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‘Peace Force’: A Dichotomy in the Film *Madras Café*

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Abstract: This paper attempts on the film’s aspect of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) which is sent by the Indian government in the year 1989 to Sri Lanka for building peace between the Tamil and the Sinhalese the two ethnic communities of the island and also how politics further politicizes the difference between the two races. The Military troop in the movie is named ‘Peace Force’ this is a dichotomy “peace” and “force”. How can a force bring peace? The Indian government tries to intervene, but is unsuccessful. The LTF (Liberation Tigers Front) which has an acute resemblance to the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) in the film back fire’s the Peace Force. The LTF has an ideology through which they want a separate state for the Tamils. But Peace Force wanted them to surrender their arms which they could not accomplish.

Key words: Peace, force, LTTE, Tamil, Sinhalese and politics.

Introduction

Films are fictional, but they do have significant resemblance to the world we live in. *Madras café* (2012) is one such film which brings forth the scenario of Sri Lanka during the Civil War (1983-2009). In art we find reality which canonizes the world of art/literature. Speaking of architecture, or paintings from the past, bring forth the idea of their age. Similarly, films that we watch are somehow associated with our experiences and everyday life. Walter Benjamin’s essay



The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Representation qualifies to sustain the idea that every art is a product of its time and every work of art is inimitable and cannot be separated from the tradition. It is deeply entrenched and therefore the tradition remains alive and capricious (Benjamin 283). Since it is affected by time, the economy and politics of the period enhance the work of art. The movie *Madras Café* swathe the span of time from 1989 to 1991 which conveniently draws attention to the political scenario of the two South Asian countries; India and Sri Lanka. The instability of the government in Sri Lanka and India's attempt to uphold peace that was exceptionally problematic for India. It is the first Bollywood film based on the Sri Lankan Civil War. The movie also puts to the forefront the politics of India and also the failure of the IPKF that led to the resign of the Prime Minister. Earlier Bollywood had produced movies on state violence and terrorism, such as *Maachis* (1996), *Fiza* (2000) and *Mission Kashmir* (2000) but *Madras Café* is the only movie that went across border other than Pakistan. The ideology behind the State's dominance over one community in Sri Lanka is an aspect of power politics which is explained through the movie.

Fairholm in his book "Organizational Power Politics" discusses about the various forms of power: force, authority, manipulation, threat/promise, influence and persuasion (16). Observations made in everyday life lead to self-realization that power is present in all spheres. During Capitalization the bourgeois enjoyed the surplus of power and the proletariats were exploited. The Proletariats could not function without the Capitalists and vice-versa. The theory of Althusser on Ideology brightens the idea of power. The two states; Ideological State Apparatus and the Repressive state apparatus very well define the faces of power. Hence it concludes that power is always an important part of any society. As this paper tries to bring forth the politics, grandeur and an illustration of power in the island country Sri Lanka it also visibly detects the failure of power. India intervened during the Civil War in Sri Lanka by sending the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) which failed and carried with it the baggage of disappointment and the loss of their former Indian Prime Minister.



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The twenty six years long Civil War in Sri Lanka is not the outcome of the small riots that took place during the early 80's, but it is the outcome of pre-independence fallouts between the two ethnic communities, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. It now seems as an age long war that processed and reproduced violence of its highest degree. Politics has been the most powerful weapon that created the catastrophe. 'Land and language' were the two prominent reasons for the war. "The Ceylon government followed a policy of using Sinhala and Tamil as its official languages until the passage of the Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956. This Act declared Sinhala to be the only official language" (Syed 209). The Tamils associated themselves to Sri Lanka as their homeland, though they are the descendants of South Indian Tamils, but still there are contradictions regarding their immigration. Tamil's association to Sri Lanka also has a history parallel to that of the Sinhalese, still the year long debate continues about the early settlers of the land.

