

Sri Lankan English Fiction: The Experience of Reading James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wajinaieke

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Abstract: Considering the literary developments in the post independence Sri Lanka, it can be assumed that a great bulk of Sri Lankan literature today comes from short fiction that mainly deal with political and ethnic violence. Thus, much critical response in Sri Lankan Writing in English in general have been laid on Sri Lankan fiction which has granted visibility to Sri Lankan Literature like never before. However, we find three distinct languages in Sri Lankan literature—Sinhala, Tamil and English. Writing in English was not that popular during and after the independence of Sri Lanka. Even the academics from various English Departments too asserted a nationalistic view that writing in Sinhala and Tamil was preferable. But, in such a context, writers like James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wijenaieke deliberately choosing to write in English to reflect on the socio-political changes that were taking place in Sri Lanka is very significant. One of the significant preoccupations of Goonewardene has been an analysis of the destructions the Sri Lankan people were bringing on themselves. Wijenaieke too has been quite successful in telling stories of their traditional upbringing as well as their contemporary socio-political experiences. This paper is a deliberation on how the issue of language is so important in the literary landscape of Sri Lanka, how English Fiction in the Post Independence Sri Lanka developed, and how the Sri Lankan writers have self-critically explored their strife-ridden political history as well as their post-colonial confrontation with modernity through the form of short fiction.

Introduction:

A look at the literary developments in Sri Lanka in the last three decades of the 20th century, helps us to assume that a great bulk of Sri Lankan literature comes from English fiction many of which deal with the impact of political and ethnic violence on the lives of the indigenous people in Sri Lanka. However, a reading of the history of Sri Lankan Fiction in the 20th century is almost a precondition to discuss the representation of realities through Sri Lankan literature in today's context. Sri Lankan Literature is available in three distinct languages—Sinhala, Tamil and English across which there are hardly any connections. There had been a great revival of Sinhala literature with classical Sinhala language beginning to meet the new socio-political realities of the 20th century, and Martin Wickramasinghe's Sinhala novel *Gamperaliya (Uprooted)* became a torch-bearer of such a revival. Similarly, a revival in Tamil Literature in the 20th century was marked by a fusion of Western narrative models with local subject matters, landscapes, customs and traditions. English writing, on the other hand, was not very popular during and after the independence of Sri Lanka in 1948. Even the academics from various English departments of the Universities of Sri Lanka also asserted a nationalistic view that writing in Sinhala and Tamil was preferable to English.ⁱ However, during the last three war-ridden decades of the 20th century, the many writers began to record self-critically and with utmost urgency the suffering, death, and trauma caused by the incidents that were unfolding in the land following its Independence.ⁱⁱ Subsequently, many poems, novels, and short stories came into being in English depicting death, communal riots, destruction of villages, abandonments of homes and so on; and this has finally granted visibility to Sri Lankan English Literature in the context of World Literature today. This paper makes an attempt to read the history of Sri Lankan Writing in

English with special reference to short fiction. One of the most dominant themes in Sri Lankan English Fiction has been self-criticism as most of the writers seem to have tried to interrogate if what happened in Sri Lanka was right or wrong. To discuss the issue of self-criticism, I have tried to refer to two stories by James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wijenaikēⁱⁱⁱ respectively, and my main argument is that both of them have used self-criticism as the most dominant theme in the stories under discussion to describe their very specific Sri Lankan experience.

The Case of Language in Sri Lankan Writing

While discussing Sri Lankan Literature in general and Sri Lankan fiction in particular, the question of language is perhaps the most important preoccupations of the writers. Because, the case of language provides an important platform to critically analyse Sri Lankan Writing in general as the native languages of Sri Lanka had been Sinhalese and Tamils, and till the other day, English was a foreign language to the inhabitants of Sri Lanka. It was mostly seen as a colonial language and the authors before the Independence preferred to write either in Sinhala or in Tamil. It was only after the Independence of Sri Lanka in 1948 that works in English—both in Original English and translated from Sinhala and Tamil, gradually began to appear. Subsequently, themes like identity, self-interrogation, and self-articulation began to feature prominently in Sri Lankan English writing.^{iv} The political history and the relative insularity and isolation of Sri Lankan life, history and culture in the post-Independence period are reflected most visibly in the literatures written mostly by the Sinhalese and Tamil writers, and Cleve Kanaganayakkam informs that:

