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*Towards a Multilingual Literary History: Lessons from a conflict environment**

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Abstract

This article presents methodologies towards a multilingual literary history of Sri Lanka in the twentieth century by examining multilingual encounters or cultures through places, people, and institutions. Massey's concept of plural space underpins the study and gives rise to various strategies to build a multilingual literary history. The guiding research questions are: How do we construct multilingual literary histories in the context of language-based conflict? What can conflict environments teach us about approaches to multilingual literary histories and spheres? In addition to discovering future directions for intra-national comparative literary studies and documenting multilingual cultures and sites, I also focus on the changing geography of multilingualism in the twentieth century. As ideological separation of language spheres turned to real-world segregation through a series of policy shifts and institutional changes, we see that the pursuit of multilingual research takes us from *organic*, or naturally occurring, sites of multilingualism to *orchestrated*, or purposefully created, sites. Orchestrated sites work to counterbalance the decreasing opportunity for organic multilingual encounters in the context of ethnolinguistic conflict.

Introduction

If one were to read accounts of literary culture in Sri Lanka, it would appear neatly divided into three spheres corresponding to the three main languages of the country: Sinhala, Tamil, and English. They each

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even have corresponding institutions, intellectuals, and literary histories to match. For instance, histories of Sinhala literature may begin with the thirteenth-century *Sidatsangarava* as an early grammar, the Sandesaya poems or Dhampiya Atuva Gatapadaya as classical literature, the Sigiriya poems as the first modern turn, and Martin Wickramasinghe as the truly modern Sinhala writer marking the turn to the twentieth century.[1] Similarly, the Tamil sphere has its fourth-century BCE *Tolkappiyam* as an early grammar, the *Sangam* literature as its classical tradition, and Arumuga Navalar from the late nineteenth century marking the modern formal turn.[2] English literature is much 'younger', so to speak, with the first major indigenous English writers emerging in the twentieth century. Critics dismiss most of the early twentieth-century English writing as artistically inadequate, while 'good' English literature begins with poet Patrick Fernando in the 1940s.[3] In other narratives, it begins much earlier with colonial writers such as Leonard Woolf and Rev. W. S. Senior.[4] Complementing the language-based literary histories, these three spheres also exhibit institutional segmentation, with different university departments, school subjects, language-category literary awards, and recognition. Perhaps this is unsurprising, since it resembles language divisions in countries the world over, yet, for myself, as an observer of the real literary landscape in Sri Lanka, these divisions seemed artificially constructed. I am well aware of the many layers of confluence and interaction between linguistic communities in the real literary world. It is hence not

[1] C. E. Godakumbura, *Literature of Sri Lanka*, rev. 3rd print, *The Culture of Sri Lanka* (Dept. of Cultural Affairs, Sri Lanka, 1976); C. E. Godakumbura, *Sinhalese Literature, by C. E. Godakumbura, …* (Colombo Apothecaries' Co., 1955); P. B. Meegaskumbure, 'Sinhala Language and Literature since Independence', in *Sri Lanka's Development since Independence: Socio-economic Perspectives and Analyses*, ed. W. D. Lakshman and Clement Allan Tisdell (Nova Publishers, 2000), pp. 259–74; Ranjini Obeyesekere, *Sinhala Writing and the New Critics* (M. D. Gunasena, 1974).

[2] K. Kailasapathy, 'Tamil Consciousness in Eelam' (1979), http://tamilnation.co/heritage/kailasapathy.htm (accessed 29 May 2019); M. A. Nuhman, 'Ethnic Conflict and Literary Perception: Tamil Poetry in Post-colonial Sri Lanka', *Colombo Telegraph*, 19 August 2012, https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/ethnic-conflict-and-literary-perception-tamil-poetry-in-post-colonial-sri-lanka/ (accessed 29 May 2019); S. Thillainathan, 'Tamil Creative Writing in Sri Lanka: Post-independence Trends', in *Sri Lanka's Development since Independence*, pp. 275–92.

[3] Ashley Halpe, 'Sri Lankan Literature in English', in *Sri Lanka's Development since Independence*, pp. 259–74.

[4] D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, *Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People, 1917–2003 / by D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke* (Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2005).

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for a lack of multicultural or multilingual realities, but rather a mere lack of records about them that leaves the public with only narratives of monolingual traditions.

I hence used the sociological approach taken by scholars such as Francesca Orsini, Karen Thornber, and Lital Levy, and examined people, places, and institutions where multilingual encounters or cultures have ordinarily occurred in order to reconstruct a history that had been cherry-picked and segregated according to the convenient nationalist narratives of language divisions. However, in the course of this research, I discovered something curious: while, at some points in the past, there were many of these naturally occurring sites of multilingualism, at others, I could only find artificial institutions and, at others, complete gaps. Why was this? Was it a methodological failure or is there something more?

All evidence pointed to the nature of Sri Lanka as a site of growing ethnolinguistic conflict. The turning points at which multilingual sites changed from naturally occurring ones to those that were purposefully organized coincided with moments of major socio-political upheaval. These upheavals changed geographies, people's mobility, and the very nature of multilingual spaces. Hence, in searching for history, we unavoidably confront the importance of space and place.

This article is an exercise in historical research as well as geography in that the search for a multilingual literary history relies on excavating material place and interactions, and recognizing space as dynamic and time as spatial. These conceptual frameworks are informed by Doreen Massey's extensive work on space.[5] The article also centres on conflict and its relation to literary landscapes: How do we construct multilingual literary histories in the context of entrenched language-based political conflict? What can conflict environments teach us about approaches to multilingual literary histories and spheres? By examining the case of Sri Lanka in detail, I hope to present workable strategies and theoretical points of departure for researching multilingual literary histories in contemporary conflict areas.

I begin with an overview of current trends in literary history and call into account the need for comparative literary analytical methods from within a 'national literature' rubric. This section provides a brief account of the linguistic-political situation of Sri Lanka and my reasons for analysing the twentieth-century context. I introduce the concepts of

[5] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (SAGE Publications, 2005).

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organic and *orchestrated* sites of multilingualism, which arise from trends seen from a conflict context. I then move on to the Sri Lankan literary spheres, analysing the discourse that constructs separate geographies associated with each language sphere and separate literary heritages. The analysis highlights several points of convergence and future directions for comparative analysis or research from a 'national literature' perspective.

The rest of this article then deals with the social, political, and geographical contexts that allow or disallow multilingual situations. The geography of educational sites in the mid-twentieth century contradicts the supposed separation of intellectuals across languages spheres; our analysis takes Peradeniya University as one such site for close scrutiny. By highlighting a few key figures and artistic styles, we see at least one focal point from which a multilingual intellectual history can be drawn. However, political developments (specifically education and language policies, violence, and ethnic conflict) from the 1950s onwards created an inadvertent segregation that systematically restricted opportunities and sites for multilingualism. In this context of full-blown ethnic conflict from 1983 to 2009, we see that multilingual spaces had to be self-consciously constructed in order to compensate and counter the effect of social and geographic separation. Previously, multilingualism occurred naturally in shared spaces—even when these individuals or sites were apportioned to separate language-sphere narratives—but, in the context of conflict, multilingual environments had to be orchestrated. Hence, as literary historians, if we were to simply apply the methodology of examining only naturally occurring multilingual spaces or encounters, we would end up with a self-fulfilling prophecy where ideologically constructed separation gives rise to a politically generated real-world separation of spheres. Instead, in a twentieth-century conflict environment, artificially constructed environments play a crucial role in a literary landscape that would otherwise continue diverging.

Theory and methodology: literary history, multilingualism, conflict, space

Literary history methodology appears to have had two phases. First, modern nationalism demanded 'national' literatures that acted as a common cultural repository for newly formed nations. Hence, in unified Germany, we find the Grimms brothers collecting tales of the German

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'folk' and systematizing the German language so there is one common language and matching literary/cultural heritage. In a retrospective manner, post-colonial countries may selectively filter the literary histories of language groups, as Orsini demonstrates in the case of Urdu and Hindi,[6] or new nation states may selectively exclude certain language communities to construct homogeneity, as Levy demonstrates through the exclusion of Arabic-Mizrahi writing in Hebrew literary histories.[7] Second, we have the post-nationalism phase where world literature or comparative literature steps beyond national boundaries and considers literary production across different countries (this may or may not be of multilingual nature). This trend in comparative and world literary studies has been criticized for its Eurocentricity, for several reasons: the languages used as the basis of comparative studies are often those derived from the colonizer's tongue, considered more 'transnational'[8]; these studies often reproduce the 'World' as peripheral to a central European literature[9]; or they misapply Eurocentric evaluative criteria or frameworks of understanding to literatures from non-European cultures.[10]

At this stage of such 'evolved' study in literature (World, Comparative, Transnational, what have you), it is surprising to see a lack of critical analysis of multilingual cultural production from within national boundaries. Perhaps the idea of 'nation' is considered obsolete in the world of academia but it certainly is not so in the real world, as the sentiments fuelling the recent Brexit or Make America Great Again campaigns would attest to. Although it may be progressive to ideologically move towards debunking constructed national boundaries, there is still a real-world need for unravelling teleological monolingual literary histories of nations and comprehending multilingualism from

[6] Francesca Orsini, 'How to Do Multilingual Literary History? Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-century North India', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 49, no. 2 (1 June 2012): pp. 226–7, doi: 10.1177/001946461204900203.

