
The Role Of Silence In Anuk Arudpragasam's Narrative

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Abstract

Introduction

Anuk Arudpragasam Is An Important Figure In Contemporary Sri Lankan Literature. He Is Deeply Renowned For His Introspective Narratives And Internal Monologues. His Novels, "The Story Of A Brief Marriage" (2016) And "A Passage North" (2021), Delve Into The Inner Worlds Of His Protagonists, Where Silence Plays A Crucial Role In Unraveling Human Consciousness, Trauma, And Existential Questions. Arudpragasam Employs Meditative Prose Based On His Study Of Philosophy And Lesser Action To Create Narratives Where People Disappear Into The Background, Allowing The Characters' Thoughts And Reflections To Persist In The Work That Is Widely Read. This Paper Examines How Silence Is Brought Into Play In Arudpragasam's Works To Explore The Complexities Of The Human Mind And Trauma, Particularly Within The Context Of The Sri Lankan Civil War.

Literature Review

The Works Of Anuk Arudpragasam, Particularly *The Story Of A Brief Marriage* (2016) And *A Passage North* (2021) Have Gained Great Attention For Their Meditative And Philosophical Narrative Style. The Silence Plays A Crucial Role In The Emotional And Psychological Experiences Of The Characters. Various Critics And Readers Of Literature Have Noted The Centrality Of Silence As A Narrative Device. This Narrative Device Serves As A Symbol Of Trauma, Loss, And The Inner Workings Of The Mind.

Jina Nejad, In Her Article, "The Aesthetics Of Silence In Contemporary South Asian Fiction," Emphasizes How Arudpragasam's Use Of Silence Reflects The Post-Conflict Trauma Experienced By Individuals And Societies. It Is Noticed That The Silence In "The Story Of A Brief Marriage" Serves Not Only As An Absence Of Speech But Also As A Medium Through Which Unspeakable Trauma Is Processed. Nejad Observes That In War-Torn Environments, Silence Becomes The Only Means To Convey The Enormity Of Suffering, As Verbal Communication Proves Inadequate To Express The Full Extent Of Grief And Loss.

David Lukoski's Work, "The Weight Of Silence: Trauma And Memory In Postwar Sri Lankan Fiction," Explores How Silence In Arudpragasam's Novels Is Connected To The

Collective Trauma Of The Sri Lankan Civil War. Lukoski Contends That Silence Becomes A Space Where Characters Engage With The Burden Of Memory, Which Is Often Too Overwhelming To Articulate. In *A Passage North*, Krishan's Reflective Silences Allow Him To Connect With The Unspoken Histories Of Violence That Shape The Northern Landscapes Of Sri Lanka. Lukoski Also Emphasizes How Silence Is A Form Of Resistance Against The Over-Saturation Of Narratives About The War, Allowing For A More Intimate Exploration Of Individual Experiences.

In Contrast, Sara Ahmed's Work, "Emotion And Temporality In Contemporary South Asian Fiction," Critiques The Excessive Use Of Silence In Arudpragasam's Novels As Potentially Alienating For Readers. She Argues That While The Novels' Slow Pace And Introspective Silences Allow For A Deep Engagement With Trauma, They Also Risk Detachment From The Immediacy Of External Events. Ahmed Posits That This Over-Reliance On Silence Could Be Seen As A Literary Technique That Distances Readers From The Characters' Lived Realities, Emphasizing Emotional Stillness At The Expense Of Active Engagement With The External World.

Methodology

To investigate the role of Silence in Anuk Arudpragasam's works, a close textual analysis of both *The Story of a Brief Marriage* and *A Passage North* will be employed.

A detailed examination of the passages where Silence is most prominent will be analyzed for the purpose of this paper. This will involve identifying scenes where Silence, either in terms of dialogue or action, takes center stage. These moments of Silence will be analyzed for their narrative function, including how they contribute to the development of characters' inner worlds and how they reflect the broader themes of trauma, memory, and existential reflection. Passages, where the characters engage in self-reflection without external dialogue, will be highlighted as key moments of psychological depth.