If the Insurgency was a central focus of the 1970s, the ethnic riots of 1983 brought in new concerns involving the Tamils and the Sinhalese. Where the earlier phase involved notions of class within a community the latter drew attention to ethnicity, identity, and the idea of the nation itself. Inevitably, the writing concerned itself with the conflict, either directly, or indirectly. (Kanaganayakkam, 59)

However, Kanaganayakkam also informs that a careful consideration of this body of English literature in Sri Lanka after the Independence would help us to acknowledge the fact that many works originally written in English also promote nativism in many ways. As she further states:

(...) The nationalist thrust of Sri Lankan politics in the last forty years seemed to favour the foregrounding of indigenous languages, namely, Sinhala and Tamil, rather than the acquired English. The projected decline of English writing, however, seems to have been averted and if English does not enjoy the “national” status it once held, it has shown its resilience by remaining a popular language in the urban areas, and among the growing middle-class. (Kanaganayakkam, 51)

Thus, the politics of language and the need for self-expression gave birth to many other important issues to be discussed in the context of English Writing in Sri Lanka. Besides, with the nationalist cultural policies, the growth of English writing was vehemently suppressed allowing national language and culture to flourish. Renowned authors like Shyam Selvadurai has stated that it was through the Youth Resurrection of 1971, led by Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) that paved the way for English writing in a substantial way. (Selvadurai, xviii). Subsequently, the

writers trying to express in the English language began to engage more meaningfully with the problems of insularity and the need for representation they were facing. At the same time, the publication of several English works in journals such as *New Ceylon Writing*, *Navasilu*, or *New Sri Lankan Review* provided new platform to the emerging writers in English. However, it was during the economic and political changes of 1980s, that Sri Lanka was opened up to the world, which further fostered a revival in English.

A cursory look at the history of Sri Lankan literature in the last three decades of the 20th century helps in understanding the fact that three important tendencies are clearly visible in Sri Lankan English literature which are as the following:

1. There can be found in contemporary Sri Lankan fiction a strong tendency to grapple with post-colonial situation in which a number of Sri Lankan writers, now living in other countries, seem to return to their native land only to get disillusioned soon.
2. Another tendency being the onslaught brought by modernity-based advancement on the idyllic life of the indigenous people.
3. The third and perhaps the most important tendency is for self-criticism resulting out of a vehement protest against the hypocritical Sri Lankan folks, the dehumanising impact brought into society by communal conflict and the inequality and exploitation of the poor in the supposed world order.

Based on such tendencies, it is almost an acceptable assumption that the need for expressing themselves in the international scene has finally made the English writers from Sri Lanka more visible and vocal. Besides, it's been quite interesting to note that the Sri Lankan English writers have systematically worked out some tools to set narration apart from Western modes of representation by which we actually mean that their works embody certain salient themes and preoccupations typical of this region. At the same time, Sri Lankan literature, especially fiction, seeks to assert its independence and uniqueness as an art form compared to other SAARC countries. Subsequently, we find that such a move by the writers has helped in evoking the details of the Sri Lankan life and society – its rich topography, ethnic composition, cultural nuances and the like. As Ajeet Cour has observed, one can assume that Sri Lankan fiction is marked by the authenticity of experience as lived in and evoked by the writers concerned. (Cour, 2003. pp. 9). However, in terms of the language used, many critics as well as authors believe that there is a cultural cringe activated by Western domination over indigenous language and culture. Many even seek to argue that Sri Lanka's leading writers now no longer stay in Sri Lanka. Besides, the internal political and cultural conflicts between the Tamil Separatists and the Sinhalese, who are the majority, have debarred all intellectual and literary developments in a significant ways. Intellectually, this situation has given a death blow to the Tamil literatures and cultures, and have activated much of Sri Lankan Literature written in English.^v

Sri Lankan English Fiction:

In the context of the SAARC region, it can be observed that there have been parallel traditions of narration surviving at different levels of the indigenous, but deprived and marginalized, sections of the society and other socio-economically stagnant and gender-based groups. What is so

interesting to note is the fact that all such groups are keeping their native tradition of storytelling alive and thereby giving a fillip to the development of literary activities in their regions. But the loss of such traditions in the flux of time as well as modernity is another matter of great concern for the writers of the SAARC region. The case of Sri Lanka too is not so different. The indigenous literary works written mostly in the traditional Sinhalese and Tamil languages bear testimony of the underlying conflict between tradition and colonialism-born modernity.

