. I understand that the impressions I created on screen (based on my personal experiences and the reality I had lived) may not agree with the images of the war and the military that the government has constructed and want to create. (Pushpakumara 2013)

The village is described in the light of Pushpakumara's personal experiences at a time when he saw the direct effects of the war. The characters in *Flying Fish* travel about the space of the film. All of their narratives are bonded together in and through the silence of the village that constitutes its setting.

All the happenings in the film are centred round the few families that inhabit a village situated in the east of the war zone. The narrative that runs parallel reveals one episode where we meet Wasana, a young woman and her soldier-lover who comes to her village on duty. The sexual relations between the two result in Wasana becoming pregnant. The attempt to abort the fetus fails. Eventually, the soldier gets a transfer and abandons Wasana. Wasana's father who has seen the sexual activities of the two going on within an abandoned, dilapidated, building does not talk about it but suffers severe mental turmoil. He is serving as a village security guard and owing to the torment in his mind gives up his job. In the end, Wasana goes in search of her lover, finds him and cuts off his penis in revenge. Her father takes his life by shooting himself at another location. Wasana runs away.

In the third story, we meet a Tamil girl. She has her first menstruation on a bus. Her father unable to pay the ransom money demanded by the LTTE is a helpless government servant. He and his wife are murdered by the LTTE. The girl runs away from the village to save her life. At the end on a bus that is leaving the village are the three characters unknown to each other. The bus moves on by itself. It has no driver.

A bus leaving the village without a driver moves along into eternity and in the distance flying fish appear. Wasana, who has taken her revenge from the soldier, the adolescent, who stabs his mother, and the Tamil girl who sees the murder of her parents and runs away are the only people on the bus. In a way, this trio can be seen as trying to run away from the invincible village background. However, in the final silent image what

we see is the driverless bus with the three passengers disappearing from sight. All that is left in the frame is the brown road and the surrounding environment. The three passengers leaving the village on a bus without a driver engaged in inner monologues are shown as a single image space while in the far distance is the open space of the village.

5.1.2. Internal space of the village: Decayed houses and deteriorated buildings

The three main characters of Sanjeewa Pushpakumara's debut film *Flying Fish try* to escape from their village in a driver-less bus. However, there is one person who is successful in evading the symbolic and physical authority that controls him. That is the Wasana's father. He shoots himself with the gun he gets enlisting as a home guard upon witnessing his wife and daughter have sex with the same Army soldier on different occasions. His trauma makes him run away from life.

It is in the same wrecked building that both *Wasana* and her mother have sex with the soldier – a roofless, decaying, dark-walled old factory hall now overcome by jungle. The late middle-aged man had to witness himself losing his pride as a husband and a father through the walls of a building wrecked by war, from which the soldier was supposed to protect the village. It is a dreadful and a shocking moment for a father to see his daughter having pre-marital sex with a soldier. The couple having sex is shown in long and medium shots with sounds of their grins and fast breathe forming the background while the father watching the scene is always shown in an extreme long

shot. The man looks like a tiny object beneath the tall weathered walls, when he eyewitnesses her daughter losing her dignity. It is the gigantic and wrecked building's presence that dominates the scene.

The roofless building has neither internal nor external space demarcated by it. Its walls separate the inside from the outside, but the bushes and shrubs are fast invading that inner space. Symbolically, the inner living space, where one human life must have been flourishing, is now been swallowed by the outer space. Now, in this space, probably the most controlled basic human activity, sexual intercourse, takes place freely, breaking all social norms. Ironically, the destroyer of those Sinhalese-Buddhist values is the same soldier who has been entrusted with the duty of protecting them from another 'enemy'.

The internal space of the village becomes an important but silent foil in setting the mood in many post-1990 films, including '*Flying Fish*'. The village house becomes as prominent as a character in many films, where the 'traditional village house' gets submerged in the outer spaces. The village house in the post-1990 trend can take two forms: the grass or coconut leaf thatched, wattle and daub house, or brick house with tile roof. Neither these houses seem to be complete or well maintained. *Wannihamy*'s little house in 'Death on Full Moon Day' is a decayed, its roof is leaking. His son *Bandara*'s house was not complete; so are the houses of soldier *Duminda* in '*August Sun*' and that of the soldier in '*This is my Moon*': none of them are complete, dark inside and bare-bricked outside.