Background Nature of the war:

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was formed by Tamils to fetch a piece of land for their Tamil brothers and sisters. Vellupalli Prabhakaran (leader of the LTTE) demanded a separate state for the Tamils in the northeast part of the island nation. Jaffna region, which was the original habitat of the Tamils was perhaps the demand of Tamils as an independent State. The Jaffna region was extensively over the news because it was the base of the LTTE and also because of the last combat between the Tamil Tigers and Sri Lankan Army during the Eelam War IV in 2006 (Mehta 2) during the War.

The President of Sri Lanka Mr. J.R. Jayewardene (1977-1989 office) signed a pact with the Indian government in 1987. The Sri Lankan Army was taken back from the north and India sent its 'Indian Peace Keeping Force' (IPKF). With the coming of IPKF the first phase of the Eelam war came to rest. But before this unrest the 'Language Act of 1958' that declared Sinhala as the 'Official Language' of the country brought another flame to the forefront.



Indian Peace Keeping Force Jawans in Sri Lanka in 1990, the year they withdrew from the island nation



Image from the movie the 'Peace Force' soldiers brutally killed by the LTF

It was a flare to burn the ‘land of Buddha’. Buddha the symbol of peace, in his land there was no peace only blood and remorse. It was Bandranaike’s government the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) that announced the ‘Only Sinhala Act’. Another reason for war was also discrimination in education. The Tamils were favoured during the British rule and were given an English education which landed them with jobs and development. More and more Tamil populace drew towards English education. Post-independence the Sinhalese government brought an Education policy. In 1971 Standardization policy was introduced according to which government could restrict the number of Tamil entries into the universities. “Under the new policy, Tamils were required to achieve higher marks than their Sinhalese peers in order to enter certain courses” (Weiss 66). These are one of the major reasons for the catastrophe.



Mr. Rajiv Gandhi and Mr. J.R. Jayewardene signing the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord in 1987

LTTE, Sri Lankan army and the IPKF

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was the outcome of several transformations of Tamil revolutionary groups in Universities which eventually lead to the formation of the biggest guerilla force in South Asia. It was actually an outburst against the ethnic dominance and prejudices that Sinhalese poured over the Tamils. After the ‘standardization’ policy was introduced into the Sri



Lankan education system the Sinhalese started to outnumber the Tamils in universities. To fight against this biasness a Tamil youth wing was formed; Tamil Manavar Peravai (Tamil Students League) by a student named Satiyaseelan. Vellupalli Prabhakaran was a member of this youth wing when he was eighteen. Later in 1976 this youth insurgent group after deformations and reformations became Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and Prabhakaran became its commander. The LTTE fought with the traditional army that is the Sri Lankan army. The Sri Lankan Army was earlier known as Ceylon Army, which was established in 1949. They fought with the LTTE for almost two decades and won the war in 2009. It was Rajapaksa's United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) that put an end to the long Civil War with the Army. Even the intervention of IPKF was unable to bring peace to the war stricken country. The IPKF was formed in 1987; it consisted of the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy. They conducted overt and covert operations against the guerilla force (LTTE). But they failed to bring normalcy in the island nation instead they lost the trust of Tamil minorities in Lanka. The result of this failure was that in 1990 IPKF was called back by the new government as the Prime Minister of India Mr. Rajeev Gandhi had resigned.

Film and its relevance to reality

The movie *Madras Café* starring John Abraham as Major Vikram, Nargis Fakhri as Jaya Sahni, Rashi Khanna as Ruby, Prakash Belawadi as Balakrishnan, Ajay Rathnam as Anna Bhaskaran and Sanjay Gurbaxani as former prime minister, directed by Shoojit Sircar is a movie about the Civil War in Sri Lanka between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. Moreover, it was a war between the government and the separatist insurgent groups like LTTE, JVP and other Tamil rebel groups. The movie offers us to know, that during the early 1990's and mid 1987 the Indian government intervened in Sri Lanka and tried to settle the uprising conflict between the two ethnic communities. The film begins with some rebels with arms shooting people in a bus, and a little girl trying to run away, is shot dead. Next Major Vikram is at Kasauli narrating about what happened four years ago, to a priest inside a church. The Indian government intervened in Sri Lanka when Anna Bhaskaran the LTF (Liberation of Tamil's Front) leader had forced a war on the island nation. But India failed, and as a result former prime minister of India resigned from office. He was later