This method will involve classifying instances of Silence based on their symbolic significance—whether Silence denotes trauma, represents moments of deep emotional introspection, or serves as a critique of language's limitations in expressing profound grief.

The analysis will also explore the role of Silence in shaping character development and the narrative framework of Arudpragasam's novels. This approach will assess whether moments of Silence facilitate transformation and growth in the characters or if they signify stagnation and emotional paralysis. For instance, in *The Story of a Brief Marriage*, Dinesh's Silence will be scrutinized in the context of his personal journey through the trauma of war, examining whether it enables him to confront and process his grief or if it reinforces a feeling of helplessness.

By integrating these methods, the analysis will offer an in-depth exploration of the role of Silence in Arudpragasam's writings, focusing on both its narrative and thematic aspects. This approach will illuminate how Silence functions as a significant device within the context of post-conflict Sri Lankan literature.

Results

The Investigation Of Silence In Anuk Arudpragasam's Novels, Especially In *The Story Of A Brief Marriage* And *A Passage North*, Highlights Its Deep Importance As Both A Narrative Technique And A Thematic Focus. Silence Acts As A Complex Tool That Influences The Emotional Experiences Of The Characters And Mirrors The Wider Sociopolitical Realities Of Post-War Sri Lanka.

Discussion

Silence as a Narrative Tool

Anuk Arudpragasam's novels often unfold in a landscape characterized by Silence, both metaphorically and literally. His characters inhabit spaces of isolation and solitude, expressing their voices through prolonged inner monologues. In *The Story of a Brief Marriage*, the protagonist, Dinesh, is a young man displaced by the final stages of the Sri Lankan civil war. Much of the novel is set within the confines of a refugee camp, a space marked by a pervasive sense of unease and impending violence but also of Silence. Despite the noise of suffering within the camp, it remains a metaphorical silence—a silence of abandonment, waiting, and hopelessness.

Dinesh's inner world is the true focus of the novel. Instead of relying on dialogue or external events, the story progresses through his thoughts, which delve into his memories, fears, and reflections on life, death, and survival. Arudpragasam uses this technique to slow down the pace, allowing readers to experience Dinesh's heightened awareness of his body, surroundings, and emotions. Silence becomes a tool for introspection, enabling the character to escape the chaos of war and enter a meditative state. This demonstrates that Silence is not simply the absence of sound but a means of connecting with the self in its most raw and vulnerable state.

Anuk Arudpragasam's *The Story of a Brief Marriage* provides a deep exploration of Dinesh's inner world, a young Tamil man caught in the final days of the Sri Lankan civil war. Dinesh's thoughts serve as the primary vehicle for exploring his internal struggles, emotions, and fragmented sense of self. Arudpragasam's sparse yet lyrical prose allows readers to delve into Dinesh's psychological state, shaped by trauma, fear, and fleeting moments of introspective calm. This section will examine key moments that reveal Dinesh's inner world.

From the start of the novel, readers are immersed in Dinesh's intense awareness of his body and the fragility of life. In one scene, Dinesh contemplates the simple act of breathing: It had been so long since he had breathed like this, feeling the air rushing into him, so long since he had simply stopped moving and done nothing but sit. It was hard to remember the last time he had sat in this way, without pain, without fear, without confusion, without even the knowledge of what was around him.(Arudpragasam, 2016, p. 17)

Here, Arudpragasam uses the act of breathing as a metaphor for the peace that Dinesh desires amidst the chaos of war. The focus on such a fundamental bodily function highlights Dinesh's deep disconnection from normalcy. He longs for a time when he can breathe without fear—a time when violence and death do not dominate the world. This

passage also emphasizes Dinesh's bodily awareness, a recurring theme in the novel, where the body becomes a place of tension between survival and surrender.