Civil war and Youth insurrections undermine the notions of security and unity. As discussed in chapter two, the house ceased to be a safe place after so many killings, robbery and rape within the house by perpetrators of violence whom nobody had the power resist. A household in the North in the war time was described thus: 'They have robbed what was in our rooms, clothes are all over. Our dresses were stained with boot marks of the blood of those killed downstairs' (Hoole et al 1993, p.73).

When the killing in the homes was over after a few years of brutal violence, the shock of death continued to haunt the people with the arrival of coffins of soldiers draped in the flag, with all its Nationalistic symbolism, as did Bandara's sealed coffin in the film 'Death on a Full Moon Day'. In fact, the coffin is too large for the little house so that it hits the door frame several times. When taken inside with difficulty, it has to be shifted a few times to avoid getting wet from the water leaking from the roof.

> The poverty of the family and the smallness of their house are made clear to the viewer even before the actual size of the large coffin squeezed into the small house is before us. (Abeysekare 2001, p. 09).

Wannihamy's house is a small quiet place. Its doors are low and the rain squeezes in from the roof to wet its mud-clad floor. Not even a radio or a human voice is heard inside it. Its mud coloured walls are plain free from decorative images or calendars. To ward off the pressure that comes from outside to accept the death of his son's death, *Wannihamy* would sit on the empty veranda's floor or the dingy rear side of the house. It is to this house that his elder daughter would come to ask for his fingerprint signature to claim compensation for her brother's demise. With this act, the house turns into a

place associated with death than life and safety. Just like the lake basin acquires a symbolism of death, the house becomes a place reminding us of death.

The coconut-leaf thatched, decayed house depicts the poverty of *Wannihamy*'s family and how caste, religion and other authoritative powers have humbled them. The house is a symbol of their petrified conditions, which *Bandara* attempts to overcome by trying to build a tile-roofed house by the war-generated money he earns as a soldier of the Army.

Red brick bound unplastered houses come as a motif in the films 'Death on Full Moon Day', 'August Sun' and 'This is My Moon'. All these houses belong to soldiers in operations. None of them are complete. Therefore, it's quite dark inside them and aggravates the silences in them. These houses interact with their backgrounds in each film to intensify the tones and moods.

> The house and the landscape of the soldier in the film 'This is My Moon' could not be found anywhere. So, we had to build the house in the right landscape. In fact, we had to break and alter an existing house to match the image. This house should depict the emptiness, uncertainty and the risk of a family whose aim of life was awaiting death. The house appears only squarely or parallel to the camera generating various moods when human images appear in its foreground. (Senavirathna 2013).

It appears at times that no human activity takes place inside the house other than the soldier's sister and the young Tamil woman sleeping inside it. Even the smallest everyday conversation takes place outside the house, in the yard. They bring chairs outside, when they want to sit.

The young Tamil woman would be told: "*You go inside!*" but neither she nor anyone else would go inside the house. The house was not anymore a safe zone but a dungeon filled with the 'emptiness of awaiting death'. The village house, like the lake in the discussion above, is a silent and metaphorical place with tremendous meaning-making potential. This space signifies the post-independent Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony's myriad impacts on the outsiders to the house such as the young Tamil woman as well as the insiders like the soldiers, or *Wannihamy*, who are rendered hapless and incapable of resistance. The house, therefore, becomes an externalized image of the internal monologues of the silent dwellers in those houses.

5.2. Silent City: As a space deprived of the hope for life

We have discussed in the third chapter the negative, ugly, uncultured, non-Sinhala Buddhist social space was depicted as the city in the popular cinema of the early decades as against the positive, beautiful, cultured, Sinhala Buddhist village that existed. The characters of the city including the complex city girl appeared for the characters witnessing that typical nature. Until the presence of the change of format brought about mainly by the creations of Dharmasena Pathiraja in the artistic cinema of the 1970's, direct readings of the city were seldom found. Since the art cinema came with this change of format decreased after the beginning of the decade of 1980, the city, seen and depicted with the inquiry of broad spatial system did not continue to take place. In short, it was not discussed that both the city and the village were mystified

zones of depiction for reinforcing existing spaces of social political and cultural spheres.