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assassinated by the LTF in Tamil Nadu. Also because, Indian PM was a threat, not only to the LTF but to the west as well (as shown in the movie) and LTF were friends to the west who helped them monetarily only to get control over the sea route. After resigning, the former prime minister's election agenda was to settle the Tamil issue in the island and the opinion polls results of the election were in his favours as well. To some extent the movie resembles to the political activities that took place during the 1980's and 1990's in India and Sri Lanka. There was an "Indian Peace Keeping Force" that intervened in Sri Lanka in order to restore the government and disarm the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) between 1987 and 1990 but failed. The 'Peace Force' in the movie resembles the IPKF, LTF resembles LTTE the assassination of former PM of India, was in reality the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi who was killed in a suicide bomb blast in Tamil Nadu on May 21st, 1991, Sriperumbudur because it was during Rajiv Gandhi's office that India signed a peace treaty with Sri Lanka. It was the LTTE that killed the PM whereas in the movie, it was the LTF. Similarly, Anna Prabhakaran the LTF chief has an obvious resemblance to Vellupalli Prabhakaran, LTTE leader.

Major Vikram goes to Sri Lanka for a covert operation in order to break the LTF in two so that they could easily take over the LTF. It was the inclined idea of power and India failed to exercise their politics in the correct manner. Even in Sri Lanka the power in the north was with LTF and the rest of the country was politically suffering because LTF had the support of the west. What can be observed in the attribute of Major Vikram is patriotic. He is ready to lay down his life for his country. He is not traumatized even when his wife Ruby is slain by Sri Lankans; he resumes to office and continues to submit himself for the assigned task. Often there is a misperception whether there is any difference between patriotism and nationalism. Whereas Druckman evidently explains the difference "Patriotism seems to lead to strong attachments and loyalty to one's own group without the corresponding hostility toward other groups while nationalism encourages an orientation involving liking for one's Own group and disliking of certain other groups" (63-64). The Sinhalese and the Tamils in Sri Lanka are nationalists. Nationalism is a distant term used and reused in several versions of patriotism that has brought about discussions in literature. From the third world countries to the developed nation all have advanced to a state where nation and nationalism is the only precedence.



A Tamil movie *Kannathil Muthamithal* (A Peck on the Cheek) (2002) directed by Mani Ratnam revolves around a family settled in Tamil Nadu, Chennai. The eldest child Amuda (P. S. Keerthana) was adopted when she was a baby. Her parents (real ones) were Sri Lankan Tamils. The story begins with Amuda's real parents getting married Dileepan (J. D. Chakravarthy) and Shyama (Nandita Das) who later join the Tiger forces. With the revelation that Amuda is adopted she demands to meet her real parents. She makes an exodus with her parents to meet the real parents. And on the excursion comes across bombing and killings. She later meets her mother and returns back to India contended. Since her mother is a Tiger she cannot keep Amuda along with her. This film is unlike *Madras Café*. It's a journey of the Sri Lankan Tamil parents' nationalistic fervour towards their Eelam (homeland) whereas also the journey of the Indian parents and their tremendous love for the Sri Lankan Tamil baby. Mani Ratnam has kept the ethnic conflict in the background, whereas foregrounded family and relationships for a Tamil refugee child. The Sinhalese doctor in Sri Lanka is also an example of solidarity and unity who helps Indira and Amuda to find her parents. This film revolves around the life of the Tigers. It also puts forward the aspect of nationalism before motherhood. Shyama gives up the baby for the Eelam. Shyama in the movie depicts a strong staunch nationalist. Whereas Vikram an army man is an obvious nationalist here, Vikram is called an obvious nationalist because army men are the protectors of the motherland and everybody believes that such people will always protect the country despite all odds. The movie leaves its reader to find out whether Shyama went back to find his husband or avenge the army or join the LTTE.