[7] Lital Levy, 'Reorienting Hebrew Literary History: The View from the East', *Prooftexts* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2009): pp. 127–72.

[8] Karima Laachir, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of "Reading Together" Moroccan Novels in Arabic and French', *The Journal of North African Studies* 21, no. 1 (January 2016): pp. 22–36.

[9] Francesca Orsini, 'The Multilingual Local in World Literature', *Comparative Literature* 67, no. 4 (1 December 2015): pp. 345–74, doi: 10.1215/00104124-3327481.

[10] Condé in Vèvè Clark, 'Maryse Condé: An Interview and A Short Story', *Callaloo* 88 (1988).

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within a nation's boundaries. This is especially relevant for countries that are only recently emerging from conflict fuelled by post-colonial nationalisms gone awry (such as Algeria, Tunisia, Iran, India, Sri Lanka, the latter of which is the subject of this study). This article is written in a felt need to add to this literature: to explore what a multilingual literary history entails in the context of language-based conflict, what problems, challenges, and implications attend such a construction.

My research is restricted to the long twentieth century in Sri Lanka, for the following reasoning. First, while there are a variety of interesting methodologies proposed for multilingual literary historical research in medieval and pre-modern times, such as those by Orsini,[11] Levy,[12] Ricci,[13] and Pratt,[14] there are far fewer for more recent histories; some exceptions include Lunn's work on twentieth-century Hindi and Urdu.[15] I also then became intrigued with the following question: What happens in the twentieth century once nationalist language ideology and literary historiography have already taken over and started filtering the contemporary as well? What happens, or is lost, between the written word and real life? Finally, twentieth-century history is important for a simpler, more material reason: the generations that lived through this era's changing landscapes and ideologies are on their way out; their oral memories need to be captured in order to counter what has thus far been a destructive teleology of written literary (and cultural) history.

In order to excavate this twentieth-century multilingual literary history, I have synthesized some ideas gathered from a few multilingual literary historians.

In *Empire of Texts in Motion*, Karen Thornber examines Japanese metropoles as sites of confluence for intellectuals of different linguistic/cultural spheres.[16] She calls these crossings 'contact nebulae' involving

[11] Orsini, 'How to Do Multilingual Literary History?', pp. 225–46; Orsini, 'The Multilingual Local in World Literature', pp. 345–74.

[12] Levy, 'Reorienting Hebrew Literary History'.

[13] Ronit Ricci, 'Multilingual Sri Lanka' (SOAS, University of London, April 2016).

[14] Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession* (1991): pp. 33–40.

[15] David J. Lunn, 'Looking for Common Ground: Aspects of Cultural Production in Hindi/Urdu, 1900–1947' (PhD, SOAS, University of London, 2012), http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/15640/ (accessed 29 May 2019); Karen Laura Thornber, *Empire of Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese Transculturations of Japanese Literature* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

[16] Thornber, *Empire of Texts in Motion.*

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'readerly contact' and 'writerly contact': multilingual, multicultural encounters exert influences over literati that are absorbed, unaccounted for, and become silent factors in their consequent literary production in separate spheres. This includes, for instance with 'writerly contact', the personal relationships between intellectuals and their collaborative creative activities and outputs during their time together or, with 'readerly contact', their shared influences from that particular moment in time such as zeitgeist literature or political activism. Building from this, I excavate sites of contact between cultural producers from the various language spheres and highlight the ways in which their cross-influence has been accounted or unaccounted for. In particular, I examine the university as one such site, as well as literary circles and cultural activist units and their activities during times of civil conflict.

I also follow Francesca Orsini's suspicions of geographies that accompany established literary histories.[17] She shows that the neat mappings of literary traditions and language to regions leave far too many gaps in history and geography that could be rectified if a spatial sensitivity was combined with a comparative literary approach. She advocates for recognizing shared geographies of literary production that in turn reveal the naturally occurring multilingualism of (in her case, Indian) society. Orsini also reminds us to be cautious of superimposing contemporary political geographies onto our understanding of history. In the Sri Lankan context, available literary histories reproduce implicit geographies that neatly correspond with contemporary political geographies. By problematizing this and recalling times when space was less homogeneous, we easily unearth cross-sphere influences and more continuous historical narratives of national literary production and intellectual thought.

Lital Levy, like Orsini, is critical of the ideological value of geography. She revives the history of Arabic-Mizrahi literature to challenge the single, teleological chronology of influences in contemporary Jewish literary styles that foregrounds Hebrew and European inheritances and ignores Arabic and Middle-Eastern influences and crossings.[18] She posits instead multiple historical–cultural trajectories that constitute the diverse inheritances of contemporary Jewish literature that may develop alongside each other, at times crossing, at times not. This understanding of various trajectories, their simultaneous confluence and independence disrupts

[17] Orsini, 'How to Do Multilingual Literary History?'.
[18] Levy, 'Reorienting Hebrew Literary History'.

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traditional models of influence, heritage, or time that are wont to pit one historical narrative against the other on competitive terms under the guise of comparison. As Levy aptly observes, 'the issue of comparison becomes irrelevant once we step outside the teleological development model in which questions of size, linear continuity, and influence are viewed as the only measures of historic importance and interest'.[19] Similarly, the multilingual literary history I propose in this article is not intended to undo existent monolingual literary histories, but rather to complement them, providing another mode of understanding the literary landscape of Sri Lanka.

Considerations of geography are key, if not central, to Thornber, Orsini, and Levy's approaches to literary and intellectual history. The multiplicity of historical trajectories, their coexistence and convergences, can only be theorized if a spatial approach is taken to time. That is, dispersed space will accommodate the development of separate histories, which may or may not meet and collide sometimes in an intersectional place. Doreen Massey's comprehensive, alternative mode of understanding on space, place, and time concisely captures this idea. Her opening propositions in *For Space* posit that space must be understood fundamentally as 'a product of interrelations'.[20] As corollaries of this come her next two propositions: that space and multiplicity are co-constitutive; and that space is dynamic, 'always in the process of being made'. 'Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far,' she continues.[21] She then distinguishes 'places' as 'temporary constellations of trajectories'.[22] Place is a sort of moment in space that encapsulates the chance chaos of space—the 'throwntogetherness' of people, things, histories, and trajectories.[23]

This radical reimagining of space captures the points made by the literary historians above. It enables us to see specific sites as necessarily dynamic, forming just one moment in the trajectories of all who momentarily gather there. It enables us to be suspicious of neat, static geographies that 'belong' to one tradition or another instead of shared simultaneously in different ways. It also allows us to construct literary histories that may not fit the available teleology but can be coexistent or even confluent with them at times. In this particular project about Sri

[19] Ibid., p. 130.
[20] Massey, *For Space*, p. 9.
[21] Loc. cit.
[22] Ibid., p. 153.
[23] Massey, *For Space*.

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Lanka, I have been wary as well that constructing a multilingual literary history can structurally erase cultural specificity, which is an undesired consequence and is adverse to the ongoing political struggle that relies strongly on asserting cultural integrity. Yet Massey's articulations provide an alternative to this threat of erasure. Space, for her, necessitates the multiplicity of trajectories and the corollary of this is that it prohibits the overruling or muting of any single trajectory. Hence, an intellectual can have at one time belonged to a pan-Sri Lankan anti-colonial struggle, advocated multilingualism, and then also have become a staunch monolingual cultural figure. Rather than seeing this as one person evolving from one stance to the next (in the traditional chronological sense), we could rethink this as two trajectories that meet in the single person. The single person can then simultaneously be a site of two narratives of literary history: the multilingual and monolingual, the separatist and unionist. Massey's conceptualizations of 'space' and 'place' hence underline my analysis of the Sri Lankan context. I also use the word 'site' to refer to a particular instance that we scrutinize, such as an individual in the example above, location (for example, the university), a group (for example, arts collective), an event (for example, a conference).