Even though we cannot argue that this minimum expression of the city in the creations of the stream of film we come across within the study scope of this thesis has come to an increase, we can suggest that it has displaced itself to productions with re-statements on the city. It does not increase because many films of this trend depict the village as the space of their episodes. We find relatively a lesser number of productions deviating from the village and identifying the city as the main space of their episodes. Among them, we discuss here two films by Prasanna Vithanage, '*August Sun'* and Chinthana Dharmadasa and Udaya Dharmawardhana's '*How I wonder what you are'*. Apart from the facts that these films have episodes woven around the the city and the last period of civil war in 2009, the most likely reason for them to be taken for discussion is that they are the creations of two young directors closer to the last segment of the time frame limiting our thesis. Dharmadasa and Dharmawardhana can be identified as the final links of the film tradition initiated by Vithanage and Handagama. Or else, they ended this film tradition to divert this film stream in a new direction.

Dharmadasa and Dharmawardhana station their camera in the city. The Sri Lankan city as in all other countries is truly the center where the political and economic power is concentrated. With the development of the transport system of Sri Lanka in the colonial period this was developed into a better form marking Colombo as the capital and cities like Kandy, Galle , Jaffna, Anuradhapura as suburbs on the political map.

The city spaces were made of shops, commercial centers, hotels, ports, institutions executing the state power, main schools, hospitals, libraries, main places of religious worship and museums. A significant happening common to all regions and special for the South Asian region, the idea of 'Going to the capital for prosperity' is activated in the Sri Lankan context as well. Similarity with collapsed freedom identified as 'complexity' by the popular cinema in a nature of single form was absorbed into the city due to the fact that in the village the multicultural feature existed at a relatively higher level and the existence of much space to be accessed by the outside world.

However, the city that we encounter in the post-1990's art cinema, which is the subject of our thesis, unlike the village, does not communicate the awakened popular expectations about life. On the contrary, almost all of the films fail to support the expectations of the people who inhabit the city and explore their psychological breakdown. The discussion that follows examines the situation arising from the social and political dynamics determined by Sinhala Buddhist nationalism.

5.2.1 The silence of the city street: a path that frustrates life expectations

The expressed meanings of the city were displaced directly due to the political conflicts including the civil war and insurrections of the youth and indirectly due to the social and political factors created by the Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism. An anonymous writer in the journal Race and Class on the Black July 1983 in his article *Sri Lanka's week of shame: an eyewitness account*, expresses, thus.

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> Thousands gathered near the cemetery and began looting and burning in every direction. Within hours, Colombo was caught up in the worst holocaust it had ever experienced. Tamil shops and houses were singled out and looted and burnt, while many Tamils were murdered 500 in the first two days it was estimated. More than 500 cars and lorries were burnt and their wreckage left on the roads. (*Sri Lanka's week of shame* 1984, p. 40)

First, there is arson, murder and eviction and second, bomb blasts and highway robberies, and third, road blocks, checkpoints and high-security zones. The common urban space is obliterated from the common picture and the state, religious and commercial institutions that occupied such space take on another meaning, in another direction. It is this changed city that many of the characters that we meet in our study traverse and inhabit and that forms the urban setting of most of the films. Visual artiste Chandragupta Thenuwara observes as follows:

> For us living in Sri Lanka, it is visible how our living space is invaded with barrels. Barrels piled in thousands obstruct the circulation and mobility of the general public. (Thenuwara 1999, p. 82)

'*August Sun*' is the foremost film in which this displaced city street is portrayed.