The development of fiction writing in English has an interesting and traceable developmental phase. The incidents that lead to the 1958 communal disturbances between the Sinhalese and the Tamils, and the exodus of the Burghers in the 1960s as a result of national policies were not sufficiently powerful events to stir the feeling of nationalism as a whole. With the eruption of insurgency, the myth of a unitary nation almost got lost and the heterogeneity within a supposed –to-be unified model was becoming increasingly apparent. This new awareness among the elite class led to a wide range of fictional works which were not always free of naive dualities. But, Kanaganayakkam observes that although there is no consensus about the achievements of these novels, the fact is that writing in English was beginning to reveal an awareness of the political upheavals of the nation, and writers were becoming increasingly conscious of the futility of ignoring the political and social unrest in the country. (Kanaganayakkam, 53-54)

Along with this struggle between two cultural systems over the issue of a nation, phenomena like Westernization fuelled by the Free Trade Zone, the emerging tourist industry, the emergence of expatriate literature by bilingual authors and so on, have rendered a greater emphasis on English in general as the language in everyday affairs. Partially, this might have affected the popularity and the relevance of English writing, and the significant changes brought about by contemporary fiction writers such as Ashley Halpé, Rajiva Wijesinha, and Jean Arasanayagam. Together with the diasporic writers, including Yasmine Gooneratne, Chitra Fernando, Shyam Selvadurai, Romesh Gunsekera, Rienzi Crusz, Michael Ondaatje, and Ambalavaner Sivanandan, one can speak of a substantial and significant body of writing in English over the past decades. Besides, many of the elite writers, who fled from the country during the trouble caused by communal wars, also found new grounds to engage with the Sri Lankan realities with more urgency because of a new rise in international readership. This induced the writers to both nostalgically and critically examine the values that had already been lost among the people in Sri Lanka in course of time.

But, when there could be found a cry against the use of English and the authenticity of the writers while using English as the language of creative expression, many fiction writers including James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wijenaiké consciously contributed a lot to the early development of original English writings from Sri Lanka. Other writers like Ediriweera Sarachchandra, though composed most of his works in Sinhalese during the fifties, wrote a novel in English called *With the Begging Bowl*. He also wrote another novel which he translated into English as *Curfew and a Full Moon* covering the insurgency of 1971. Although, the first two decades after Independence did not see any visible growth of writing in English, despite perverse criticism, writers like Goonewardene and Wijenaiké continued writing in English. Rajiva Wijesinha, in his edited Anthology *Bridging Connections* observes that writing in English came to its maturity with the publication of Goonewardene's *The Awakening of Dr. Kirithi* in the year

of 1976. (Wijesinha, xii). Subsequently, English established itself as the language of creative expression from an indigenous point of view and the writers could beautifully express the anxieties of the local people in the different works of fiction that they had produced.

The form of short fiction in the Sri Lankan context provides another ground to discuss the relevance of the Sri Lankan experiences for fictional explorations. The Anthology—*The Penguin New Writing in Sri Lanka* (1992) is an important addition to the discussion of contemporary Sri Lankan writing.^{vi} In his review of the book, Makarand Paranjape makes an interesting observation on the development of the form of the short story in Sri Lanka by relating it to the sociological aspects of this country. He states that Sri Lanka seems to support short fiction and short poems more than the novels and other voluminous works. This is mainly because the ‘sociological soil’ which nourishes its literature has been eroded or because the fragmentation of the society has denied its writers a large enough ethos to support literature on a grandeur scale. This must be an apt remark in the sense that the narrative traditions in Sri Lanka have historically traversed from being simple folk tales to more complex multilayered narratives typical of short stories. He also argued that like other commonwealth countries, Sri Lanka too has a colonial past followed by a strife-torn period of independence. Such experiences might have helped the writers to create some narrative snapshots based on the history of the Sri Lankan people in a form of writing which was not at all indigenous to Sri Lanka.