There is one addition, though, to this available discourse on space and place. Ideologically significant geographies can turn into politically significant ones with real-world consequences (i.e. restrictions) on the mobility of people, which in turn have their consequences for cultural production. While the above scholars examine what I call *organic* (or naturally occurring) sites of multilingualism, the conflict environment creates a need for *orchestrated* sites of multilingualism—that is, sites that are consciously created, generally by a need for pluralism and reconciliation. As literary historians, the tendency to search for organic sites of multilingualism may eclipse the value of orchestrated sites, which form a much-needed counterbalance to decreasing opportunities for multilingual and multicultural encounters. They become fascinating sites to examine for their institutional reimagination of society. For instance, the Hindustani Academy of early twentieth-century India provided a structural response to the increasing divide between Hindi and Urdu by promoting Hindustani as common language based linguistically on both Hindi and Urdu and therefore accessible to all.[24] Just because the academy was temporary and hence deemed a 'failure'

[24] Lunn, 'Looking for Common Ground'.

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ought not undermine the influence it may have had on its contemporary society. Similarly, orchestrated sites for multilingual encounters in Sri Lanka during conflict may have been transient but their value is immeasurably important to trajectories of cultural production.

The Sri Lankan literary spheres

First, a brief on the Sri Lankan context. Sri Lanka achieved independence from the British in 1948 in a peaceful manner after about 150 years of colonization. Anti-colonial nationalism had been stirring in a cultural sense from the mid-nineteenth century where religious activities were revived against Christian proselytization. This religious revival soon transformed into a linguistic revival as certain languages were seen as intrinsic to understanding religious texts (in the case of Sinhala and Buddhism) or due to a wider contemporaneous linguistic revivalism (in the case of Sri Lankan Tamil vis-à-vis Tamil language revival in Madras).[25] The English language cut across ethnicities and was wielded as cultural capital that enabled social mobility and economic opportunity: in popular slang to date, English is even called *kaduwa*, which means 'sword'—that is, a weapon (of class prestige, social mobility).[26] This legacy as the language of both the colonizer and the native elite led English to be removed as official language and replaced by Sinhala (only) in a controversial act in 1956. Although the rallying call was to remove the privileges of English and encourage Sinhala and Tamil languages, the final political wave let go of Tamil and only afforded Sinhala official status.[27] This act is a pivotal point in Sri

[25] For language, religious, and cultural revivalism, see Kē En Ō Dharmadāsa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (University of Michigan Press, 1992); Kailasapathy, 'Tamil Consciousness in Eelam'; A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (UBC Press, 2000). For political history and some cultural context, see K. M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Penguin Books, 2005); Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Indentities* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

[26] Thiru Kandiah, '"Kaduva": Power and the English Language Weapon in Sri Lanka', in *English in Sri Lanka: Ceylon English, Lankan English, Sri Lankan English*, ed. S. Fernando, Manique Gunasekara, and Arjuna Parakrama (Sri Lanka English Language Teachers' Association, 2010), pp. 36–65.

[27] See Neil DeVotta, 'From Linguistic Parity to Sinhala Only', in *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*, ed. Neil DeVotta (Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 42–72.

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Lanka's history of ethnic conflict, as language and ethnicity were effectively collapsed into one, marking the beginning of undisguised ethnolinguistic discrimination. From thereon, ethnic discrimination via language discrimination snowballed with outbreaks of racial violence into a drawn-out conflict from 1983 to 2009.

Like most other countries, academic research and institutions of Sri Lankan literature are divided along lines of the three main languages: Sinhala, Tamil, and English. The division is reified in the isolation of different languages on different floors of a major publisher's bookstore,[28] in state literary award categories, and university department organization. This is not an unusual phenomenon, globally speaking. However, if we examine literary research and the syllabi of literature and language courses, we find that the division between languages is not simply a matter of technical separation: it facilitates the construction of completely different *worlds* of ideology, history, and geography. Each language's literary sphere seems to be its own entity, with its own intellectuals, self-referential canon, literary heritage, and associated geography. In the next two sections, I first examine the respective associated geographies of each sphere, after which I examine the separate literary and intellectual heritages of each sphere, unravelling some false separations and future directions for comparative research.

Associated geographies

The geography associated with Tamil culture takes Madras as its centre: it was the site of early Tamil cultural revival, it remains the centre for major Tamil studies, and has continuously been the hub for Tamil intellectuals. For instance, the earliest modern Sri Lankan Tamil writer, Arumuga Navalar (1822–79), worked primarily between Jaffna and Madras, as did his followers from the 'Jaffna School'.[29] Navalar was also the leader of the Hindu-Saivite revival in Jaffna. He identified himself as 'a Tamil from Yalpanam [Jaffna]', exemplifying the sameness of Tamils across the Indian Ocean with only geographical location difference.[30] In Tamil, India was referred to *thainadu*, which means motherland,

[28] Sarasavi, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.
[29] Kailasapathy, 'Tamil Consciousness in Eelam'.
[30] Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, p. 31.

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whereas Sri Lanka was *seinadu*, or child-land.[31] Even when a distinctly Sri Lankan Tamil identity in literature was being forged, it was done so in a relation of opposition to the hegemony of Madras, again exemplifying the centrality of Madras to the associated geography of the Tamil world.[32]

In the Sinhala sphere, on the other hand, Sri Lanka has been the ancient geographic centre of Sinhala literary heritage, since Sinhala is only spoken on the island. Later, however, Bengal became an important intellectual centre for Sinhalese intelligentsia. The leader of the Buddhist cultural revival, Anagarika Dharmapala, established strong links with Bengal in collaborative efforts to protect the Bodhgaya, where the Buddha attained Enlightenment.[33] However, the connection became more ideological when Dharmapala expounded on the Aryan nature of the Sinhala language, the intrinsic value of Sinhala to Buddhism, and claimed that 'The Sinhalese first came to this country from Bengal and the Bengalis are superior in their intelligence to other communities in India'.[34] Later in the twentieth century, Bengal remained an important cultural centre for Sinhalese artists and scholars, as it was the seat of the Bengali cultural renaissance that inspired modern Sinhala renaissance. Many pioneers of Sinhala creative arts also studied at Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan, such as playwright/author Ediriweera Sarachchandra, musician Sunil Shantha, and dance artist Chitrasena.[35]

Dharmapala made the revival of Sinhala inextricable from Buddhist revivalism and emphasized the Aryan Sanskrit and Pali roots of Sinhala. This served as an indicator of the Sinhalese lineage from 'superior' Aryans, with the Aryan-associated centre in northern India. This contrasted with the Tamil cultural revival that was simultaneously constructing a Dravidian identity as indigenous, ancient, and civilized, from the South of India in direct opposition to the northern Aryan identity. This South-Dravidian, North-Aryan dichotomy was mirrored

[31] M. Sitralega, personal communication, 7 July 2016.

[32] See, for example, Karthigesu Sivathambi, 'Is It Sri Lankan Literature in Tamil or Tamil Literature in Sri Lanka?', July 2003, http://www.tamilcanadian.com/article/1907 (accessed 29 May 2019).

[33] For more on Dharmapala, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, and the Bengal connection, see Dharmadāsa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*, 'The Nineteenth Century Buddhist Revival', and 'Revivalism, Social Mobilization, and the Sinhala Language'.

[34] Ibid., p. 146.

[35] Kamal Wickremasinghe, 'Rabindranath Tagore: Portrait of a Torn Soul', 10 May 2016, http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=144998 (accessed 29 May 2019).

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in geographical inverse in Sri Lanka, where the association was North-Dravidian and South-Aryan. This mutual exclusivity of roots hence encompassed both language and ethnicity and would eventually serve as ideological fuel to ethnic troubles in Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, the English sphere's associated geography has centred on Britain. The dominant topics in the Sri Lankan English literary scene are perhaps post-colonialism and Sri Lankan English—both of which are very much in conversation with the colonial homeland. The early anxieties of English writing in Sri Lanka focused on the lack of a local vocabulary and the need for 'a distinctively Ceylonese experience'.[36] Both were overcome in the poetry of Lakdasa Wikkramasinha, whose Sinhala bilinguality enabled him to use local and English traditions to carve a new vocabulary that could paint this 'Ceylonese experience' in an early Sri Lankan English.[37] While there is some focus on South Asian, migrant, diasporic writing, all of which de-centralize the British literary world, it is clear that English literature in Sri Lanka follows the global English and 'world' literary trends that centre on Britain (and the United States of America) and expand radially outwards.

The above demonstrates the different geographies associated with each sphere. All three language spheres have a central Sri Lankan axis from which the outward direction varies: to South India, North India, and Euroamerica, respectively.

Literary history and potential directions for comparative research

If we observe the associated geographies above, we see that multilingualism is an inherent part of each sphere's literary heritage. Just as Sinhala literati would be familiar with (or be full-blown scholars of) Pali and Sanskrit, Tamil literati would have exposure to thought from other Dravidian languages such as Kannada or Telugu from cultural-linguistic revivalism in Madras, and English literati would have the inheritance of Latin and Greek languages and cultures from their British-English education. Progress or advancements in literary styles would then be evaluated using these language families as referential points. Thus, for Sinhala literature, innovation in the twentieth century happened when

[36] Tissa Jayatilaka, 'The English Language Novel of Sri Lanka and the Critical Response to It: An Overview', *Navasilu*, no. 17 (2000): p. 8.

