

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 11

Special Issue: 2

Month: March

Year: 2024

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Impact Factor: 3.025

Received: 03.02.2024

Accepted: 05.03.2024

Published: 30.03.2024

Citation:

Swathy, P., and S. Sudha. "An Analysis of the Psychological Turmoil Experienced by Munaweera's Female Characters in *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 11, no. S2, 2024, pp. 53–57.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v11iS2-March.7509>

# An Analysis of the Psychological Turmoil Experienced by Munaweera's Female Characters in *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*

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## Abstract

*The study aims to explore the psychological impact of war on Munaweera's women in the novel *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*. This article will be focusing on the trauma experienced by female protagonists who were on opposing sides of Sri Lanka's civil war and who simultaneously played the roles of terrorist and refugee will be discussed. This novel depicts the ethnic violence that exists in the nation and tells the horrific stories of families who both fled and remained in Sri Lanka. Nayomi Munaweera attempts to capture how war upends the lives of regular people in her book. She retells the stories of the Sinhalese, Tamils, and Burghers who comprise the island's multi-cultural reality, providing an impartial account of the history of the Sri Lankan civil war from a variety of viewpoints. The tragedies of war shatter the peace. This novel centers on the psychological aspects of refugees and terrorists, specifically focusing on memory and trauma. Trauma is an emotional reaction to the horrific event that negatively affects the victim's mental state. The traumatic thoughts cause a person to think very differently about themselves and other people. This novel attempts to depict the psychological trauma that violent ethnic conflict causes to its victims while also showing the horrors of war. The purpose of this article is to analyze the idea of women being victims by using trauma theory.*

**Keywords:** Trauma, War, Memory, Terrorist, Refugees.

## Introduction

Nayomi Munaweera was born in Sri Lanka in 1973 and they immigrated to Nigeria due to civil war. However, they were forced to flee Nigeria as a result of the military takeover that drove out all Asians. Munaweera's family eventually made Los Angeles their home. In South Asia in 2012 and the US in 2014, her first book *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* was released. In 2013, it was awarded the Commonwealth Regional Prize for the Asian Region. This novel vividly depicts the brutality of Sri Lanka's civil war as well as the social suffering and mental collapse of its characters. In her second book, *What Lies Between Us*, the protagonist is a woman who grows up in America and Sri Lanka and is plagued by both her mother's unspoken trauma and her own childhood trauma. It's a tale about motherhood and being a mother's daughter. Munaweera thus skillfully navigates the various forms of trauma experienced

by women in her novels. The story of the two female protagonists and their families is told in Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors*. They were raised in a nation where people lived normal lives filled with dreams, marriages, love affairs, education, dignity, and happiness in each other's company—all of which were destroyed by civil war. The novel examines the various facets of the conflict and is set against the backdrop of the civil war that raged from 1983 to 2009. The story is told from the perspectives of two girls: Saraswathi, a Tamil girl who later joins the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and dies as a suicide bomber, and Yasodhara, a Sinhala girl who later became a refugee.

Yasodhara describes the tale of her own wealthy, loving, and impoverished Sinhala family. She shares her parents' narrative, Nishan and Visaka. As a young child, Nishan enjoys life to the fullest, exploring the sea without realizing the cruel things that lie ahead. In order to secure a spot in a college and eventually land a job, his mother forces him to study all day. Visaka grew up in a family that valued education and manners. She married Nishan despite having feelings for a Tamil boy. Born into a family where social stratification, parental aspirations, teenage romance, and the subtle distinctions between Tamil and Sinhala people all play a role in shaping the lives of Yasodhara and her sister Lanka.

Yasodhara's family fled to Los Angeles as the war upended their tranquility. They needed some time to get used to the new country. These young girls suffered greatly in a foreign land; their minds were constantly clouded by their joyful recollections of Sri Lanka, and they became afraid when they lost sight of the people and places they loved. To help her remember, Lanka drew pictures on the wall. When they saw the drawings, they were both satisfied. But they quickly adjusted and went on to live their own lives. These sisters encountered the horrors of life when they returned to their homeland. Lanka was killed in an attack, and Yasodhara was traumatized by the violence in her motherland. As a result, she fears Sri Lanka and is reminded of her sister Lanka's passing whenever the country is mentioned.

