

Resentment of War in the select Poems of Kamala Wijeratne

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Cite this paper as: Dr. S. Angelin Femilet (2024). Resentment of War in the select Poems of Kamala Wijeratne. *Frontiers in Health Informatics*, 13 (5) 802-804

Abstract

The Paper attempts to analyse social problems of youth caused by war in Srilanka. Focusing on Kamala Wijeratne's concern for social atrocities and its negative impact the article precisely and systematically analyses her poems. The poems of the chosen author are important in today's scenario because apart from various feminist and marxism concern, she focuses on resentment of war and its effects. The article shows, loneliness and social exclusion are the outcome of civil war and it must be eradicated to build a healthy society.

Keywords: Resentment, Repercussion, Loneliness and Social Exclusion

War and Violence

'Resentment' is the term used to describe upset and anger towards another person caused by a real or imagined injustice and 'war' is a state of armed conflict between different countries or groups within a country. War causes destruction of buildings, homes and infrastructures that leaves people homeless. The impact of war can be seen in the poems of Kamala Wijeratne, who is a Srilankan English Poet of Singhalese origin, short story writer and educationalist. She has received many awards including State Literary Awards and the Sahithya Ratna lifetime award, which is the highest honor given to Srilankans who made an outstanding contribution to Srilankan Literature. Wijeratne's professional writing began in 1983 with the publication of her first poetry collection *Smell of Araliya*. The paper attempts to analyse the resentment of war and violence and its repercussion on the lives of youth with reference to the select poems of Kamala Wijeratne.

Loneliness and social exclusion are the outcome of resentment of Srilankan war. Loneliness is a state of being alone, distress, discomfort or isolation that one's social needs are not being met by the quantity or quality of social relationship. Similarly, "social exclusion is the act of making certain groups of people within a society feels isolated and unimportant." (Collins dictionary. com) Wijeratne in her poems "To a Student," "Monuments" and "Musical" express her lasting painful episodic tragedy of war and loss of innocent youth who fight in war.

The Srilankan Civil war was fought in Srilanka from 1983 to 2009 between the Tamil Tigers and the Sinhalese, due to the continuous discrimination and violent persecution against Srilankan Tamils by the Sinhalese- dominated Srilankan government. Upto one lakh deaths have been recorded by 2010 (ABC Australia.org). Since the end of the civil war, the Srilankan state has been the subject to much global criticism for violating human rights as a result of committing war crimes, usage of heavy weapons, abduction, massacres, assassinations and sexual violence.

In the poem "To a Student," the teacher motivates both Tamil and Singhalese students to find solutions rather than frighten about the crisis. It focuses on how racial differences penetrated in the classroom and how they influenced the young minds. When she expresses her concern they could hear gunshots which have blocked all the other sounds. Instead of concentrating studies the students are anxious about their friends and relatives. Within sometime the place

was filled with human flesh suspended from bushes and trees, the splintered bones scattered everywhere and the pools of blood started flowing in the roads. They could also hear the blast of landmines:

I do know your ears are stopped

Against my voice.

The echoes of gun –shots have blocked

All extraneous sound,

Blasts of grenades have cracked the drums,

(your fear for brother, friend and lover). (5-9)

The teacher asks the students not to focus on the ruins of cities like ‘Illions’ and ‘Carthages’ that were destroyed in war, but the pupils are in loneliness and most of them are in a mood to exclude from their native, because “Only the dead have seen the end of War.” (Santayana)

“Monuments,” by Wijeratne describes the state of a small Srilankan community in the midst of Civil war. The poem begins with the speaker stating that she is on a bus that is travelling from stop to stop. At each stop she recollects the memories of lost soldiers:

The bus sweeps past the swinging tree

And the road unwinds long and cold

The chassis creates with the load

And jolts to a halt by the road.

The bus stops for a moment to load

And I see the writing on the halt

A wayside monument etched in gold.

“IN MEMORY OF MY SON” I get a jolt. (1-8)

Wijeratne speaks of the heroes who sacrificed their lives at war and in every bus stop she could find monuments erected in memory of them. While thinking of war and its consequences she recollects thousands of names and one among them is “Bandara,” “master of the soil” once picked paddy from his own land. The incident shows poverty and symbolizes the racial dimensions that prevail in Sri Lanka. As a result, the poet points out that many young men come from poor, farmer families have joined the army for their livelihood.

Srilankan men, if they had not gone to the war, would have led a different life. They would have had a life, especially with focus on the harvesting period, the happiest and the most anticipated period in a farmer’s life. She makes reference to the “Avurudu,” Sinhalese, New Year, it is a season, when the paddy is harvested and new rice is prepared and it is served steaming and scented by a mother’s fond hands, this line shows a domestic happiness.

Instead of enjoying such things, the most emotional commentary on war imagines the plight of the parents and loved ones who have lost the young men who went to war. The last stanza, briefs a sad tale of poor parents who lost his son in the war out of loneliness asks the purpose and logic behind war:

A farmer in the muddied loin cloth haunts me

And a housewife with billowing sleeves and string of beads

Stare at me out of the unwinding road

And their faces are stern with unshed tears. (28-31)

In “Musical” Wijeratne feels sorry about the young soldiers going to the war front. In the first and the second stanzas the reader is given a picture of young, perhaps inexperienced soldiers are singing happily in the war front. Their youthful innocence is captured effectively in the following lines:

Happy they were

As they drummed with their hands

And sang their songs

And beat their boots in rhythm. (5-8)

It is obvious that these soldiers have not seen the brutality of war. The metaphor “Caged Parrots” with “the green...fading from their feathers” is used to make a connection between the young men in “their green brown uniform” and the parrots that the poet saw in the pet shop. The author pictures just as the parrots the young men’s days are counted. “Musical” criticizes war and the killing of innocent lives and sees no beauty, justice or nobility in war.

Even though, the first person narration gives a personal aspect to the poet’s sadness with regard to the Srilankan war her subject and themes are universal as war destroys everything and creates room for loneliness and social exclusion among people. Thus, Wijeratne in her poems “To a Student,” “Monuments” and “Musical” expresses her lasting pain of innocent youth who participate and fight in war.

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