[37] Halpe, 'Sri Lankan Literature in English', p. 287.

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Ediriweera Sarachchandra developed new evaluative criteria for Sinhala literature that escaped the restrictions of *Sanskrit* evaluative criteria. In Tamil, innovation came in young Marxist Tamil poets in the 1950s doing away with the elitism of the Pure Tamil Movement and *Sangam*-inspired styles, instead using colloquial language and addressing societal issues. Each sphere built onwards from their own specific philological heritage. The English sphere was slightly different but we will revisit this after the following discussion of the odd separation of Sinhala and Tamil spheres.

The lack of overlap between Sinhala and Tamil spheres strikes me as odd, for several reasons. First, there are extensive studies in the field of linguistics about the similarities, cross-derivations, and dynamic influence between Sinhala and Tamil through the ages. As early as the 1930s, W. F. Gunawardhana and Swami Gnanaprakasar presented a paper on the possible Dravidian roots of Sinhala at the Royal Asiatic Society.[38] More recently, Sandagomi Coperahewa has done research on language contact between Sinhala and Tamil, demonstrating that Sinhala diglossia (that is two registers, literary and spoken/colloquial) can largely be attributed to the absorption of Tamil words into spoken Sinhala while written Sinhala continued its Sanskrit base.[39] This Dravidian aspect of Sinhala spoken vocabulary could have interesting consequences for literary evaluation. For example, the poets of the 1970s turned away from formal, written Sinhala and began using entirely colloquial Sinhala in their work. Could the Dravidian roots of colloquial Sinhala be used to innovate a new evaluative criterion of Sinhala poetry? Or perhaps develop new styles? There are a lot of possibilities, none of which has been taken up by academic scholarship or has inspired creative writing from this angle.

Second, if one reads literary histories of Tamil and Sinhala together, the parallels and similarities in trends and developments in each sphere are quite clear—and yet there are no comparative studies of this from a national, multilingual perspective. In the early twentieth century, nationalist creative writing emerges in all three language spheres. Tamil writers Thuraiappah Pillai, Comasundara Pulavar, and Periyathambi Pillai all sang of 'Mother Lanka', venerating the homeland and

[38] Sandagomi Coperahewa, 'Linguistic Identity and Growth of Language Consciousness: Indo Aryan vs Dravidian Debate, 1920–1935', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* 55 (2009): p. 66.

[39] Sandagomi Coperahewa, 'Language Contact and Linguistic Area: Sinhala-Tamil Contact Situation', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* 53 (2007): pp. 133–52.

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referring to unity between the peoples of Ceylon (in Tamil, *Ilankai* or *Eelam* in these poems).[40] Similarly, in English, we have Sri Nissanka's play *Our Lanka* (1939) that uses historical mythology as an analogy for anti-colonial struggle and calls upon 'the Sinhalese and our Tamil brethren … [to] unite in harmony for the welfare and prosperity of this Island, which is our common heritage'.[41] Sinhala nationalist writing was prolific from the mid-nineteenth century up to the 1940s, from dramatist John de Silva's depiction of the fall of Kandy to the British (where he marches onstage and incites the audience to rise up against such injustice) to the primordial Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist writings of Piyadasa Sirisena.[42]

As part of this nationalist sentiment, language purism (the removal of 'foreign' words in a language, such as those of Sanskrit, English, or other origin) became strong in both Sinhala and Tamil spheres. The intellectual circles of Jaffna at the turn of the twentieth century subscribed to the *tanittamil* ideology—that is, the Pure Tamil Movement, originating in India while the literary zeitgeist of the time was *centhamil*, or literary Tamil. This trend was dropped by the 1920s with emerging Marxist writers who dominated the scene, rejecting linguistic purism as an act of elitism.[43] Correspondingly, a purist movement began in Sinhala, spearheaded by Munidasa Cumaratunga and the *Hela Havula* group, that referred to pure Sinhala as 'Hela' and the Sinhalese as 'Helese'.[44] Although clearly the Hela movement resonates with the Indian *tanittamil* movement for purification/de-Sankritization, there has been no comparative study within the Sri Lankan context about the de-Sankritization or linguistic purism movements in the two languages. Moreover, there is little if any reference to the Indian *tanittamil* movement in research about Sinhala purism, one exception being a footnote in Coperahewa's study of the

[40] R. Cheran, 'Cultural Politics of Tamil Nationalism', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 12, no. 1 (1 January 1992): pp. 44–5.

[41] Goonetilleke, *Sri Lankan English Literature*, p. 137.

[42] Ranjini Obeyesekere, 'The Sinhala Literary Tradition: Polemics and Debate', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 12, no. 1 (1 January 1992): p. 38.

[43] Cheran, 'Cultural Politics of Tamil Nationalism', p. 44; Karthigesu Sivathambi, '50 Years of Eelam Tamil Literature', 1995, http://tamilnation.co/literature/eelam/95sivathamby.htm (accessed 29 May 2019).

[44] Sandagomi Coperahewa, 'Purifying the Sinhala Language: The Hela Movement of Munidasa Cumaratunga (1930s–1940s)', *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 4 (2012): pp. 857–91.

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Hela Havula that refers to 'a similar "pure Tamil" movement in South India'.[45]

Another interesting literary moment in all three languages is the influence of Marxism or class consciousness. Here, the effects have been divergent. Marxism influenced young Tamil writers in the 1940s and 1950s, and led them to address intra-societal issues such as caste and gender, while Sinhala writers like Martin Wickramasinghe used social realism to depict class struggle and the impact of modernity on traditionally affluent groups. In English, class consciousness expressed itself with the scholarly desire for literature that communicates a 'truly Ceylonese … voice',[46] a literary preoccupation with the romanticized rural (such as in the works of James Goonewardene), and self-consciousness about class, as with Punyakante Wijenaike's *Giraya* (1971) or Lakdasa Wikkramasinha's self-loathing poetry in the 1960s. Additionally, the socialist and communist writings of Russia were great influences across all language spheres via translations in Sinhala, Tamil, and English, which holds another point for some interesting comparative research.

The above are three such historical moments or intellectual movements that could provoke some rich comparative studies between language spheres. I diverged from discussing the English sphere at the beginning of this section because the impact of English marks a curious point of comparison. In both Sinhala and Tamil, familiarity with English (or Western) intellectual thought was seen as a positive attribute from about the 1940s onwards. Hence, Sarachchandra and the Sinhala writers of the Peradeniya school possessed a bilinguality in English and familiarity of Western literary ideals that enabled them to innovate in the Sinhala sphere. Obeysekere speaks of the rise of a 'fluent, bilingual, educated class emerged which appreciated the best that was being produced in the West and at the same time sought to absorb and assimilate Western influences into a continuing tradition of indigenous Sinhala writing'.[47] Similarly, the bilingualism of such academics as Kailasapathy and Perinbanayagam is credited for why 'their horizons were wide and rich'

[45] Ibid., p. 875.

[46] Yasmine Gooneratne, 'A Perspective on the Poetry of Sri Lanka', *Journal of South Asian Literature* 12, no. 1/2 (1976): p. 1.

[47] Ranjini Obeyesekere and Chitra Fernando, *An Anthology of Modern Writing from Sri Lanka* (Published for the Association for Asian Studies by the University of Arizona Press, 1981), p. 10.

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and enabled them to enrich Tamil literature.[48] In either case, familiarity with the Western/English literary world is narrated as indigenized influence: it is an absorptive relationship where foreign values, styles, language, and so on are used to enrich the indigenous language and literature. There is no sense of a dynamic relationship and, moreover, there is no attribution of the influence of *Sri Lankan* English literary development to the Tamil and Sinhala spheres. Rather, writers in the Sri Lankan English sphere found credibility (due to the anxious search for an 'indigenous' Sri Lankan English literature) in their bilingualism and familiarity with Sinhala or Tamil traditions. Hence, Lakdasa Wikkramasinha's familiarity with classical Sinhala poetry and folklore marks his work as the first real depiction of Sri Lankanness in English. Contrastingly, his Sinhala poetry creations are disparaged but that is from within the evaluative criteria of Sinhala literature with no reference to possible influences from his own writing style in English.[49] There appears to be a one-way flow of influence from Sinhala/Tamil on the one side to Sri Lankan English on the other; similarly, foreign-English influence flows into all three literary spheres but somehow has not yet been a comparison point for a common literary heritage across the spheres. There is no sense of a Masseyan dynamic space occupied by foreign-English, local-English, Sinhala, and Tamil: the influences are monodirectional and absorptive as traditional imaginings of space-time would allow, not coexistent or in flux.