The Politics of Power

India sent a 'Peace Force' to normalize the situation in Sri Lanka and the movie exentuates the idea of sending the IPFK. To bring attention to the dramatized name of the 'force', there was no peace, instead only killing. Major Vikram on the course loses his wife and also the former Prime Minister. There were constrains and the LTTE was at some point, perhaps more efficient than the Sri Lankan Army and the IPKF. The movie revolves around the politics of power. Theorizing power will lead to Althusser's concept of Ideology which states that the Repressive State Apparatus (army, police,



government and the Ideological State Apparatus (church, institutions) holds on the power system through hegemony. “Gramsci had no wish to argue with Marx's nostrum that every state is a dictatorship. ... It may be that every state is ultimately a dictatorship, and will bare its teeth when confronted by a serious challenger, whether from the outside or from within, but it is not true that dictatorship is the sole form of political rule. There is another form, and it is “hegemony.” (Bates 351-352). In the case of Sri Lanka the Sinhalese dominated government institutionalized acts which provided proof of their hegemony. The beliefs that Sinhalese are the singular proprietor of the land and precedence must always rely with the Sinhalese was their agenda. In the film though LTF is shown as barbarian it does not mean that the government were less corporal. The missing/disappearances which the movie fails to mention is also one part of the truth about the Civil War which remains unheard. Here State (Sri Lanka) is an archetype of hegemony. In simple terms hegemony is domination of any kind and State is an institution through which it is practiced. As the Major lacked power/authority over Bala the RAW Chief of Madras base, he could not take direct action towards him. The RAW official in the film tried to negotiate with the LTTE, but it turned out to be otiose. Even the state is an ideal paradigm of political dominance because Major's power seized to exist while Bala representing ideology through the Tigers dominates him. Power politics play a dominant role to pursue hegemony over the civilians.

Significance of the LTTE in Sri Lankan politics was not much because the Tamils hardly made up to the parliament. It was in 2004 parliamentary elections that LTTE supported the Tamil National Alliance, which secured 90% of votes in the electoral district of Jaffna, in the Northern Province. The film does not support any side. It only brings the picture of the Sri Lankan Civil War and politics. Bala was trapped, and he was trapped by the Tamil insurgents through ‘honeytrap’. Bala disclosed to LTF all the relevant information about the activities and plans of the Indian government or rather about Research Analysis Wing's covert operation for which Major Vikram was sent to Sri Lanka. There were various types of political atrocities by different groups, whether it was India's force, the LTF or the Sri Lankan government. Major Vikram was kidnapped by the LTF which was political. Only because of Bala's apprehensive behaviour they let Vikram out. It was decided in advance that the arms deal, which the Indian government wanted to give to Shri



(Shri was once a partner of Prabhakaran but now he is into politics with his party TPA) will be given to LTF. Near the dock, Vikram and his men faced bullets by the LTF. But Shri was contacted by the Indian government officials for political reasons. The officials wanted Shri to stand in the elections against Anna, so that they could pin down each other.

During the war, India had a mammoth responsibility; they decided to successfully conduct the provincial elections. The circumstances and the power that the Sri Lankan government possessed now no longer happen to favour them. Instead the LTF had decided not to negotiate. Bhaskaran was a ferocious man with conviction and fortitude he was the messiah to the Tamils. Hence it was extremely difficult for either government to continue. India thought of a military solution and sent their 'peace keeping force'. But the force was called back in 1990. There were tremendous political uprisings. And Bhaskaran became a hero for Tamils and terrorists for rest of the world. Bhaskaran was a man of power. LTF no longer had any rules they just made the government realize that they were brutal, fearless and most devastating enemy they ever saw. They killed the civilians if they tried to obstruct them while carrying out their actions. Besides these attacks, suicide bomb attacks were most prominent. The subject and the State were going through a rigorous tussle which formulated the ground for power politics and vice versa. Althusser's idea of a State, is repressive. We have to adhere to the concept of the repressive apparatus in order to view subject as power but not vice-versa. "The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others" (Althusser 777-778). In the case of the movie the subject is Major Vikram and Bala who are either divided by the situation or it is their own choice to distance themselves from others. The Tamil situation is also similar, for they are the subjects who are divided from others. If all the Sri Lankans are Subjects then they are divided inside themselves. This divide and conflicts prolonged and transformed into War. Every governance relies on the fortune of power and politics, therefore there is an existing ideology. This ideology according to Althusser has "material existence". This material existence of ideology relies on the ideological apparatus which itself relies on religion, ethical, political etc.