Against this critically significant context, the case of two pioneer writers—James Goonewardene^{vii} and Punyakante Wijenaikē^{viii} within Sri Lankan Fiction is worth mentioning. Both these writers have rendered seminal contributions to the developmental phase of Sri Lankan English fiction. One of the most dominant underlying themes of these two writers has been self-criticism which can be explained in terms of their stories. Goonewardene, who was born in Pannala, Sri Lanka, emerged as a leading fiction writer in Sri Lanka with his collection *The Awakening of Dr. Kirthi* (1967) in which the pastoral setting prevails so visibly. On the other hand, Punyakante Wijenaikē—another best-known Sri Lankan writer who hails from Colombo, is famous for her story-collection *The Third Woman* (1963). Initially, she used rural life as her theme, but later she shifted her focus to urban landscapes. I will try to explain the experience of reading Sri Lankan fiction in terms of Goonewardene’s story “The Doughty Men of Purantota” and Wijenaikē’s story “Monkeys”^{ix} which are remarkable achievements in making self-criticism an important mode of expression. But, no such attempt has been made in this paper to explore the multiple Sri Lankan traditions that shaped such writing.^x My focus will be on how the two stories undertaken for discussion produce notions of self-criticism in the context of Sri Lankan English fiction.

Reading Goonewardene and Wijenaikē

James Goonewardene’s story “The Doughty Men of Purantota” from his book *The Awakening of Dr. Kirthi* presents a slice of life in a small village called Purantota which is witnessing a crucial conflict between modernity and ethnicity. This story starts with the construction of a bridge, the confusion and fear arising in the minds of the common folk on the point that the communication with the other side of the river would surely destroy the independence and identity of the village and the subsequent bombing of the bridge under the leadership of a not very significant man

called Girigoris. The construction of a bridge on the river passing by the village has appeared to be the cause for discontentment and heated debates amongst the inhabitants. It is Girigoris, the chief layman of the village temple, who voices his fears to his fellow villagers that the construction of a bridge at the 'doorstep' of the village implies that the 'independence' of the village is seriously at stake. Once the bridge is completed, the village road will be occupied by buses, lorries, and people from other villages and the native people will be pushed to the wayside like rubbish. There have been voices disagreeing with Girigoris, but they are silenced soon before they are expressed profoundly by the secret destruction of the half-built bridge.

Goonewardene's story shows how the search for vengeance against ill-fate of life and the hunger for power and influence in society induce the physically deformed Girigoris to provoke the villagers against the bridge and destroy it. His construction of this fictitious moment in the story provides ample scope to delve deep into the contemporary politics of his time. The story raises questions of regionalism and preservation of indigenous identity which may be at stake because of the construction of the bridge which will surely help in the influx of people from the other part of the river. The destruction of the bridge is a symbolic resistance not only against the invasion of the machine – the buses and lorries—but also against the 'strangers' who might pass through the village. As Girigoris says: "It has to be an unpropitious time that strangers should climb over our stiles as if the whole village was now a public highway." (Wijesinha, 148) Girigoris' chief concern is to affirm the authority of the villagers over their village: "Because then there will no longer be a village here. The bridge will belong to no one. So, will be the village be no one's." (148) Then again he says:

I do not believe that there is anyone here who would like to see our village become a *palu kenatte* in which any stranger could come and plant his manioc and feed his cattle. We have no other place to go in any case, but more than that our fathers preserved it for us, and it is our duty to preserve it for our children. (155)