Geography, politics, and Sri Lankan literature

The geography of intellectual heritage

Just as the three spheres have their own associated geographies and pools of literary influences, they each have their own canonical intellectuals. Martin Wickramasinghe and Ediriweera Sarachchandra are strongly, if not exclusively, associated with the Sinhala literary sphere while the same is true of K. Kailasapathy and K. Sivathambi in the Tamil sphere. In researching some of these intellectuals' histories and their

[48] K. S. Sivakumaran, 'Karthigesu Sivathamby—Sri Lankan Scholar with International Recognition', *The Island*, 31 August 2005, http://www.island.lk/2004/08/04/midweek07.html (accessed 29 May 2019).

[49] See, for example, the evaluation given by Wimal Dissanayake, 'A Note on Lakdasa Wikkramasinha's Sinhala Poetry', *Navasilu* 2 (1979): pp. 31–2.

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social circles, it became clear that the construction of their belonging to one sphere alone is a false creation of current literary historiographical methods. For example, both Kailasapathy and Sivathambi were involved in the activities of multicultural/multilingual think tanks in the South such as the Social Scientists' Association, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, and the Marga Institute. Sivathambi was involved in co-publications with social scientist Kumari Jayawardena and also published work in the English-literature journal *Navasilu*.[50]

Research demonstrated that these defining intellectuals of the different spheres had many points of contact, moved in similar social and intellectual circles, were involved in similar artistic movements, or were influenced by common literary heritages, an example of which we will see in the following section. This would be unsurprising if we thought of space as multiple, consisting of many points of various trajectories meeting up. The contact points discussed above—journals, think tanks, social circles—could correspondingly be thought of as sites capturing momentarily that heterogeneous vitality of space. In this section, we examine the University of Peradeniya as one such example. This university is commonly reproduced in oral history as an institution that transcended socio-cultural difference for the pursuit of intellectual production. It is an organic multilingual site, brought about by the pursuit of education that necessitated the congregation of students from all over the island at one hub.

Migration to seek educational opportunities created a natural mixing of ethnicities. At the secondary-school level, many Sinhala-speaking students from the North-Central province in Sri Lanka, from major towns such as Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, would move up towards Jaffna for better educational facilities. This was the case of such statesmen as K. B Ratnayake and Maithripala Senanayake. The result was an effectively trilingual citizen who studied in English, may speak Sinhala at home, and learnt Tamil due to their adopted environs.[51] Similarly, at the tertiary level, students from across the island would come together at universities located only in the South. Students would reside in mixed halls, participate in the same classes, and co-exist in the same recreational spaces. Universities were still small, scarce, and difficult to

[50] A thorough bibliography of Sivathamby's work can be seen in 'Research Papers in English', *Sivathamby*, http://sivathamby.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=88&Itemid=549 (accessed 11 August 2016).

[51] Sunil Wijesiriwardena, personal communication, 24 July 2016.

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get into, so this created a tight congregation of diverse individuals who would go on to lead the country in their separate spheres.[52]

Peradeniya University (or the Peradeniya campus of the University of Ceylon, as it was known from 1952 to 1978) exists in popular memory and some written histories as a hub for some of the most important pioneers of creative and scholarly work in twentieth-century Sri Lanka.[53] Yet, despite the importance of Peradeniya as a place for intellectual scholarship, it has hitherto remained unanalysed as a contact zone for intellectuals from different spheres. Rather, these pioneers of cultural production hailing from Peradeniya are still narrated as though belonging and contributing to literary development in single spheres.

For instance, E. F. C. Ludowyk is renowned for his influence as an English-language academic through his literary criticism, as a teacher and head of the English department, and as a dramatist heavily involved in the students' English-language Drama Society (DramSoc).[54] His contemporary, Ediriweera Sarachchandra, renowned as the 'father' of modern Sinhala theatre, worked with traditional folk theatre styles such as *koothtu* and *nadagam* and adapted them for the stage. Sarachchandra was a lecturer at Peradeniya University teaching literature and Pali and involved in the theatre scene; his role as a university lecturer is attributed to his influence as a critic.[55] He contributed to the scholarly work of the Sinhala scene through publications such as *Modern Sinhala Fiction* (1943) and *Folk Drama of Ceylon* (1952) (the latter concentrates on 'Sinhala' forms of theatre). Additionally, Professor S. Vithiananthan, another contemporary of Ludowyk and Sarachchandra at Peradeniya University, was a pioneer in the field of Tamil theatre.[56] He and his students, along with S. Maunaguru, revolutionized the *koothtu* tradition of Tamil folk theatre, adapting it to stage. Maunaguru would go on to continue this

[52] S. Canagarajah, personal communication, 9 June 2016.

[53] Ajith Samaranayake, 'The Passing of a Generation', 8 June 2003, http://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2003/06/08/fea04.html (accessed 7 June 2019).

[54] Ashley Halpe, 'Ludowyk, English, and the Sri Lankan University', 16 October 2006, http://archives.dailynews.lk/2006/10/16/fea02.asp (accessed 29 May 2019).

[55] Ranjini Obeyesekere, 'Ediriweera Sarachchandra: A Renaissance Man', *Colombo Telegraph*, 20 July 2014, https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/ediriweera-sarachchandra-a-renaisance-man/ (accessed 29 May 2019).

[56] Stanley Wijesundera, 'Professor Subramaniam Vithiananthan: An Appreciation', *Tamil Times*, February 1989.

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tradition, working in the East, using theatre as a force of social change, and also reconciliation work later with Southern Sinhala dramatists such as Dharmasiri Bandaranaike.[57]

Curiously, there is little to no connection in written literature of Sarachchandra to Tamil folk theatre, despite both the *koothhu* and *nadagam* traditions being Tamil—or at the least South Indian—traditions. Coperahewa points out that the word '*nadagam*' is of Tamil origin and an article written by the English dramatist Ernest MacIntyre shows how South Indian *nadagam* came to be Sinhalized via missionaries who picked it up from Jaffna and Batticaloa.[58] Moreover, Sarachchandra's work builds on the *koothhu* tradition, which is what Vithiananthan also developed and now dominates Tamil folk theatre traditions in the East (through the works of artists such as S. Maunaguru and S. Jeyasankar). Sarachchandra's classic *Sinhabahu* and Vithiananthan's classic *Ravanesan* were both first performed at the Open Air Theatre of the University of Peradeniya in 1961 and 1965, respectively, while both scholars were at Peradeniya. Yet there is little to no mention of these crossings. One article that does mention the similarity between Vithiananthan and Sarachchandra's style implies that Vithiananthan's contribution to Tamil theatre was a derivative product of Sarachchandra: 'The work of Prof. S. Vithianandan in the University of Peradeniya was an undoubted emulation of Sarachchandra's work.'[59] It is not a dynamic relationship of influences nor a case of simultaneity of production: there is a linear chronology where one precedes the other and consequently is greater/more influential. According to this narrative, modern Sinhala theatre, through its pioneer, Sarachchandra, drew inspiration from external elements from South India, Japan, China, the West, and so on, as opposed to local influences from his contemporaries. No dynamism is located in the relationship between Sinhala and Tamil theatre; rather, each absorb influences *outside* of Sri Lanka and within its own linguistic community. The commonality of

[57] Sinniah Maunaguru, personal communication, 6 July 2016; Dharmasiri Bandaranaike, personal communication, 26 July 2016.

[58] Ernest MacIntyre, 'Ceylon, Sri Lanka And India: The Ediriweera Sarachchandra Encounter', *Colombo Telegraph*, 27 November 2014, https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/ceylon-sri-lanka-and-india-the-ediriweera-sarachchandra-encounter/ (accessed 29 May 2019); Coperahewa, 'Language Contact and Linguistic Area', p. 147.

[59] P. B. Galahitiyawe, 'The 94th Birth Anniversary of the Late Prof. Ediriweera Sarachchandra Falls Today Maname and Its Impact on Our National Culture', 6 March 2008, http://www.island.lk/2008/06/03/features3.html (accessed 29 May 2019).

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kooththu and *nadagam* as progenitors of modern Sri Lankan theatre holds potential for building a common aesthetic or evaluative criteria for theatre across spheres.

My reason for highlighting E. F. C. Ludowyk is also to demonstrate the segmentation of intellectuals. Ludowyk is credited as an English sphere intellectual but little attention is given to his influence as a teacher upon key creative and critical intellectuals of both Tamil and Sinhala literary traditions. Upon watching one of Ludowyk's plays that he directed with DramSoc, Sarachchandra said: 'I did not realise at the time that it was providing me with the basic education I needed in an area of artistic activity that was to become, later, practically my life work.'[60] Ludowyk taught some of the foremost critics in both Sinhala and Tamil, including Ranjini Obeysekere, Regi Siriwardena (both from the Sinhala sphere), and A. J. Canagaratne (the major English-Tamil translator).[61] Hence, it seems illogical to only think of Ludowyk as belonging to just the English-language tradition. Rather, we should consider him similarly to Vithiananthan and Sarachchandra, as part of a constellation of intellectuals who would come to influence different creative production and schools of thought across literary spheres.