It is a multi-narrative film. In one of its narratives, the main character *Duminda* is an army soldier. On his way to his village on leave, in Anuradhapura he visits a brothel with his friends and finds among its sex workers his sister *Kamani* as he enters the room with his chosen prostitute. He sees his sister walking out of a room with an old man. She gazes in stunned amazement at her brother for a few seconds and tries to get back to the room and close its door. But *Duminda* gives her several thundering slaps. The scene ends with the brothel managers pointing a pistol at his head and grievously

hitting his face. *Duminda* does not meet his sister in Anuradhapura again. He only meets her again in his ancestral home when he goes to his village.

In the narrative connected to *Duminda*, it is during his search for his sister the following morning that he encounters the city street. The first view of the street in the background is of the gate to the brothel. It is not open from the outside but is closed so as to conceal the goings-on inside the brothel. The gate of the garment factory in the city that he sees later, on the other hand, is closed because its workers have lost their jobs. In the empty silent city street are posters on the walls of the workers demanding their lost jobs being eaten up by stray goats.

It is not only the loss of life from the war and its horrors or the barrel laden security zones that form the city scene; there are other displacements of economic spaces in the city. The two locked gates come up as loud indicators of silence. They do not indicate a fulfilment of life expectations. They symbolize moral collapse that accompanies an exclusive economic advance. It reveals the identity of a brother in search of the hidden turmoil of his sister.

As in the village, the urban space and its lost identity are turned towards a background space representing a character that transcends the internal monologue of silent characters. In *August Sun*, the monument of the city street that we meet at the gates of the brothel and of the garment factory is silent but communicates a powerful message.

It is the soldiers' monument bus stop. It is the city space where *Duminda* waits for a bus.

There are no vehicles on the street except a tractor filled with coffins. In the city street, are images of death and of impermanence and economic instability.

There is no speech, no sound amidst these brief images that appear in the noonday Anuradhapura city space, but they emphasize a background of the total uncertainty of life. The images are mostly distant and again the character *Duminda* is submerged within them, who with *Kamani* that we do not see again in the frame, portray their tragic condition.

> With the decade of the 80's the real situation of the public space in this regard is disturbing. When a baby is born a popular question among the Sinhala community is to ask if it is a sarong or a kambaya (cloth worn by a woman)? We raise this point because that traditional question is now changed to 'Is it army or garment?' signifying not sarcasm but distress. (Seneviratne 2013, p. 367).

The street in the noonday Anuradhapura scene is the path that shatters the life expectation of the 'army and garment' son and daughter. In another scene, there is the Samadhi statue. The hegemony of Sinhala Buddhism, in this case, the holy city, is shown to crumble as an indirect result of it. The historicity, royalty, the odour of seela and symbols of the sangha embedded in the name 'Anuradhapura' are subjected to gross revision in the holy city that is the setting of the film. (Seneviratne 2013)

As the characters pass through in the space of the city streets it is not only *August Sun* that defines its silent background but also 'D', the main character in *How I wonder*

what you are that reaches cinema audiences in 2009, also gets submerged in the urban space.

We meet 'D' in *How I wonder what you are* as a young man just spending time unable to find a way out for the freeing of the empty solitariness in the mind with the body covered with sweat in a small apartment with loss of hope . He lives a silent life of monotony with only the sound of the live telecast of the television on the last few days of the civil war and the sound of the water bubbles of the oxygen tube in the fish tank. Suddenly, '*Cathy*' comes to him, a friend of '*D*'. She comes in search of '*D*' because she had an argument with her lover '*KK*' and suddenly leaves after staying for few days in his home. Nothing happens. '*Cathy*' and '*D*' are in unexpressed bond with each other and the film ends with '*D*' expecting and waiting for the return of '*Cathy*'.

In one scene, '*D'* gets on the pillion of a motorcycle of a stranger who promises to drop him at his lodgings. During the ride, he tells '*D'* about his frustrated life expectations.

> People are too close. So they don't feel each other. Like in a cow shed. That sea is like a fence. The life is so wretched that there is no freedom even to breathe. Don't you feel how everything is getting stagnated? (Dharmawardhana and Dharmadasa 2011, p. 138)

'D' riding the pillion listening to all, maintains silence.