This concern for the 'preservation' of the village is farther connected with the idea of independence of the village shared by every individual: "They believed in the independence of their village, and whatever happened in the village had to be protected from outside interference." (155) But this idea of independence extends itself to a state of insularity where certain inevitable and positive changes brought modernity and progress are misrecognised as harmful to the organic life of the village: "The village is ours. If it is necessary to destroy the bridge to preserve our independence we must do so". (156) At the same time, in the same process, someone called Andoris Rala, who settled in the village ten years ago, is also seen as an outsider. Destroying something following the decision made by what he called 'more superior man', Girigoris is jubilant of his newly acquired confidence and authority. The villagers under the leadership of Girigoris turn into a pack of 'pliable instrument of destruction'. They submit their individual opinions, furnish to the wish of the group (or of Girigoris, the leader) and work like a 'compact and tight little group':

They had been shedding their identities slowly and merging into a group, a tradition based village group... Soon they would become so mindless that they would have no separate wills, or the capacity to critically analyse any of their actions. For brief moments yet, certain

doubts and fears erupted into their minds, but having given their will to do this thing they could not encourage doubts. (159)

What is this doubt? It is not merely a doubt over their leader's actions and intentions. It is a doubt over their own conviction and action. Goonewardene is perhaps trying to imply that the problems of binaries always linger as there are problems with both orientations. Such an intended meaning helps to portray 'self-criticism' on the part of the characters as a dominant theme of the story under consideration.

Thus, the story gives birth to a doubt over the fate of the village in connection with the building of the bridge. It is also a doubt over the changing lives on the other side of the river – the dock and the city – which is in continuous conflict with the insular stagnant life of the village. The world of Purantota is finally caught in the web of conflicts and confusions created by binaries like tradition and modernity, insularity and fluidity, change and stability, the insider and the outsider, human and machine, the individual and the group, the local and the global, stagnation and progress. Through his writing, Goonewardene looks back to himself and his society “with honesty and courage”, as Yasmine Gooneratne observes, “exploring themes related to injustice and disharmony created in Sri Lankan society by political opportunists who irresponsibly bend the nation's divided interests to their own advantage.” (quoted in Salgado, 43). Added to this confusion is the question of language. The way the world on the other side of the bridge is alien to the villagers, the English language too is an alien linguistic field which has to be contextualised in a non-English setting. This is mainly because, the English as a non-native language already ingrains the cultural baggage contained by the term itself. Thus, the issues of representation and articulation perhaps become the most significant literary trope for a writer like Goonewardene.^{xi}

The other story chosen for discussion is Punyakante Wijenaiké's “Monkeys”. Published in 1992, this story problematises the question of territories and boundaries – both physical and mental – and provides a scope for reading it in the context of the Sri Lankan experience of communal conflicts. The important theme in almost all of the fictional writing of Wijenaiké is the tyranny of a community or a group towards the weaker members of society.^{xii} In the story “Monkeys” Wijenaiké deals specifically with the emotional life of a Samanera—the young novice monk. His father thought that the hermitage is the best-place for a motherless child and expected the child to be happy among the monks. Although, the Buddhist philosophy of the monastery is supposed to develop the small boy spiritually, he is too young to understand and appreciate the training he has been receiving from the Chief Priest. Subsequently, the young boy-turned-monk finds himself in-between two contradictory forces—his natural yearning for love, play and freedom and the restraints he would face while on the path of spiritual advancement. Gradually, he develops friendship with a group of playful monkeys following which the disciplined and routine life in the hermitage is contrasted with the freedom and love he witnesses in the behaviour of the monkeys. He starts stealing away to the forest after his noon meal when the other monks are resting. He prefers lying down on the hard rock surface in the scorching sun watching the monkeys and enjoying their friendliness to meditating in the isolated monastery. He takes food to the monkeys in the begging bowl hidden in his robe. The situation reaches a climax when the monkeys create havoc in the hermitage compound. The development of the Samanera's character is evident by his determination to obey the Chief priest as well as by his realization of the value

of being a free man. Although this is the crux of the story, the story leaves behind many clear entry points for the reader to arrive at a political reading of it.