Another crucial moment occurs when Dinesh contemplates the possibility of his own death. As he considers the inevitability of dying in the camp, his thoughts turn inward:

The sense of helplessness he felt in that moment, the knowledge that it was entirely beyond him when he would die, whether in a week or an hour or a few minutes from now, came upon him as a relief, a relief that had been building in him slowly, little by little since the day he left his home. (Arudpragasam, 2016, p. 29)

In this passage, Dinesh's internal monologue reveals his resignation from the reality of death. Yet, paradoxically, he finds relief in his helplessness. This speaks to the profound exhaustion and despair that war has instilled in him, where the surrender of control becomes a form of solace. His inner world is dominated by this sense of inevitability, where life and death are no longer opposing forces but intertwined experiences he must navigate.

Moreover, Arudpragasam frequently emphasizes Dinesh's attempts to find moments of humanity amidst the dehumanizing conditions of war. For example, Dinesh's quiet, meditative thoughts during the act of washing his face reveal his desperate attempt to cling to a semblance of normal life:

The feeling of water against his face was extraordinary, he had forgotten what water could feel like, and the softness of it as it ran down his cheeks and chin made him feel as though his skin were still somehow intact, as though the person who had lived in it once was still in there, though he hadn't felt this way in a long time. (Arudpragasam, 2016, p. 58)

This passage captures Dinesh's desire to reconnect with his pre-war identity and the sense of normalcy that has been taken from him. The simple act of feeling water on his skin becomes a moment of temporary transcendence, a way for Dinesh to remember that he is still human despite the horrors surrounding him.

These examples from *The Story of a Brief Marriage* show how Arudpragasam skillfully uses Dinesh's inner world to explore themes of bodily awareness, the inevitability of death, and the longing for humanity amidst destruction. Through Dinesh's inner monologues, Arudpragasam captures the psychological toll of war, revealing a deeply contemplative and fragile character whose survival hinges not just on physical endurance but on his ability to find meaning in moments of stillness and Silence.

In *A Passage North*, Krishan, the protagonist, undertakes a journey to attend the funeral of his grandmother's caregiver. The novel is primarily composed of Krishan's thoughts as he travels through the postwar landscape of Sri Lanka. The Silence that permeates the narrative is both literal and symbolic, representing the voids left by the violence of war and the difficulty of expressing personal and collective trauma. Krishan's inner monologues are shaped by his reflections on loss, memory, and the passage of time, which are amplified by the stillness of the physical and emotional landscapes he traverses.

One of the key elements of Krishan's inner world is his contemplation of time and memory. Throughout his journey north, Krishan is often lost in thoughts about his past relationships, particularly with his former lover, Anjum, and the caregiver, Rani, whose death he is traveling to mourn. His mind wanders from present events to these memories, highlighting the fluidity of time in the narrative.

Krishan's inner monologues reflect a philosophical contemplation on the nature of memory. The metaphor of memory as an elusive, fleeting entity emphasizes the emotional detachment he experiences from his past and those who were once significant to him.

Krishan's reflections are inextricably linked to the Sri Lankan Civil War and its enduring legacy. Although the novel is set during a period of fragile peace, Krishan's thoughts remain haunted by the violence and trauma of the war. As he travels, Krishan observes the landscape and contemplates the war's lasting impact on the people of the north. He notes:

The train line had taken much longer to be put back into operation, not only because all the stations on the northern section of the line had been bombed out but also because every inch of the track and every nut and bolt had been stripped away (Arudpragasam, 2021, p.192).

Krishan's inner world is shaped by his understanding of collective trauma. The past is not merely a closed chapter; it continues to influence and shape the present. Krishan's thoughts reflect the experience of living in a post-conflict society where the war may have officially ended, but its emotional and psychological wounds persist.