There are three main background spaces present in the film. The first is '*D's* home. The second is the tavern. The third one is the streets of the city. When we come across the above statement the bicycle carrying *'D'*; and the man runs along one of these streets.

What stations in the dark scene is only the single distant image of the old motor bicycle which seldom passes the light of the street lamps in the streets of the capital in the night. The man on the bicycle disappearing in the darkness taking leave from *'D'* in an instant is never met again. The scene ends with a distant image showing '*D*' vomiting at a corner after walking along the dark, silent, empty street. The street is empty and deserted with no people in it. No life is met there.

Even before and after this scene '*D'* walks along the streets crowded with people and traffic. But, Dharmawardhana and Dharmadasa create all these scenes in such a way that life is not met in these streets. In early times, the filmmakers who went for outer spaces of the village had a tendency to create images in long-shots but these directors show a tendency for using close-ups. Hence, other than the character these images do not sufficiently picture anything else. Fragments of life are met. Vehicles and parts of shops in the street seen in fragments. 'We focused camera to the bare truth of our lives. And cut them … then joined it back as we wanted.' (Ibid)

According to this idea, the meeting streets in these centrally close images is an expression of the 'true story' of life. Accordingly, it is not meaningless to suggest that this represents the expression of their moods. What can be found in this expression of moods?

> How I Wonder What You Are captures the eventual truth of a youth under the city lights. It frames an occurrence portraying the emptiness and the stillness of the life of a youth who has lost the taste of human bonds and doesn't have a reason to live on. (De Silva 2011, p. 39)

The city streets constitute a communicative image of the hollow and static life that swallows up D and the people who associate with him. Just as *Duminda* is swallowed up by micro-elements of the urban space, *D* remains in the silent space of his urban background, which turns into a space that sums up all the silences of the characters.

Conclusion

Victor Ivan defines briefly the horrible experiences that Sri Lankan society faced during the past several decades and destroyed its soul as follows:

> Insurrection, war and the Tsunami - both natural and man-made disasters - have taken away nearly 150,000 lives over the last 20 years. All these disasters did not kill all the people in the country, but they have done harm to the human soul or killed people. Although we are alive, our souls have been destroyed or killed. (Ivan 2005, p. 5).

It is reasonable to define the dual space of both village and city that we identified in this chapter as refugee spaces occupied by characters whose souls have been killed by natural and man-made disasters. It is clear to the critical observer that although the tsunami was a natural disaster the other disasters were all determined by the political direction and actions based on such direction in the country's independence era. Extremist Sinhala Buddhism and Sinhala nationalism (Sinhala Buddhist nationalism) suppressed other social discourse and divided society along racial, religious and caste considerations all of which resulted not only in extremism and marginalization but also oppression which in turn led to the aforementioned crises and the closing up of social space for redemption from them.

For this reason, although the geographical scene of the dual space of village and city that we have identified so far changes they engender similar meanings as one unit. Whether the tank is the background to the village or the street is the background to the city, the crises faced by the characters are always based on definite facts. Merely because a background remains silent or static it is not possible to conclude that its effect on other areas and characters is not related to it.

The creator of *Forsaken Land* claims unequivocally that its environment plays the role of a character. Such "environment character" comes out of its space in Forsaken Land and reappears in other films and in other rural and urban open spaces and thus traverses from film to film as a character.

The characters in the film wave chosen for this thesis use silence as a powerful mode of communication. Those characters that we met in earlier chapters and several similar characters that we meet in this chapter provide space for the creation of a new concept. If the environment that swallows up all the characters like micro particles, appears again as a character, and if it traverses from one film to another, then the environment performs an internal psychological monologue and silence becomes a powerful mode of signification.

Conclusion

> *I saw death from my childhood days. I saw*
> *bodies burning on the road. It is this*
> *generation of my childhood that is now*
> *engaged in artistic creations. It is that*
> *torment in my soul that is displayed*
> *throughout this film.*
>
> (Jayasundara 2008)

From its beginning, the focus of this thesis was on an exploration of the silence that characterizes Sri Lankan cinema from 1990. It reviewed contemporary theories of silence from the earliest times of the twentieth century. After evaluation of early and contemporary research into the phenomenon of silence, socio-cultural standpoint to cinematic silence and its aesthetics was seen to be the best approach to adopt in reading the post 1990 Sri Lankan cinema, given the socio-cultural context of violence and war that left its imprint on the cultural canvass of Sri Lanka.

