



BIG MATCH 1983: A NEW HISTORICAL LOGOTHERAPEUTIC READING TOWARDS PEACE THROUGH RECONCILIATION

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Abstract

The paper which is entitled *Big Match 1983: A New Historical Logo therapeutic Reading Towards Peace Through Reconciliation* is focused on the need to interpret peace and reconciliation to society. The paper deciphers a form of violence in Sri Lanka in 1983 as projected by the poem and works as a thirst for peace through reconciliation. With historical concern, the violence of ethical clashes can be observed as artificially instigated due to hidden political agendas to fulfill the vote banks of politicians. Then it caused to destroy the peace and calm ground of the country as history bears witness. Even though the majority of the people do not move with literature in a country, writers are afforded a great part of the responsibility as peace messengers. Through their creations, they struggled to spread the message of the importance of peace directly or indirectly to society. A New Historical Analysis along with Logotherapy of Viktor E. Frankl is employed to decipher the workings of the poem. In addition to that, the evolvement of violence is also read through the lens of Rene Girard. Therefore, the analyze is pursued political involvement in the particular incident to bring out its objective; address violence from a political perspective to reflect the need for peace and reconciliation to society. Further, it understands poetess'; Yasmine Goonaratne's direct address on the futility and suffering of war is observed, to pass the essence of the importance of peace and reconciliation. It is worked as a contribution to the literature since it is an unspoiled literary piece under the particular reading.

Keywords: *Big Match 1983, Logotherapy, peace, reconciliation, violence, Yasmine Goonaratne,*

“Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

— Matthew 5:9

Introduction

Peace and reconciliation are interdependent on each other and justice, where one will not become a possibility without the other to enable freedom, is a world view on which all societies are built to constitute a sustainable life-furthering society. At this juncture, peace has become one of the greatest businesses where more resources are spent and innumerable wars have been waged while “[r]econciliation means much more than forgiving the perpetrator and understanding what happened; it implies ensuring that the conditions that gave rise to the conflict change deeply, and trusting that the state will never again cause or allow that situation to occur” (Salamanca and Ricardo Mendoza: 25). When one talks about freedom one is reminded of Heidegger who defines negative freedom and positive freedom as:



“Negative freedom means freedom from ... compulsion, a breaking loose, release. Freedom in the positive sense does not mean the ‘away from ...’, but rather the ‘toward which’; positive freedom means being free for ..., being open for ..., thus oneself being open for..., allowing oneself to be determined through ..., determining oneself to ... This means to determine one’s own action purely through oneself, to give to oneself the law for one’s action” (Heidegger 2005: 15).

It is pertinent to note that a move towards the negative concept of freedom also will end up in annihilation and therefore as people of Sri Lanka who are divided by colour, religion, language, and ethnicity need to embrace positive freedom that is inclusive and promotes life-furthering coexistence.

Direct violence such as war, massacre, fights, anti-state terrorism, state terrorism, and Structural violence such as caste system, economic structures, and parades before the installation of any peace and reconciliation promotes the vicious cycle of violence rather than installing peace but in reality, the above-mentioned forms are practiced in order to install peace. At this juncture, one must be astute because for peace to exist reconciliation must antecede but for reconciliation to happen truth and justice must antecede, and moreover, this is the universal reason in all societies for the existence of Acts and Laws that surpass diversified agendas. The yoke of Peace and Reconciliation falls on the shoulders of The United Nations Organization (UNO) since WWII in order to enable the smooth functioning of life-furthering activities but to shift the blame onto the UNO and live as if we as citizens of Sri Lanka do not have a role to play will only hinder the future of this island nation.

This paper deciphers the forms of violence in Sri Lanka as projected by the poem *Big Match 1983* as a thirst for peace. In Sri Lanka, the historicity with regard to violence points out that the ethnic clashes were artificially instigated with hidden political agendas for promoting vote banking that sprouted the thirty-year civil war where the brutality of violence has been experienced first-handedly. Moving back further, history accumulates many instances regarding different riots which caused the destruction of peace and the calmness of this pearl in the Indian Ocean.