What is important for discussion is that fact that the boy, who has grown up among the monks of the Sangha, without any motherly love, has to conform to the strict and dull routine of a *Samanera*. The only moment of the day that he finds enjoyable is the time when after the noon-meal he steals some time out of his short leisure and runs to the forest, climbs the rocks to reach the group of monkeys. He gives them food, plays with them, sleeps among them and even imagines about his mother whose love he has never experienced. But this friendship with the natural world helps the hordes of monkeys to follow the boy to the hermitage, encourage them to invade the compound, pluck the fruits and berries grown by the Chief Priest. After this invasion of the monkeys, the Chief Priest, engraved by the destruction, advises the boy that, “He must not allow monkeys to dominate him, follow him here to the temple. He must not play with them or feed them, or they would always follow him.” (218) The boy tries to understand and follow the advice as much as he can. The next day, “He could hear his monkeys call him, screaming, crying, but he did not go to them. If he went on playing with them and loving them, they would always haunt him.” (219) Thus, through the experience of a six year old child, Wijenaikē, in this story, seems to be concerned with critiquing the drawing of boundaries at various levels. She raises a series of conflicts in terms of binaries between rules and freedom, the primitive and the civilized, the insider and the outsider; and problematises the construction of boundaries that can delineate one idea from the other. This series of conflicts and doubts lead Wijenaikē to critically reflect on the self, the constructed identity as an individual as well as a part of something larger than the individual.^{xiii} Thus, unlike in Goonewardene, we find a different kind of Sri Lankanness and self-criticism where both the formation of boundaries and transgressing the boundaries become equally important leaving everything for the readers to determine what is right and what is wrong. Besides, the story raises questions regarding the decision taken on behalf of the boy by his elders, which finally deprives the kid of his childhood.

The issues raised in the two stories I have tried to discuss exemplify certain significant points. When a writer has decided to write in the context of the Sri Lanka, by the very nature of Sri Lankan experience of conflicts and construction of boundaries, he or she will have to end up coming back to the issues of identity and self-criticism over what has happened or what has been done. In such a situation, the questions of boundaries and ethnic affiliations automatically get reflected in the writings of the writers concerned. Thus, how the individual encounters the world out there, and how, in return, the selves of both the writers and the characters they have portrayed get narrativised in the process of representation, has given Sri Lankan fiction writing in English an unprecedented visibility. But what is also worth-noticing is the way the two writers address more or less similar issues in the two stories although they are written in two different periods in the literary history of Sri Lanka. In the previous story, the other—the threat that the villagers feel from the outside world—is not defined. The construction of the bridge and the resultant assimilation of the people—both can be seen as threats to the simple easygoing ways of life in the village. The conflict begins mostly from the realization of the possible invasion of the ‘machine-dominated’ urbane life into the simple lives of the natives, which can also relieve them from the age-old insularity. However, in the second story, the ‘other’ is distinctively defined in terms of the monkeys, which have the symbolic potential to disrupt the established order in the

life of a community. This change of attitude in defining the 'other' might be seen as the resultant tendency of the post-1983 communal strife. Now, the 'other' is no more some abstract ways or ideas of life but some visible and animate groups. But in both the stories, the elements of self-criticism is very much available in the form of narration where everyone including the writers as well as the characters they have portrayed are engaged in a kind of debate over what is desirable and what is explicit in their transient world order.

Conclusion:

Today, any discussion on contemporary Sri Lankan fiction in English has to be carried out within the wider contexts of postcolonialism. Besides this, how do the works of the resident writers relate to those of the internationally acclaimed writers who had fled from the country following the Civil War; or to what extent have the Sri Lankan literary productions at home and abroad been caused and shaped by the political incidents in the island country, are also to be considered critically. Although notions of cultural nationalism have been instrumental in the production and critical reception of texts, Sri Lankan English writers like Michael Ondaatje, Romesh Gunasekera, Shyam Selvadurai, Carl Muller, James Goonewardene, Punyakante Wijenaikē etc. have rigorously challenged the theoretical, cultural and political undercurrents in binaries like 'insider-outsider', 'resident-migrant', 'authentic-alien' and so on. By interrogating self-critically the discourses of territoriality and boundary that have come into prominence since the Civil War, they have rightly sought to reclaim the marginalised voices through the form of the short stories.