Despite parallels with other parts of the world in similar situations, the particular kind of silence is a unique manifestation in the Sri Lankan context, proliferating and reproducing over contemporary, recent and historic social, political and religious cultural spaces, forcing to cast stereotyped representation in cinema and other contemporary arts. The discussion in chapter one showed how silence becomes a 'shield' for those who are forced to vulnerability and how they, in turn, readopt silence,

individually and collectively, as a weapon against the very forces that oppressed them. Finally, the metaphor 'silence as a weapon' was suggested.

The second chapter showed that silence and silencing of the weak prevailed from the ancient times of Anuradhapura to the final stage of colonial rule. The ancient history of Sri Lanka evidenced the rise of the Theravada Buddhism and the caste system that paved the way for creating a 'silent subject' vis-à-vis the ruler. This 'forced silence' and the socio-cultural landscape of it, which prevailed for nearly two millennia did not change much during the rule by Western colonists, representatives of Western monarchs, Christianity's challenge to Buddhist establishment, or other agents of modernization owing to the rooted traditions over millennia. Post independent ideological regimes that increasingly adopted Sinhalese Buddhism reinforced silence of the weak and reinvigorated a Nationalism of the dominant majority over the vulnerable and the minority. Chapter three argued how the popular art of the post-independence Sri Lanka conspired to build stereotypes of the perceived 'other' of the dominant ideology and restrain diverse and multiple perspectives to the art including cinema.

In chapter four, two prominent characters from the 1990s cinema, 'Wannihamy' from Prasanna Vithanage's 'Death on Full Moon Day' and 'the Tamil girl' from Asoka Hadagama's 'This is My Moon' take the centre of the discussion. They represent the male and the female, the Southern and the Northern, Sinhala and the Tamil and shows how silence becomes a common characteristic of living in Sri Lanka, under the

conditions they had to and shared by many. The Fifth chapter expanded the discussion to other remarkable characters from other films of the time to explore how silence became a defining feature of them.

It was shown in the third chapter that the early post-independence art, including cinema, did not represent a form of art that called the Sinhala Buddhist hegemonic ideology to question. Visual arts and cinema in 1990s embodied the challenge of the artists against the Sinhalese Buddhist hegemony. In fact, they had experienced the youth insurrections and extreme nationalism that lead to war, catalysed by the Sinhala-Buddhist ideology. In cinema, their resistance set the mood, tone and the narrative style of the films.

A socio-cultural theoretical stance was adopted in the thesis. The Tamil girl's character in 'This is My Moon' confirmed the suggestion by Covarrubias and S. Windchief in Silences in *Stewardship: Some American Indian College Students Examples* (2009), that silence is a method of preserving one's culture. Further, Thomas Bruneau's observation in *Communicative silences: Forms and functions* (1973) that silence is a tool in the hands of the powerful and unleashed towards the weak and the subordinates as a measure of control is unsettled in preference to argue the exact opposite of it: that silence is a shield of the marginalized and the vulnerable, behind which they feel safe, as also suggested by Cheryl Glen in *Unspoken* (2004) and Kennan Ferguson in *Silence: The Politics* (2011).

In parallel to Ferguson's argument from a feminist point of view that the weak is feminized by authority, both 'the Tamil girl' and 'Wannihamy' are feminised as opposed to the 'masculine' authority of religion and state. In terms of gender, religion, language and culture the Tamil girl occupies a liminal space. Although Wannihamy seems to belong to the majority, his poverty and vulnerable social status makes him indistinct from the Tamil girl when it comes to how those in power recognise him. Ferguson's contribution towards 'resistant silence' is particularly useful in this context.