Tamil girl Saraswathi recounts her journey from a young, naive child to a terrorist. She intends to become a teacher and resides in a war zone in Sri Lanka. Her goals were to become a certified teacher. Her brothers died in a war, but they recovered quickly enough. They took pride in the boys' martyrdom and their fight for their race. Girls were not safe either, as they were kidnapped by Sinhala soldiers and subjected to horrific rapes. The worst thing is that those victims are viewed as untouchable and nobody should ever see them or speak to them. However, the village as a whole can discuss her. This led to victims committing suicide. Saraswathi was left alone in her home one day when she was apprehended by a group of Sinhala soldiers and thrust into the center of a conflict that she desperately tried to escape but was unable to avoid. Her dreams and contentment were all dashed at that precise moment. Her family's rejection of her made her feel absolutely dead. She then joined the LTTE and slaughtered a large number of Sinhala people. Her unrealistic aspirations to become a teacher were replaced by becoming a suicide bomber.

### **A Study on Impact of War on Women**

This article aims to analyze the trauma that the female protagonists of the novel endured as a result of the Cold War between the Tamil and Sinhala communities. People's physical and mental health have been seriously harmed by personal problems rather than political ones. The story opens with a tranquil period of time when the British left and the island's residents began to live their lives, as the adage "the calm before storm" suggests. Plot development follows the 1948 ethnic conflict's expansion throughout Sri Lanka in parallel. In addition to the vivid descriptions of the ocean, the surrounding landscape, and childhood memories, there are also depictions of the ferocity of Sinhala people toward Tamil people, including their bullying of a young Tamil girl, refusal to

rent to Tamil families, burning down of the Tamil Library, and the start of the ethnic conflict. The children themselves display the racial discrimination associated with being Tamil and Sinhala. “We were aware for the first time that we were distinct, different, and that this difference extended to the ocean” (Munaweera 62). Munaweera painted a vivid picture of discrimination-such as slapping a young Tamil boy for teaching her granddaughter Tamil-through the character of Yasodhara’s grandmother. By instilling in the minds of the young children a strict sense of Sinhala identity, they attempt to incite hatred towards the Tamil people, viewing them as enemies. The author reinforces the strong anti-Tamil sentiments that were fostered in Sri Lanka following independence through these examples.

The Jaffna Public Library fire by the Sinhalese in 1981 marked the official start of the conflicts. With its largest and most valuable collection and nearly 95,000 burned manuscripts, the library was a center of Tamil learning and culture. They burned children in their unjustified wrath and massacred both the young and the old. Yasodhara’s uncle Anuradha was brutally murdered by mobs, which had a direct impact on Yasodhara’s family. The incident was attributed to her by many. Women were the targets of those who were unable or afraid to place blame on others, especially those in positions of power. According to Erica Jong, “Blaming Women is always in Fashion.” Yasodhara’s family was forced to flee their homeland and take refuge somewhere in the world due to the violence they witnessed firsthand. “I refuse to raise my kids here. What kind of society have we descended into that old people and kids are burned alive in the street? (Munaweera 90).

According to the refugee theory developed by E. G. They were compelled to “leave home country before the deterioration of the military or political situation prevents orderly departure,” according to Kunz in *The Refugee in Flight: Kinetic Models and Forms of Displacement* (1973). They’re known as anticipatory refugees by Kunz. He categorizes refugees further into three groups: those who identify as majority-identified, those who identify as self-alienated, and those who identify as event-alienated. Individuals within a group of refugees they have fled are commonly referred to as Majority-identified refugees and Event alienated refugees.

As an immigrant, Yasodhara learns that even everyday objects in America can take on strange new shapes. They were embarrassed by their situation because they had to rely on America, their host nation, to survive. In an effort to find safety and the means to survive, they decide to renounce their majority status in Sri Lanka, which forces them to reconcile with their minority status. Yasodhara and Lanka both miss the aromas of their island village in Colombo. Memory is vital to these characters’ lives. Memories of the good old days brought the protagonists joy, and they hated the bad times that were both present and future. Despite having left Sri Lanka behind, they are still tormented by flashbacks to their past existence.