Krishan's inner world is also characterized by a search for meaning amidst suffering. His introspection often delves into existential questions about life, death, and the nature of grief. After Rani's death, he reflects on her suffering and the broader suffering of those affected by the war. In a moment of contemplation, Krishan muses: "Landscapes so flat and dry and unforgivable that it seemed almost miraculous that so many generations had worked life and sustenance out of the earth" (Arudpragasam, 2021, p.193).

This reflection captures Krishan's profound engagement with the philosophical aspects of suffering, positioning it as a way to reconcile with life's fleeting and often painful nature. Through these inner monologues, Arudpragasam depicts Krishan's mind as constantly engaged in deep reflection, navigating personal grief, historical trauma, and existential uncertainty.

The novel's exploration of Krishan's inner world encourages readers to pause and accompany him on his contemplative journey, where Silence and stillness provide opportunities for profound philosophical and emotional engagement.

Stillness

Stillness, like Silence, is a recurring theme in Arudpragasam's works, particularly in his portrayal of characters' interactions with their own bodies. In *The Story of a Brief Marriage*, the stillness of Dinesh's body is juxtaposed with the surrounding violence. As a war refugee, his body is constantly in danger, yet Arudpragasam's prose dwells on moments of physical stillness, such as Dinesh's careful attention to the act of washing or the contemplation of his own heartbeat. These moments of bodily awareness offer a reprieve from the chaos of war and allow Dinesh to reconnect with his humanity in a situation that seeks to dehumanize him.

Arudpragasam's focus on the body in stillness can be interpreted as a form of resistance to the dehumanizing effects of violence and trauma. By entering the narrative on the physical sensations of his characters, he creates a space for them to reclaim their agency, even in the face of overwhelming powerlessness. In these moments, the body becomes a sanctuary, where the character's inner life can unfold in relative peace despite the external turmoil.

In Anuk Arudpragasam's works, stillness is a central theme intricately interwoven into both the narrative structure and the inner lives of his characters. Stillness manifests not only as physical immobility but also as a deeper, almost philosophical state of being—a slowing down of time that facilitates profound introspection and connection with the self. Through the inner monologues of his protagonists, Arudpragasam employs stillness to explore memory, trauma, and existential reflection. This focus on stillness allows the characters to grapple with the weight of their experiences, particularly in the context of the Sri Lankan civil war.

The novel "The Story of a Brief Marriage" (2016) explores the profound impact of stillness amidst the chaos. Set in a Sri Lankan refugee camp during the final days of the civil war, the protagonist, Dinesh, finds solace in moments of tranquility amidst the pervasive violence and death. Arudpragasam's detailed, slow-paced prose vividly depicts these moments, such as when Dinesh washes himself before a hasty marriage. This seemingly mundane act becomes a meditative ritual, offering a stark contrast to the surrounding turmoil.

“Drops of water trickled down from Dinesh’s hair onto his shoulders. They rolled to the ground as his body dried slowly in the cool air...” (Arudpragasam, 2016, p.122). The stillness in *The Story of a Brief Marriage* is not a retreat from reality but a profound focus on the present moment. The repetitive rhythm of Dinesh's breath creates a temporary respite from the external chaos, enabling him to connect with his own body and existence. This stillness offers a fleeting yet powerful moment of self-awareness in a world where such introspection is a rare luxury.

In "A Passage North" (2021), stillness is an integral aspect of Krishan's journey, both physical and mental. As he travels to northern Sri Lanka for the funeral of his grandmother's caregiver, Rani, Krishan's thoughts often wander to memories of the past, especially his former lover, Anjum, and the postwar landscape of Sri Lanka. Much of the novel unfolds

within Krishan's mind, where stillness prevails as he contemplates the nature of suffering, death, and memory.

“Taking in those details, Krishan allowed himself to get a little closer, glancing at last towards the head of the casket of Rani’s face, at the hair combed neatly back, at the eyes closed, the lips tightly pursed...” (Arudpragasam, 2021, p.213).