Changing geographies

The points of confluence discussed so far between spheres depend on organic multilingual spaces. For instance, the proposed linguistic commonality of Sinhala and Tamil comes from one such ordinary multilinguality: it is an effect of 'linguistic contact' where two languages (or rather, its speakers) in constant close proximity take on each other's characteristics to the point of indiscernibility. Likewise, even if the imagined geographies of influence stretch as far as Madras or London, real-world geography consists of multilingual sites that manifest a common intellectual or artistic heritage centred at home. Shared places such as Peradeniya University entail shared influence and opportunities for multilingualism and plurality, even if the very same place has been historicized selectively in each different sphere's histories.

[60] Halpe, 'Ludowyk, English, and the Sri Lankan University'.

[61] Ibid.; Rajan Philips, 'Jaffna's Literary Soul: A Tribute to A.J. Canagaratne', 2006, http://www.sundaytimes.lk/061029/Plus/pls21.html (accessed 29 May 2019).

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Sadly, this organic nature of multilingualism changes sometime after independence through a series of policy shifts and outbreaks of violence. In this section, we discuss some of these policy shifts and the ways in which they formed a sort of unofficial or soft segregation, where places became more polarized or internally homogenous and, even in shared spaces, the opportunity to mix became inadvertently restricted.

The first of these policies regards language. As much as English may be romanticized now as an ethnic unifier—a link language that enables cross-community communication as well as international outreach—English in the first half of the twentieth century was primarily a class divider. The 'English-educated elite' functioned as a separate class of their own, consisting of diverse ethnicities, religions, and so on, but all possessing the essential cultural capital of English literacy that allowed them access to jobs, government, and social prestige. Even though, by the mid-1940s, only 7 per cent of the Sri Lankan population were English-literate,[62] basic functions such as banking, the telegram service, and legal proceedings were all conducted in English.[63] Universal education, won in the 1930s, granted literacy to an increasing population in Sri Lanka but this widespread vernacular education amounted to little social mobility, as most jobs required some competency in English, particularly the highly desired government jobs.

In order to reverse this social order, the *swabasha* (mother tongue, or literally self-language) movement was created to replace English with Sinhala and Tamil.[64] Eventually, in the early 1950s, a series of directives were issued that gradually reformed secondary and tertiary education to ensure that people would only study in *swabasha*. That is, Tamils would study in Tamil, Sinhalese would study in Sinhala, and English education was available to Burghers and other minorities. What this effectively meant was that new generations of complete monolinguals would arise who were ill-equipped with any link language to bridge the communication divides. Although Sinhala and Tamil were provided as link languages and, on paper, English was a compulsory subject, the logistics of teachers, educational material, and (lack of) demand for Tamil language learning in Sinhala majority areas meant that there was no material realization of an effective link language to

[62] J. E. Jayasuriya, 'Language in Education', in *Education in Ceylon: Before and after Independence 1939–1968*, ed. J. E. Jayasuriya (Associated Educational Publishers, 1969), p. 64.
[63] DeVotta, *Blowback*, p. 45.
[64] For details on the policy changes see Jayasuriya, *Education in Ceylon*, and for an overview of *swabasha* movement, see deVotta, 'From Linguistic Parity to Sinhala Only'.

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bridge communication divides. Additionally, the *swabasha* movement coincided with the Sinhala Only Act of 1956 that made Sinhala the only official language. The implication for this new generation of non-Sinhala-speaking monolinguals was devastating.

This cementing of 'Sinhala' and 'Tamil' as ethnolinguistic identities effected essentially an unofficial segregation within schools. No longer could the likes of young Ratnayakes and Senanayakes be educated in a common language (English) in Jaffna. Similarly, at university, Tamils and Tamil-speaking others (such as Muslims) would continue studying in classes physically separated from their Sinhala-speaking batch mates.[65] Of course, there were other sites of mixing, such as in hostels and during recreational activities, but the impact of promoting indigenous languages effected the beginnings of ethnicity-based segregation, systematically limiting the sites that would otherwise act as organic sites of multilingual mixing.

The 1970s brought about a much greater change of landscape through certain key events. In 1974, the Jaffna Campus of the University of Sri Lanka was established—the first campus in a non-Sinhala-majority area.[66] Initially, it carried on the tradition of university campuses as sites of multicultural, progressive thinking. Many of the academics who taught here came from Peradeniya. It was run through the 1970s under the leadership of Peradeniya figures such as K. Kailasapathy (the first president) and then S. Vithiananthan, who are discussed above.[67] Some of the early members of staff included such important cultural figures from diverse backgrounds as Regi Siriwardena and A. J. Canagaratne in the English department; K. Sivathambi and M. A. Nuhman in the Tamil departments; and Sunil Ariyaratne and Sucharitha Gamlath in the Sinhala departments. Not only were they all important cultural figures of their various circumscribed spheres, they were all also multilingual with knowledge in at least one vernacular and English. They have all also been involved in some translation through their

[65] In Sri Lanka, the category 'Muslim' is seen as an ethnoreligious identity apart from Sinhalese and Tamil. For this article, I have reproduced this terminology of 'Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim' as the three major communities of Sri Lanka to follow conventions of discourse about communal relations in Sri Lanka.

[66] 'History', *University of Jaffna*, http://www.jfn.ac.lk/index.php/history/ (accessed 1 August 2016).

[67] Karthigesu Sivathambi, 'University of Jaffna and Its Vice Chancellors', March 2003, http://www.tamilcanadian.com/article/1692 (accessed 29 May 2019).

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careers, with Siriwardena and Canagaratne being renowned as major translators.[68]

Although this was the original scene of Jaffna University, things changed dramatically from 1977. After the elections of 1977, ethnic riots ignited in the South with several pogroms carried out against civilian Tamils. For fear of backlash, at Jaffna University, Sinhalese students and academics were harboured in Tamil homes until they could be safely transported back to the South. Although this was an instance of great camaraderie, the situation turned sour when some Sinhala students exaggerated and falsified injuries once they crossed the border of the peninsula and were met by the army. This news circulated in the South, causing further violence towards Tamils in the South.[69] That was the official end of Sinhalese admittance into Jaffna University, signalling the end of multiculturalism at the university until re-admittance after the end of the war. From this point onwards, the university saw generations of Tamil intellectuals arising from experiences gathered solely within the peninsula. Suresh Canagarajah recalls how he was of the last few generations who had to travel to the South to attend university there and hence mix with a variety of students.[70] After 1977, the geographical separation meant less multicultural encounter for students both in the South and the North. What this effectively would mean was a silence—a non-communication of intellectual developments that happened in the different spheres in time to come.

After the 1977 pogroms comes the watershed moment in Sri Lankan modern history, commonly referred to as the beginning of the full-blown conflict: Black July, 1983. In retaliation of the murder of some Sinhalese policemen in the North by rebels, Colombo went ablaze as Tamil shops and homes were looted and destroyed, often by burning, and ordinary Tamil civilians were massacred. No longer safe, many Tamils fled Colombo and other areas of the South and migrated overseas or towards Jaffna and the East. For instance, renowned Tamil Marxist writer Neervai Ponnaiyan, a resident of the Dehiwala suburb of

[68] A. J. Canagaratna, 'Regi Siriwardene the Multi Faceted Human Being', http://www.island.lk/2005/03/20/features5.html (accessed 1 August 2016); Philips, 'Jaffna's Literary Soul'.

[69] Mahendran Thiruvarangan, 'Clash At Jaffna University: Conversations on Culture & History—Part II', *Colombo Telegraph*, 28 July 2016, https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/clash-at-jaffna-university-conversations-on-culture-history-part-ii/ (accessed 29 May 2019).

[70] S. Canagarajah, personal communication, 9 June 2016.

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Colombo, abandoned his home with his family and fled to Jaffna. There, he continued his literary production and community service during the conflict until his return to Colombo in the 1990s.[71]

Sinhalese populations similarly evacuated their residences in the North and East and went to live in the South. Much later, in 1990, Muslim populations in the North (about 75,000 people) were expelled from their ancestral homes after tensions between the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) and Muslim minority came to a flash point. As Muslim civilians became targeted in random acts of violence, Northern Muslims fled towards the Eastern and North-Central provinces to escape persecution in a moment that is often described as the 'ethnic cleansing' of the peninsula.[72]

What becomes clear out of these political developments is that the imagined geographies of North-Dravidian-Tamil/South-Aryan-Sinhala became increasingly realized. The intellectual communication that would have otherwise happened organically at sites such as universities and schools was effectively rendered impossible. What we see from this point onwards is that those intellectuals and artists who wished to hold onto multicultural, multilingual sites had to create specific instances in which this mixing could happen.