The announcement of bomb explosions and the ferocity of the people on television screens in Sri Lanka keeps viewers in constant communication with the injured mother country. They believe that observing the war on a screen would relieve them of their guilt and anxiety. Although they make an effort to block out the war, it exacerbates their trauma and draws them further into crisis. Yasodhara remarks, “We never discuss this.” However, I had a week of nightly dreams about that head (Munaweera 118). The enduring and incalculable impact of traumatic events on refugees is such that their psychological and physical scars are unlikely to heal quickly. The protagonist in this story is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A traumatic event, such as sexual assault, child abuse, domestic violence, or other threats to an individual’s life, can lead to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is a mental and behavioral disorder. Not those who have experienced trauma in the past, but rather those who do so frequently. Long after the traumatic event has ended, they are still plagued by unsettling thoughts from the war or other traumatic experiences.

Saraswathi, a Tamil woman, comes into focus in the story after the author describes Yasodhara's hardships as a refugee in a foreign land. Instigating the second narrator, Saraswathi, was the hierarchy among the ethnic groups and the ongoing Cold War. Living in the northern conflict zone, Saraswathi is always afraid of the Tigers and the soldiers of the Sri Lankan army. According to Munaweera 124, she expresses her aspirations of becoming a teacher while being fully cognizant of her circumstances. "Sometimes I get this breathless feeling that the war is a living creature, something huge with appointed tongue and wicked claws," Saraswathi writes, capturing the horrifying trauma of war. I just can't fathom what it would be like to live outside of this war because I was raised inside of it (Munaweera 124).

The brutal three-decade war left wounds in both the people's minds and their land. Individuals who were homeless sought safety in the camps. However, because of the war, the camps are in the worst possible condition. Due to their ongoing fear of being sexually harassed by the soldiers, girl children's trauma was even more horrific. Saraswathi recalls how, after returning from school, her friend was treated terribly by the soldiers, and how society and her family pressured her to commit suicide by plunging into a well. Saraswathi was soon harassed by the soldiers as well and began to feel cut off from the harsh world. She endured suffering as a victim, her dreams being dashed, and her family's negligence. She is haunted by the event and ultimately becomes estranged from herself as a result. She has severe psychological trauma from the egregious violation of her bodily integrity and the overwhelming sense of the same brought on by social rejection in the immediate wake of the rape. In addition, she suffers from PTSD, which causes her to have nightmares of being molested. Sexual assault survivors frequently experience feelings of constant danger, the need to be alert, and mistrust toward others. She had faith that her family would make everything work out. But because she is estranged from her own family, everything is in vain. Saraswathi's mother convinces her to eschew her upbringing and become a hero by joining the LTTE. Thus, Saraswathi suffers double harm—once for her gender and once for her ethnicity. She voluntarily joined the movement.

## **Conclusion**

Munaweera reveals Saraswathi, the story of a suicide bomber that has been suppressed. Although official history maintains that individuals such as Saraswathi took up arms in response to their horrific experiences and tales of trauma. Why people might resort to violence and commit acts of terrorism is a topic the author delves into. Although Munaweera delves into the trauma of surviving a war through Saraswathi, Yasodhara's story focuses on the anguish and sense of loss brought about by being exiled from one's native land and the struggles of reestablishing oneself in Los Angeles. In the course of the book, Munaweera extols the connections between the lives and fates of Tamils and Sinhalese. The most vivid incident, however, is when Saraswathi killed herself and many others in a suicide bombing, bringing Yasodhara and Shiva together to live out the rest of their days together and killing Yasodhara's sister, Lanka. After delving into the various sensitivity and reactions of the two ethnic groups, the novel gains strength and individuality. Additionally, it features perspectives from both communities via the lives of Saraswathi, a Tamil girl, and Yasodhara, a Sinhalese girl.

The two main characters undergo PTSD, which alters their way of life. Self-harm as a means of survival, Saraswathi turned terrorist, but Yasodhara attacked people in her inner circle. Despite their apparent dichotomy, the terrorist and the trauma victim are really reflections of one another. This book provides an opportunity to closely examine the psychological processes that lead to their overwhelming trauma. Here, a trauma victim who became a refugee leaves the nation and carries horrific memories, while another trauma victim who became a terrorist uses weapons to try

and overcome trauma. The difficulties faced by women during armed conflicts have come to light recently, and the only way to put an end to war is to pursue peace. In her poem “To a Student,” poet Kamala Wijeratne states, “Let us plan fresh methodology to stop other Hiroshimas”.

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