This passage highlights the dual nature of stillness in the novel—it is both a recognition of death and a space for profound reflection. Rani's motionless body symbolizes the unresolved histories and traumas that linger after the war. In such moments, Arudpragasam employs stillness to connect the personal and the historical, intertwining Krishan's internal contemplation with the broader collective experience of war.

Moreover, Arudpragasam's depiction of stillness is frequently philosophical, echoing traditions of meditation and existential reflection. Krishan's stillness enables him to confront not only his personal sorrow but also the broader questions of existence that trouble him. As Krishan contemplates time and its passage, stillness becomes a space where he can grapple with life's impermanence.

“As though to tell him that any attempt to cure or solve absence would lead, sooner or later, only to death and the extinction of thought” (Arudpragasam, 2021, p.286). Arudpragasam's works often contrast the violence and chaos of the external world with moments of quiet stillness. It is in these peaceful, unhurried moments that his characters confront their deepest fears, desires, and memories. This stillness offers a therapeutic break from the overwhelming trauma they experience. By focusing on the details of the body, the rhythm of breath, or the quiet of the mind, Arudpragasam provides his characters—and his readers—a space for reflection amidst the harsh realities of war and loss.

Arudpragasam's use of literary stillness provides a meditative approach to storytelling, where introspection and the search for meaning often outweigh action. In both *The Story of a Brief Marriage* and *A Passage North*, stillness is not only a narrative technique but a philosophical state that allows characters to delve deeply into their inner worlds and explore the complexities of existence.

The Role of Inner Monologues

Arudpragasam's use of inner monologues is essential to his exploration of memory and trauma. Both of his novels examine the lasting effects of war, particularly how individuals remember and process traumatic experiences. In *The Story of a Brief Marriage*, Dinesh's inner monologues are filled with memories of his pre-war life, moments of normalcy that now seem distant and unreachable. His reflections on his parents, his education, and his hopes for the future are interspersed with his present reality, creating a contrast between the life he once had and the life he now faces.

In *A Passage North*, Krishan's inner monologues delve deeply into the complexities of memory. As he reflects on his love for Anjum and the devastation of the civil war, the

novel's title becomes a metaphor for his journey through both physical and emotional landscapes. Krishan's thoughts are haunted by the passage of time and the enduring influence of the past on the present. Similar to Dinesh's musings, his repetitive thoughts reveal his attempts to comprehend and reconcile the events of his life.

The Philosophical Exploration

Arudpragasam's works delve into philosophical themes, influenced by Buddhist and existential thought. His emphasis on stillness and Silence aligns with these philosophical frameworks, which view inner contemplation as a path to understanding existence. In *The Story of a Brief Marriage*, Dinesh's quiet moments mirror meditative practices, highlighting the impermanence of life. The novel's minimalist prose reflects this meditative quality, with each sentence carefully chosen to convey the stillness of the protagonist's inner world.

A Passage North further explores the philosophical significance of stillness and Silence. Krishan's journey is marked by a search for meaning in the face of loss and trauma. His internal reflections on death, time, and suffering echo existential themes. The novel's deliberate pace and focus on introspection allow Arudpragasam to delve into these philosophical questions, mirroring the meditative practices of his characters.

Conclusion

Silence is a cornerstone of Anuk Arudpragasam's narrative structure. Through inner monologues, he creates a space for his characters to retreat from the external world and engage in introspection. These moments of Silence and stillness allow his characters to process their memories, traumas, and existential questions, shaping a rich and meditative narrative style. Arudpragasam's focus on the inner world of his characters, rather than external action, challenges conventional narrative forms and offers a profound exploration of the human condition in the face of war, loss, and trauma.

In *The Story of a Brief Marriage* and *A Passage North*, Silence, and stillness are not merely narrative devices but integral components of the characters' journeys toward understanding and healing. Through his nuanced exploration of inner monologues, Arudpragasam invites readers to contemplate the complexities of life, memory, and trauma, offering a literary experience that is both deeply personal and universally resonant.

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