"The concept of human security (which was very much pushed forward by then Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy), in contrast to the traditional notion of "national security,"



proposed that if human beings are suffering in large numbers and are in desperate and catastrophic situation, we should not stop international concern only at the borders of national sovereignty” (Naidu 17). India unable to control the ongoing of the interstate war in Sri Lanka affected its own governance. The media probed into IPKF matter and later the resignation of the Indian prime minister magnified the critical political situation even in India. Like Lloyd the other leaders too must commemorate ‘human security’ before considering anything to be a national duty. In the case of Sri Lanka and what the movie shows the idea of human security depends on the nature of politics. The northeast region or the Jaffana region where the Tamils and Tigers were predominant the Repressive State Apparatus practices “while the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally placed in power relations which are very complex” (Althusser 778). The type of governance, we find in India and Sri Lanka is very much different from that of Europe if we consider Foucault’s views, then modern state should not be considered as an entity above individuals instead there should be a complete integration of individuals which will set forth new formats and structures (Foucault 783). The movie indulges in contemplating new structures that is taking down the LTF and forming new electives. The failure of IPKF is also the failure of the Apollo like power structure that crumbled and shattered the dreams of both India and Sri Lanka. Major Vikram held the gyre, but the politics of power resulted in loosening it.

Conclusion

Outside the celluloid, there was a full stop to all the chaos and bloodshed when Rajapaksa the Prime Minister replied to the Tigers through bullets in the latter years of the War. The defeat of the LTTE is credited to Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was the Defense Secretary during 2009. He formulated the defeat of the LTTE. His success was questioned by Human Rights departments all over the world because of the heavy casualties. These two men (Gotbaya and Prabhakaran) took over whole of Sri Lanka into, the most devastating genocide that the world ever saw. It was a rampage and the government was in frenzy. “The conflict at successive Sri Lankan governments had tried for decades to keep shrouded in a blanket of propaganda and censorship was witnessed, in part at least, by one man who was unusually well qualified to understand the force of war” (Weiss 97). Even the role of the Sri Lankan army was commendable, but with loads of civil casualties. And



India was only able to hold the Tigers for some time, but the outcome was devastating as well. *Madras Café* shows how the 'Peace Force' was a failure and it resulted in the assassination of the former Indian prime Minister. Even after this loss 'peace' could not be restored and 'force' was perhaps not the right way to bring 'peace'. And even after his death the Civil War continued for nineteen years. The movie fails to give a proper conclusion to the 'Peace Accord' or IPKF. The reason could be political. The movie could have become more controversial (it became in some parts of India). "In Chennai (the capital of Tamil Nadu), the Naam Thamizhar (We Tamils) activist group sought a ban on the film citing its alleged negative portrayal of the LTTE. It also demonstrated outside venues screening the trailer of Madras Café's Tamil version on 5 August 2013" (Fernando 15). "In Tamil Nadu, where thousands of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees continue to remain in camps, the Eelamist cause has been actively taken up for decades by key political parties, including the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and its principal opposition, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). Both parties have been vocal in their criticism of the Sri Lankan government and what they perceive as the marginalization of the Sri Lankan Tamil population following the defeat of the LTTE" (Fernando 16). It further dealt with the politics of the two countries and was critically acclaimed for its story, direction and acting.

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