Even though people murmur that history does not bear any importance, but “where History is denied it is most clearly at work” (Quot. by Savarimuttu 2016:64) furthermore without history there is no present or a positive future. Therefore, knowing the past becomes a sine qua non if a peaceful harmonious society needs to be built in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka lost her balance at considerable times because of the terrorism by the majority which was later taken up and orchestrated by the State. The monuments of 1983, and Black July today screams unnecessary shadow on the politics between the two ethnical groups which lived sharing this island



nation. The genocide unleashed on Tamils by the Sinhalese shattered the lives of Tamils to a greater extent and also brought pain in the lives of Sinhalese who were conscious of the unethical events. When the majority was physically powerful enough to engage in war and violence, a minority within the majority had the moral strength and courage to exhibit their strength to barricade the violence —people who were emotionally and creatively dominant commenced to put their objections forward. At the same time, it is this minority that also elaborated on the importance of harmony through their writings setting forth literature to propagate peace. One has to also remember that it is due to war and violence a new genre entitled “Peace Literature” came into existence where intentionally writers penned the importance of peace and critically and rationally spread their perspectives using different mediums such as poems, short stories, novels, and dramas. Thus, a new type of poetry “anti-war poetry” came to set in. Poets such as Amy Lowell, Wilfred Owen, W.H. Auden, Oscar Wilde, and Lynette Roberts drafted about the chaos, fragmentations, sufferings, and lamentations of war as the truth accepters of violence. Even though these poets are tabled under ‘war poets’ in the History of English Literature, one should be aware that they do not glorify war but instead project the reality of agony and pain that is hidden under the mask of war heroism and thereby their poems can be very well termed as anti-war poems.

Sri Lankan writers also spread the notion of peace using their works. They possessed individual voices even amid crucial political, social, and economic barriers. Even though the majority of the people did not reach out to their works, writers were afforded to fulfill what they needed to express. Among them, Yasmine Goonaratne is one of the greatest Sri Lankan writers in English who has projected the turmoil due to ethnic violence in her poem *Big Match 1983*. It addresses one of the darkest incidents in Sri Lankan history: “Estimates of the death toll range between 400 to 3,000 men and women where 8,000 homes and 5,000 shops were destroyed and 150,000 people were made homeless. The economic cost of the riot was \$ 300 million” (Ground views).

Further, the poem *Big Match 1983* can be put into the category of war poems, but it is totally a lamentation since it does not glorify war. In this sense, *Big Match 1983* can only be treated as a modern poem, not as a postmodern one. However, the universal appeal of violence that leans weakest into the darkness while using them as pawns is discussed here by applying Rene Girard’s Scape Goat theory. Therefore, the paper can be considered a reinterpretation of history with a pensive sight. Finally, the paper will fulfill the objectives by addressing violence from a political perspective to reflect the need for peace and reconciliation as here and now. Reading the poem gives an experience enabling a transformation within the reader so as to metamorphose the reader into a being with an inclusive consciousness, which becomes the logotherapeutic component with regard to the praxis of this poem. The logotherapeutic component becomes the most vital element in the workings of this poem, where it is derived from the Greek word ‘logos’ which has the double meaning of ‘word’ and ‘thought’. It is used in classic authors indiscriminately for the ‘internal word’ present in the mind, and the ‘external



word' uttered by the lips" (Clake 1909:3). Moreover, Frankl precis this aspect: "Logos is a Greek word which denotes 'meaning'" (Frankl 2000:90) —reinforcing the internal and the external word; and 'therapy' means remedy, healing, treatment, or cure, and proclaims that this therapy "focuses on the meaning of human existence as well as on man's search for such a meaning" (ibid). Thus, prescribing such poems to the school and higher education syllabus will enable the coexistence of multiplicity.

Methodology

A New Historical Analysis along with the Logotherapy of Viktor E. Frankl will be the methodology employed to decipher the workings of the poem *Big Match 1983*. In addition, the evolvement of violence will also be read through René Girard's lens.

Results and Discussions

The poem "*Big Match 1983*" begins with a presentation of the reactions of tourists. The entire poem altercates on the country's helpless condition and the reasons for the unexpected events to happen because of the bloodthirsty barbarians. At the onset, the title *Big Match 1983*, first imparts an impression that it is something to do with sports i.e., a cricket match between two leading schools which is considered as a tradition of Sri Lanka, which has been acquired from the English. Although during the poem, readers may figure out that writer does not concern about a cricket match, not even a match that includes in a box of matches. But it is a hefty deal that caused the burning of entire Sri Lanka at one point. Even though the title seems to be misleading in sports *Big Match* is an apt title since it brings out the kind of sporty mindset the majority had at the time of inducing Black July in 1983. Though the country is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious nation before the independence all its people lived peacefully without many hardships as one nation under the white man's rule. But the white man started all this confusion in trying to formulate a Eurocentric understanding of the Orientals. For example, E. Valentine Daniel in the book *Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence: Sri Lankans, Sinhals, and Tamils*, literature on contemporary political violence brings out the following fact that has been forgotten by most:

"The historicization of place by its transformation into space is accompanied by the historicization of a people through their transformation into a race. The sketch given us by Gunawardna (1900) on the "Aryanization" of the Sinhala people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the context of the spread of scientific racism to the colonies, can hardly be bettered. Among those implicated—even if unwittingly—in this endeavor were the great Orientalists Sir William Jones (1746-1794), Max Muller (1825-1900), and the missionary Robert Caldwell (1913); the lesser-known historians H. W. Codrington (1926) and William Knighton (1845); and Rudolph Virchow (1886). And what is more, as Bernard Cohn (1985:7) has written of India (it is equally apt of Ceylon), "The classification



of languages and race, along with ‘surveys,’ ‘maps,’ ‘histories,’ ‘dictionaries,’ ‘reports,’ and ‘recommendations,’ were part of a massive production of texts in the nineteenth century which continued the establishment of discursive formations, the defining of an epistemological space, the creation of a discourse (Orientalism), and the conversion of Indian experiences (and also forms of knowledge) into European objects.” (E. Valentine Daniel 1997: 58)

But things started to change after independence and the 1983 riots brought out hidden tensions into the limelight the *Big Match 1983* marked the chaos where many lost their chattel and ideology went wrong and everything turned into turmoil based on the majority perspective footing on ethnicity. Throughout the poem, Goonaratne discusses how the politics of selfish individuals stood up for their own selfish ambitions and the means by which they utilized innocent and the weakest civilians to fulfill those ambitions. And the way those ambitions led the entire country into a blood bath.

Safety and security are the second most important component in the hierarchical triangle of Abraham Maslow and the poem *Big Match 1983* projects in the opening lines itself the cancelation of bookings by the tourists in a hurried manner, further delineating the insecurity nature of the country and its effect on tourism industry due to the corrupt politician’s misunderstanding of negative freedom to be a positive one. Tourists cancel all their trips, all the luxuries, and aesthetic experiences because, as humans, we always give priority to basic needs. Therefore, it is prominent to note that peace in an environment takes a prominent place. Under this particular situation, Sri Lanka became a playground for others (mostly of the international mafia) and a subject of discussion at many levels.

The poem *Big Match 1983* sarcastically brings out the reasons that sprouted the racial clashes and mass violence into existence in 1983. Even though the poem does not directly mention the reasons, a New Historical reading would excavate the undeniable truth that started way back by the European colonizers as already mentioned. For example, the lines “Flash point in paradise’. ‘Racial pot boils over” points out the following facts:

“The monograph called *The Physical Anthropology of Ceylon* by Sarasins and Virchow “which repeats the same anthropometric nonsense on race that served nineteenth-century European interests so well. This epistemicide history was picked up by Sinhala nationalism in the first half of this century and Sinhala chauvinism more recently and was used to bludgeon first “the decadence of the West” and then the “alien Tamils from the North.” In late 1983, a Sinhala politician commented on the similarity of the Aryan noses of J. R. Jayewardene and the Kashmiri Brahmin Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and contrasted these with the Dravidian nose of the Tamil Liberation Front. The little episode in Parliament



cited by Serena Tennekoon (1990) about Jayewardene's Aryan nose and Amirdhalingam's non-Aryan nose excited a flurry of letters to the newspapers. Most of these defended the "Sinhalya is an Aryan" theory, and many were from citizens well-read in the nineteenth-century anthropometric wisdom of the Sarasins, Virchow, and others. In retrospect, one of the salubrious and sobering outcomes of this period of open expression of racism was the opportunity for prejudices that were taken to be scientific, objective, and obviously true to be freely questioned and openly debunked. Within his brief period of less than a decade, racism of this sort had become, if not a proven falsehood, then at least an unfashionable embarrassment" (E. Valentine Daniel 1997: 58-59).

Using an attractive metaphor, 'racial pot' Goonathilake tries to emphasize, that before the Aryan (unwanted) agenda of the government, Sinhalese, Tamils, Burgers, Moors, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Atheists, and all others lived together without committing any harm towards each other. But now the "pot" which is equated to a melting pot becomes a means to extinguish the Other due to its exclusive ideology thereby it boils over not to shed off the differences but to create more space for differences to exist. When one equates the events with the book of Jeremiah 18: 1-5, it projects the fact that at least when true interpretation is validated in the future a new society founded on Truth, Justice, and Peace could become a reality. But more than 40 years have passed, and that particular pot still boils over with various shades and colours.