Silence did not limit itself to a protective shield. It also becomes a powerful weapon against the very perpetrators of their oppression. The Tamil girl as well as the Wannihamy, therefore, are armoured with the shield of silence, which also is their weapon, which we saw them using in subtle and crafty stokes against the otherwise unassailable. As we note that silence is capable of being the weapon of a weak, we are prompted to believe that silence is no longer the cinematic expression of a particular individual. Instead, the other spaces of the individual such the house, the village, a tank and the gravel road also submerge in silence, implying the resistant expression of a community and its socio-cultural space.

This common expression of collective silence opens up new interesting areas of research for us. Depicting 'silence' as mis-en-scène is the foremost among them. Understanding the visual regime of silence is of interest to a researcher who wants to study the role of silence as a weapon.

Filmography

Ahas Gawwa (One League to the sky) 1974, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Mithrarathna Herath; directed by Dharmasena Pathiraja

Akasa Kusum (Flowers of the Sky) 2008, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Prasanna Vithanage, A. Sreekar Prasad, H.D. Premasiri; directed by Prasanna Vithanage

Aksharaya (Letter of Fire) 2005, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Iranthi Abeysinghe, Laurent Aleonard; directed by Ashoka Handagama

Anantha Rathriya (Dark night of the soul) 1996, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Damayanthi Fonseka; directed by Prasanna Vithanage

Dadayama (The Hunt) 1983, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Sunil Chandrasiri, P.A. Somadasa, Rabin Chandrasiri; directed by Vasantha Obeysekara

Gam Peraliya (Changing Village) 1963, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Anton Wickramasinghe; directed by Lester James Pieris

How I wonder what you are 2009, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Channa Deshapriya, Rasith Jinasena, Dammika Samarathunga; directed by Chinthana Dharmadasa and Udaya Dharmawardhana

Igillena Maluwo (Flying Fish) 2011, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Manohan Nanayakkara, Sanjeewa Pushpakumara; directed by Sanjeewa Pushpakumara

Ira Mediyama (August Sun) 2003, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Soma Edirisinghe; directed by Prasanna Vithanage

Me Mage Sandai (This is my moon) 2000, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Iranthi Abeysinghe; directed by Ashoka Handagama

Oba nethuwa oba ekka (With you without you) 2012, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Prasanna Vithanage, A. Sreekar Prasad, H.D. Premasiri; directed by Prasanna Vithanage

Para Dige (On the Run) 1980, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Albert Godamanna; directed by Dharmasena Pathiraja

Parasathu Mal (Flowers of the others) 1966, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Chithra Balasooriya; directed by Gamini Fonseka

Pawuru Walalu (Walls Within) 1997, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Nita Fernando; directed by Prasanna Vithanage

Purahanda Kaluwara (Death on a full moon day) 1997, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by NHK, Japan; directed by Prasanna Vithanage

Rekhava (Line of Destiny) 1956, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Lester James Pieris; directed by Lester James Pieris

Sankara (_____) 2007, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Renuka Balasooriya, Somarathne Dissanayake; directed by Prasanna Jayakody

Sarungale (The Kite) 1979, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Y.M.Karunathilaka, Ranjith Palansooriya, Wimal Kuruwita Bandara; directed by Sunil Ariyarathne

Sisila Gini Ganee (Ice on Fire) 1992, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Sanath Gunathilake; directed by Prasanna Vithanage

Sudu Kalu saha Alu (White black and grey) 2005, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Krishan Deheragoda; directed by Sudath Mahadivulwewa

Sulanga Enu Pinisa (Forsaken Land) 2005, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Chandana Aluthge, Philippe Avril, Marie-Michèlegravele Cattelain, Pascal Diot, Michel Klein, Michel Reilhac, Francisco Villa-Lobos; directed by Vimukthi Jayasundara

Thani thatuwen piyambanna (Flying with one wing) 2003, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by Iranthi Abeysinghe, Upul Shantha Sannasgala; directed by Ashoka Handagama

Tharanaya (Crossing) 1997, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by _____; directed by Sudath Devapriya

Udu Gam Yamaya (Against the tide) 2001, motion picture, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Produced by _____; directed by Sudath Devapriya

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