Multilingualism in segregated geographies

When asking literati and academics about developments in literature through the twentieth century, I observed the same division between the spheres: most of my interviewees could speak extensively about one (perhaps two, including English) spheres but would have little to no awareness of any features or developments in the third sphere. There would be reminiscences of the heyday of Peradeniya University and leftist political struggle prior to independence as sites of cross-community harmony and multilingualism but very little information on multilingual literary or intellectual culture in the post-1980s era. The few instances where this did happen, though, were at activist sites where multilinguality was consciously created as a key

[71] Neervai Ponnaiyan, personal communication, 11 July 2016.

[72] D. B. S. Jeyaraj, 'How and Why the LTTE Evicted Muslims from the Northern Province 25 Years Ago in "Black October 1990"', *Dbsjeyaraj.com*, 10 November 2015, http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/43660 (accessed 29 May 2019).

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component of reconciliation at various places, events, or groups. In this section, I discuss some of these instances of *orchestrated* sites of multilingualism: orchestrated because the lack of organic sites necessitated the creation of alternative places for a multilingual counterculture to prevail.

Neervai Ponnaiyan, a seminal figure in the Tamil literary sphere, recalls perhaps the earliest attempt at an independent pan-Sri Lankan writing unit.[73] In the 1950s, leading Tamil writer K. Ganesh invited Mulk Raj Anand to establish a Progressive Writers Association (PWA) in Sri Lanka. Several leading writers and artistes were called to the Hotel Nippon, Colombo, for a meeting where Anand organized the establishment of the first PWA in Sri Lanka, modelled on the Indian group by the same name. It was visibly a collective across linguistic fields, with two co-presidents who were leaders in their respective domains, namely Martin Wickramasinghe from the Sinhala literary sphere and Swami Vipulananda from the Tamil sphere. Similarly, from the Sinhala and Tamil spheres, respectively, Ediriweera Sarachchandra and K. Ganesh were appointed joint secretaries. This group unfortunately fell apart quite soon, as their activities had mostly depended on Sarachchandra's initiative and organization; once he left for his doctoral studies, the group did not sustain itself. In its place, the Ceylon Progressive Writers Association (CPWA) opened in 1957 consisting of Tamil writers only. They continued in their literary developments but also maintained good relations with other writing communities. Ponnaiyan was part of this group and recounts how the CPWA was involved in reconciliatory activism work, joining forces with literary communities from other spheres. In 1975, they organized a conference with writers from other communities and submitted an 11-point programme to the government on the topic of reconciliation.

An interesting contrast to the short-lived PWA is the Vibhavi Centre for Alternative Culture (Vibhavi) that ran from 1990 to 2001.[74] Founded by a group of predominantly activists and artists, Vibhavi aimed to encourage an alternative set of both aesthetic and socio-political values for recognition that ran counter to the status quo of society, government,

[73] Information on the Progressive Writers Association and Ceylon Progressive Writers Association from personal communications with Neervai Ponnaiyan, 11 July 2016, Colombo.

[74] Information on Vibhavi Centre and the literary culture of the 1990s from personal communications in Colombo with Sunil Wijesiriwardena, 24 July 2016, and Neervai Ponnaiyan, 11 July 2016.

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and state-sanctioned literati of the time. Their activities were quite prolific. They released monthly bulletins in Sinhala and Tamil with critiques and literary works, including book reviews, and facilitated book launches. Their office in Nugegoda included a library and, once a month, a film screening took place, showing a variety of local and international art films. The centre is recognized by younger film artists such as Vimukthi Jayasundera as being one of the first and few places where they could gain access to diverse art films from around the world.[75]

Importantly, Vibhavi conducted a famous literary competition that would be advertised island-wide through newspapers and their own bulletins. Award categories included novels, short stories, drama, and poetry, and their call-outs would attract diverse entries, each being awarded a sizeable sum of Rs 10,000. These entries went towards Vibhavi's Independent Literary Festival, which was renowned for being progressive and the most artistically interesting festival available, particularly in comparison to the state-funded alternative, the State Literary Awards. In fact, by the 1990s, many artists and critics would refuse to participate (as judges or chairs) in the State Literary Awards, which they saw as biased and opaque in their processes of selection and awards. Moreover, the State Literary Awards in the early 1990s concentrated squarely on Sinhala cultural production, with awards for English, Tamil, and translations only being introduced in the late 1990s. In contrast, the Independent Literary Festival had awards in both Sinhala and Tamil as separate language categories for each formal category and the main coordinators were involved with Vibhavi, namely Sunil Wijesiriwardena, Kamalaweera Jayatilaka, Neervai Ponnaiyan, and Sunil Ariyaratne. The reason to exclude English from the categories was the fact that there was very little writing available in English and the main aim of Vibhavi was to get literature out into the grassroots, where English was inaccessible anyway. English was also seen as belonging to a different class and hence irrelevant to the aims of Vibhavi. Vibhavi wished to discuss literary production by Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims as a means of creating dialogue around alternative culture—that is, not just on ethnic harmony and cross-ethnic dialogue, but also to discuss issues such as chauvinism, patriarchy, caste, and so on. The Vibhavi team conducted literary discussions with schools and community centres around the country. Unfortunately, at

[75] Personal communication from Jayasundera to Sunil Wijesiriwardena, conveyed to me on 24 July 2016.

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the time of their activity, it was virtually impossible to penetrate the North and East due to the war situation so their activities remained in the central, east, and south of Sri Lanka. Discussions on Tamil literature were carried out in Sinhala with Sinhala-speaking communities and Sinhala literature was discussed in Tamil with Tamil-speaking communities in the country, such as those in the central hill country. Sunil Wijesiriwardena, Vibhavi's founder, stated that their main aim was to break the lack of information in the South and introduce people to the diversity of artistic production and ideas in the Tamil sphere. Additionally, the Vibhavi bulletins were released in Sinhala and Tamil, and interviews of Sinhala writers would be written in Tamil and Tamil writers would be written in Sinhala; Neervai Ponnaiyan alone carried out interviews with 47 Sinhala writers and introduced them to Tamil audiences through this bulletin.

Film has also been a site of interlingual communication used as a counterculture effort to ethnic divisions.[76] When the 1977 riots broke out, the Government Agent of Jaffna, a Sinhala man named Lionel Fernando, organized a film festival in 1978 that showed films produced in the South. In the 1970s, even if films were Sinhala, the film community itself was very diverse. The premier film studio, Vijaya Studios, was owned and managed by a Tamil businessman. In 1983, for this ethnic detail of ownership, the Vijaya Studios was burnt as the country went on a rampage against businesses owned by Tamils. Vijaya Studios was only one such place that was attacked not only due to its Tamilian ownership, but also due to the multicultural community that congregated there. It was an attack on the culture of Sinhalese 'traitors' as well. From then on, the involvement of the Sri Lankan Tamil community in indigenous film production became minimal.

Later, in 2003, filmmaker Dharmasiri Bandaranaike organized another film festival in the North, only the second after Lionel Fernando's in 1978. He joined with dramatist Parakrama Niriella and young film producers Prasanna Vithanage and Ashoka Handagama to show films in the North and East, in Jaffna, Vavuniya, Batticaloa, and Trincomalee,

[76] Information on film culture is from D. B. S. Jeyaraj, 'Jaffna Film Festival and Indigenous Tamil Cinema in Sri Lanka before "1983 Black July"', *Dbsjeyaraj.com*, 16 October 2015, http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/43235 (accessed 29 May 2019); Athanas Jesurasa, 'Indigenous Tamil Cinema in Sri Lanka before "Black July"', 25 September 2015, http://www.ft.lk/article/475611/Indigenous-Tamil-cinema-in-Sri-Lanka-before–Black-July- (accessed 29 May 2019) and personal communications with Dharmasiri Bandaranaike, 26 July 2016.

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where Bandaranaike had been working since the 1980s. Vithanage's film *Purahanda Kaluwara* (Sinhala) that was screened features the return of the unidentified body of a soldier. After the screenings, discussions took place about the similarities of the plight of the viewing community and the ordeals represented on-screen. This film festival took place for four years consecutively between 2003 and 2007, with the consent of the LTTE government.

Dharmasiri Bandaranaike discussed the importance of producing art in its original Sinhala to Tamil-speaking communities to establish shared experience (such as the story of the unidentified soldier). In the early 1990s, he showed his play, *Trojan Women*, an adaptation of Euripedes' classic, in Sinhala in the North in order to produce art that could help communities there disassociate the Sinhala language from the language of the army/occupation. The story of *Trojan Women* retells the Trojan war from the perspective of the women who suffered: women whose husbands and sons were killed, who had to sacrifice their ways of life to survive, who were raped and abused through the conflict. Bandaranaike intentionally related the story to the Sri Lankan situation to highlight the pain of women in the conflict. The play was staged in Sinhala, with printed synopses in Tamil distributed before the play. It was well received and discussion sessions after the play revealed the profound effect that the play had on the audience, listening to stories similar to their own in a language that was hitherto despised.