Then the poetess moves with a boy who left the motherland and returned to find his history and roots. But the turmoil of the country keeps him away while reminding him that his current residence is quite enough to find the answer to his burning question "Who am I?" without putting his life in danger. With this mass violence the condition of ordinary citizens was pushed into a powerless position, even the arm of democracy was curbed due to the unpractical election rules and regulations. Before this people had a big heart for helping others without considering their racial or religious differences. But then after Black July in 1983, everything crucially changed.

The poetess announces that "We talk of 'Forty-Eight' and 'Fifty-Six'" with pride but one should remember that these are the steps that led to the particular disastrous violence of the country. It is favorable to observe one by one as follows: 1) Forty-Eight refers to the year 1948 marking the independence of Ceylon which later was changed into Sri Lanka. D.C.R.A Goonetilleke mentions, in his publication *Sri Lankan's 'ethnic' conflict in its literature in English* that after the independence, the Tamil minority tried to build privileges for their own. But the Sinhalese eliminated it as the majority of the country. (cf. Goonetilleke) Even what was divulgated in Sri Lanka under the twist of upholding the benefits of the majority is that it belongs to a realm of exclusiveness due to its influence from various colonizers. When all the countries are giving importance to protecting the rights of their minorities



with the principle that the weakest section of a society should be given special care, Sri Lanka is moving against the run of the text. And Goonatileke mentions that this unbalancing and uncommon situation “leads to occasional outbreaks of communal violence” (ibid). In his writings, *Democracy in America* Alexis de Tocqueville clearly sorts out the particular idea regarding majority vs. minority. But unfortunately, Sri Lankan government always used the scapegoating concept while smashing the country’s weakest part. 2) Then “Fifty-Six” which is commented on the “Official Language Act” or “Swa Bhasha Act” or the “Sinhala only bill” placed the country into a murky place. These all are results of political games and manipulations. Changing Sinhala into the official language, displacing English where minority Tamil speakers were hurt, again foddering coal under fire. Those periods of time performing as fanning of fire further. Writing his “Sinhala Only Act destroyed peaceful Sri Lanka” Prof. Rohan Gunaratna, sorts out this wicked action, mentioning “Sri Lanka went wrong mainly because of our short-sighted politicians, who played politics for their political and personal reasons.” And further he specifies the unnecessary of such an act during S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike’s government amid a peaceful environment among all ethnic groups.

Deeply shifting to the political games of this 1956 act, it shines the culprits who fanned the country under changing of their religions while not being true to themselves and even those manipulators were trustworthy for nothing, only to their ego-driven motives. That is how the entire politic of Sri Lanka is based on egoistic motives and hatred.

In the poem, the line “The game’s in other hands in any case” reminds one of the following that

“There are some ironies to the Sri Lankan appropriation of “the lines of face and shades of color,” ironies that would have been charming if they had not turned out to be so deadly. In 1983, many a chocolate-colored Sinhala apprehended a chocolate-colored fellow Sinhala and, denied the victim’s claim to his “race” on the grounds that his skin was not of the shade that a Sinhala’s skin ought to be (like the Sigiriya frescos?), beat him up and, in one instance known to me, even killed him for being a “Tamil trying to pass as a Sinhala.” By the same logic, several Tamils I knew escaped being killed, even when their pronunciation of Sinhala had all the giveaways of misplaced retroflexes and unaspirated *hs*, those distinguishing marks of Dravidian speech. They were excused as understandable speech impediments. Some of these stories constitute the growing collection of “Jokes of the July Riots” told by Tamils” (E. Valentine Daniel 1997: 59)

Soon after poetess utters that anyhow the game is not with people, it is with politicians or the hands of the government machine. It again clearly demonstrates the government’s involvement in the country’s unacceptable footing. In addition to that Goonarathne evokes the nature of that period:



“It’s a strange life we’re leading here just now,
not a dull moment. No one can complain
of boredom, that’s for sure.”

The ongoing situation was not a familiar one for them. Before that peace and harmony were at least amidst the rural masses. That is why it has become a strange life. In accordance with *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, a man’s deepest desire is to find the meaning of his life. But under this circumstance citizens were not able to move through their future. The meaning of their lives got lost. With that, this condition kept them in a bordered position, a liminal existence of being in limbo.

The narrator who had sent his wife and daughter to a secure place reports the situation to an elderly neighbor who is now far away through a telephone conversation. According to the poem, he is usually under the influence of alcohol but nowadays he has increased his intake to console himself from the unexpected fear that can appear at any second: “I send Padmini and the girls to a neighbor’s house.”