End Notes:

ⁱ Some critics were of the view that writers in English failed to engage themselves with the Sri Lankan milieu and socio-political reality of the day. Thus, they had to face vehement criticisms.

ⁱⁱ After the Independence, in 1956, SWRD Bandaranaike took the lead of a new government and issued a mandate to do away with English as the ruling language through the passing of the Sinhala Only Act. However, this was also the beginning of ethnic tension leading to communal riots between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in 1956, 1958, 1970 and so on. In the subsequent riots of 1977 and 1981, many Tamil people lost their lives and properties which led to the rise of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that became the dominant Tamil political force demanding a separate country for the Tamils.

ⁱⁱⁱ James Goonewardene and Punyakante Wijenaikē have written a large number of short stories in English about the social and political changes that were taking place inside Sri Lanka. For example, Goonewardene in many of his stories undertook an analysis of the destructions that the Sri Lankan people were bringing on themselves by conforming to hatred and conflict. Wijenaikē too focused substantially on their traditional upbringing as well as their experiences upon confrontation with the contemporary socio-political situations in Sri Lanka.

^{iv} D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke's book entitled *Sri Lankan English Literature and Sri Lankan People 1917-2003* published in 2005 serves as a kind of history of Sri Lankan English Writing, and this book played a significant role in introducing Sri Lankan English Literature and culture to the whole world by making a reference to both Pre-independence and post-independence English Literature.

^v In this context, a reference may be made to Wilfrid Jayasuriya's book *Sri Lanka's Modern English Literature—A Case study in Literary Theory* that presents a body of English literature spanning one hundred years, from 1900 to 2000. The book deals with the historical background and the social and political factors which shaped the works by authors written in English.

^{vi} Besides, this Anthology, many other anthologies of Sri Lankan Literature have been published but they are not easily available in India. The list includes titles like *An Anthology of Modern Writing from Sri Lanka* (1982), *Modern Sri Lankan Stories* (1986), *Modern Sri Lankan Poetry* (1987), *Modern Sri Lankan Drama* (1987), *The Penguin Book of Modern Sri Lankan Stories* (1996), *Sri Lankan Literature in English 1948- 1998: A 50th Independence Anniversary Anthology* (1998), *An Anthology of Contemporary Sri Lankan Poetry* (1993) etc. which are published in Sri Lanka and India and are easily available to readers. Most of these Anthologies seek to discuss how language is so important in modern Sri Lankan cultural and intellectual life.

^{vii} James Goonewardene started writing fiction since early 1940s. Although famous primarily as a novelist, he has contributed several short stories. His novels *A Quite Place* (1968) and *Call of the Kirala* (1975) foreshadow the elements of interrogations based on the interplay and contrast between the rural and the urbane—the village upholding life way and values and the city embodying the life style and values of Western prominence.

^{viii} Wijenaikē published her first novel *The Waiting Earth* in 1966. Some of her other story collections include *The Third Woman* (1963), *The Rebel* (1979), *Yukthi and Other Stories* (1991), and *To follow the Son* (1995).

^{ix} The texts of both the stories are taken from Rajiva Wijesinha's anthology *Bridging Connections: An Anthology of Sri Lankan Short Stories*.

^x Here I would like to refer to Halpé who stated: "Lankan writers in English are making their own particular contribution to our critical awareness of Lankan reality, and to the exploration of human potentiality that is central to art of any importance." ("Sri Lankan Literature" 13).

^{xi} This problem finally gets realised in an acute manner in the intellectual developments of Sri Lankan fiction in the subsequent periods. However, what I am actually trying to explore is the concerns of a writer who has deliberately chosen to write in English to express something very much typical of the Sri Lankan societies irrespective of the language used.

^{xii} In her preface to the novel *The Waiting Earth* (1966) she tells her readers that in the stories in her *The Third Woman* there is no high endeavour and no moralising and that the characters and the incidents are real to her.

^{xiii} Chelva Kanaganayakam has pointed out that in Sri Lankan writing, "the line that separates aesthetic criteria and political conviction becomes extremely thin" (quoted from Salgado. 10). However, she seems to be talking more about the critics and less about the authors.

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