Attempts to establish such open dialogue in the South were met very differently though. Dharmasiri Bandaranaike also tried to bring theatre of the North and East to the South. In one of his first attempts, he was warned by the police not to do so. Bandaranaike and some fellow dramatists, such as Ravi Ratnasinha and Parakrama Niriella, were also involved in creating theatre around reconciliation and interethnic dialogue. When a girls' school in Kalutara tried to stage a play on why the war needs to end, working with Ratnasinha and others, a right-wing Sinhala-Buddhist political party, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), issued threats to the school to shut down the performance.[77] Due to the threat to these children, the play was abruptly halted.

A more violent eruption happened in 2003 at the Sinhala-Tamil Cultural Festival in Colombo, organized by an independent group of

[77] Sethu Das, '"The Land Minds of Sri Lanka", March 2010, https://www.sethudas.info/ravindraranasinha (accessed 7 June 2019).

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journalists and artists called the Hiru group.[78] The organizing team was misrepresented in media as being affiliated to the Sinhala radio station Hiru, working in collaboration with the LTTE. Due to this, many still remember the festival as organized by these groups and remember it as a propagandist intervention during the ceasefire. In reality, these young journalists had organized the festival independently with the support of many academics, particularly Karthigesu Sivathambi and Sucharitha Gamlath from Jaffna University.[79] They did engage with the cultural section of the LTTE in order to establish dialogue and provide an insight into the cultural production going on in the North. However, the festival was attacked by the Sihala Urumaya and other groups of Sinhala chauvinists.[80] Media was swept by reports of violence at a 'Tamil Awakening' festival—a festival to revive and disseminate Tamil cultural production in support of self-determination.[81]

What emerged from my research with these writers and cultural activists is that the organizations that involved diverse cultural groups and worked multilingually were created as a conscious attempt to create solidarity, break down barriers, and educate people, as grassroots enterprises and in order to influence communities towards reconciliation and harmony. These places did not appear before conflict came about. Rather, before conflict became a direct issue, it was more important for historians and literati to carve out niche narratives of mono(lingual)cultures. This may not have been intended maliciously, but rather to assert a socio-political position. For instance, S. Vithiananthan wrote an extended essay in

[78] Information on this from Dharmasiri Bandaranaike, 'A National and International Appeal to Artists, Human Rights Organizations and Mass Organizations: Defend the Performing Rights of Sri Lankan Artists from Fascist Attacks', *Trikone Cultural Foundation*, http://trikonecf.net/human_rights.php (accessed 11 August 2016); Champika Ranwaka, 'Pongu Tamil Thugs Attacked Patriotic Sinhalese in Colombo', http://www.lankaweb.com/news/items03/041103-5.html (accessed 7 June 2016); TamilNet, 'Mobs Attack Sinhala-Tamil Cultural Festival in Colombo', 29 October 2003, https://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=10278 (accessed 29 May 2019) and personal communications with Dharmasiri Bandaranaike, 26 July 2013, Colombo.

[79] Lakshman Gunesekara, 'Dangers of Sinhala Extremism: Hiru vs. Hela Urumaya: A Draw for Now?', 2 November 2003, http://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2003/11/02/fea04.html (accessed 7 June 2019); TamilNet, 'Proud to Shed Blood to Protect Tamils', 29 October 2003, https://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=10285 (accessed 29 May 2019).

[80] Deepal Warnakulasuriya, 'Attack on Sinhala-Tamil Arts Fest', 2 November 2003, http://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2003/11/02/new14.html (accessed 7 June 2019).

[81] See Ranwaka, 'Pongu Tamil Thugs Attacked Patriotic Sinhalese in Colombo'.

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1968 on the Tamil intellectuals, history, culture, and politics in order to represent information that was frequently under- or not represented in national histories.[82] Similarly, extensive research was done in the 1950s on Islamic Tamil literature in order to carve out a special place within the Sri Lankan Tamil scene for Sri Lankan Muslim cultural history.[83] Yet, as time went on and social and political waves continued to divide society, these previously imagined geographic separations became more real. As sites of organic multilingualism became structurally impossible to recreate—as parliamentary debates became monolingual and classrooms were separated and generations grew up monolingual with ineffectively learnt link languages—new sites had to be orchestrated.

Conclusion

Multilingual literary research in the Sri Lankan context is a poorly explored area. Some bilingual research exists, such as Chelva Kanaganayakam's article 'Dancing in the Rarefied Air' about English and Tamil writing of Sri Lankan Tamils, Obeysekere and Fernando's commentaries on Sinhala and English writing in their 1981 anthology, and Obeysekere's foreword to a Sinhala and Tamil collection of poetry.[84] However, methodologies towards multilingual research reaching beyond just a side-by-side comparison is yet to be seen. This article has attempted several strategies towards creating this field, suggesting directions specifically for the Sri Lankan case and conceptual frameworks applicable to general multilingual contexts as well.

First, I proposed common ideological bases from which to analyse literary spheres, such as the phenomenon of imagined associated geographies. Second, I gestured towards thematic and formal directions of comparative research, such as the Marxist moment in literature or early nationalisms in Sri Lanka. This, however, is still at a basic level of

[82] S. Vithiananthan and Sachi Sri Kantha, 'Tamil Studies in Ceylon; a Review Essay of 1968', http://www.sangam.org/2009/05/Tamil_Studies.php?uid=3462 (accessed 31 July 2016).

[83] Nuhman, 'Ethnic Conflict and Literary Perception'.

[84] Chelva Kanaganayakam, 'Dancing in the Rarefied Air: Reading Contemporary Sri Lankan Literature', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 29, no. 1 (1998); Ranjini Obeyesekere, 'Sinhala and Tamil Writing from Sri Lanka', *Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University* 22, no. 1 (1987): pp. 1–5.; Obeyesekere and Fernando, *An Anthology of Modern Writing from Sri Lanka*.

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multilingual research where 'comparison' still implies separation—separate spheres, worlds, aesthetics, and so on. Third, I proposed a theoretical basis from which we could reimagine space and time that allows heterogenous, multiple trajectories, one of which was the multilingual literary history. This methodology was practised by examining one site—the university—as a naturally occurring multilingual site revealing shared intellectual heritages between spheres. This same approach was applied to sites of multilingualism orchestrated during the conflict era.

Our alternative understanding of space, following Massey, makes all the above approaches equally valid directions forward for a multilingual research culture. It forms a broad foundation that accommodates the ideas posited by contemporary multilingual literary scholars such as Levy, Orsini, and Thornber, whose approaches may be methodologically different, but rest on an underlying principle of spatializing time. For instance, Thornber's Japanese metropoles that facilitated writerly and readerly contact were places that enabled temporally limited mixing of individuals who would then spatially disperse and carry with them ideas germinated during that peculiar time. For Levy and Orsini, to take one common thread between their research, the collision point of different trajectories centres on the individual: the itinerant Arabic-Mizrahi writer carrying their Eastern Jewish cultural inheritance to the West; or Orsini's multilingual local, the scribe or performer or poet whose multilingualism affects their own composed product, which in turn is carried on through different language–literary trajectories.

The Masseyan understanding of space also validates the importance of orchestrated multilingual spaces as compared to the organic spaces literary historians would tend to search for, as the scholars above have done in their respective geographic regions. This is crucial for the study of contexts affected by linguistic- or ethnonationalism where nationalist manipulations of the past and present affect the real-world landscape, leaving little opportunity for organic multilingualism to occur. Orchestrated spaces, instead of being seen as isolated attempts at reconciliation or failed attempts at sustaining a counterculture, form an integral part of a constellation of trajectories, colliding with and thereby playing a part in other trajectories. This is true of Vibhavi's influence over young cinematic producers who go on to produce monolingual works; or of the 2003 Cultural Festival that collided (literally even) with Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism via the protesters disrupting its proceedings; or of the Sinhala films displayed in LTTE-controlled areas where cultural production would otherwise take on party lines.

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This alternative imagining of space also removes the threat of silencing one trajectory for the sake of the single narrative. Now, when reconciliation, pluralism, and trilingualism is a top priority, this could portend the silencing of voices for political struggle; 'a common "Sri Lankan" identity is just the other word for ultimate structural genocide', as one reviewer put it when discussing a trilingual poetry anthology.[85] Instead, plural space can encompass all narratives, harmonies, and discords alike. This leaves consequences not only for literary history, but also for strategies in taking forward our contemporary and future literary cultures.

[85] TamilNet, '"Sri Lanka" Poetry: Rajapaksa Man Edits, India Publishes, SL-Canada Mission Launches', 29 May 2013, https://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=36359 (accessed 7 June 2019).

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