The name “Padmini” which Goonarathne uses is a common name in both Sinhala and Tamil communities —where Padmini is a woman who can be guessed as the wife of the speaker. It emphasizes the bearings of sufferings of all civilians without any dimensions. However, the outer world or the outer relationships are not able to do anything to rescue others under a particular circumstance.

“Out of the Palmyra fences of Jaffna bristle a hundred guns” symbolically projects the Tamil community, symbolized by the land of Palmyra trees, and the poetess recalls a fact. That is, people living in Jaffna usually use Palmyra leaves to build their fences, which covers their privacy. Further, it shows the simplicity of those innocent rustic people. Here the military atmosphere is highly imaginative through the way bullets are going through the Palmyra leaves while making the bristle sound. The situation got worst not only in Jaffna but in the Western or the Capital part of the country as well. And for example, in Pettah, the poem mentions: “Landmarks of our childhood / Curl like old photographs in the flames”.

All the memories of their previous parts of life get collapse and photographs become mourning symbols of lost memories of people. Indirectly she penetrates the way how Pettah was burnt adopting the story of photograph burning. Needless involvement of politics or the government created a path to a disabled society. And people whose obligation was to protect civilians also looked at it another way, ignoring their grievances due to unethical involvement.

The situation was so serious that even religious truths and morals were turned a blind eye and the poem emphasizes this through: “beneath a bo-tree in a shower of sticks and stones / flung by his neighbor’s



hands”. Brainwashed civilians did not care about their behaviour with blood thirst and they always followed their spoiled ego mindsets as naive fools. However, the connection between the ‘bo-tree’ and ‘shower of sticks and stones’ pageants that things go beyond the limit projects the fact on the deep sense of Aryan assimilation by the Sinhala community. Conclusively, the entire blame is shifted upon politics since the government made the unwanted division. And without stopping there it put the whole country into a valley of agony. With that, burned damage and scars still are there. However, the dominant dichotomy is the reason for all.

Finally, the entire poem is examined the futility, cruelty, and negative side of war and violence. Therefore, when a potential reader inception to go across this s/he terminates the poem with an awakened mind because the poem unconsciously evokes the reader’s thoughts and emotions through the yelling and the burnings symbolizing mass violence. Thereafter in the future, the potential readers will not engage or take the side of violence or any side which destroys or harms society but will work towards harmony. The poem also projects that the collective violence of the sort found in Sri Lanka in recent years results when the discordance obtained between epistemic and ontological discursive practices leads to a quest—a quest and a plea for recognition of the new identities constituted by these practices. This poem reminds one that there are among Sinhala and Tamils those who have not gone beyond the narcissistic stage of self-expansion and disregard for the other. Others quite clearly have encountered the challenge of their humanity in the threat of violence, wherein not only life and security but, more importantly, honor and dignity are at stake.

Conclusion and Contributions

The use of anti-war poetry is one of the ways to address the importance of peace and reconciliation. It directly emphasizes the futility and suffering of war and violence. But in one lateral when it takes the attention on violence, in another lateral it explores the importance of harmony to society through the potential reader. Specifically observing the main target i.e., Black July in 1983 readers may able to identify unethical and unnecessary political involvement which has become a curse to the country. To accomplish the hidden agendas of the government they utilize different mind gaming methods like scapegoating concept, where the innocent Tamils became the scapegoats and now in order the solve the disparity between the Sinhalese and the Tamils the Muslim community might become the scapegoat if we do not act fast in bringing in an inclusive system into existence. At this juncture, it is important to note the truth projected by the German theologian Bas Wielenga “Contemporary movements like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or certain Marxist Leninist (ML) groups are, according to me, examples of such zeal which attracts especially the young because of its radicalism but leads into a vicious circle of death and destruction, because it lacks wisdom, enlightenment” (Bas Wielenga: 57).



Therefore, through this paper, researchers project that the unnecessary involvement of government machinery in dirty politics shatters the balance of this country. Since researchers have touched on an unspoiled literary piece to analyze, the paper is covered the bulkiest gap of the literature on the particular poem, “*Big Match 1983*” summarizing the poetess’ way of promoting the importance of peace and reconciliation which were harmed because of political circumstances of the country.

Big Match 1983 emotively presents violence, especially the kind of collective violence that occurred in Sri Lanka in 1983, which is vulnerable to taking on a prurient form. The text comes alive when being read and at this juncture, the praxis of the poem works on the reader through the words, images, and signs used demanding a transformation in the reader without becoming a pornography of violence and thus does not parochialize violence.

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