

## Cheran's Poems - A Testimony of the Srilankan Tamil Sufferings

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### Abstract

The relationship between literature and conflict is inseparable. Literature becomes prominent and becomes an important work, when it exposes the crisis an individual, or a group in which the individual belongs faces. In every literature of conflict, Memory plays an important role, as it is the only factor that helps the next generations understand the amount of pain their community has suffered. Violence is not only physical, but also epistemic. Cheran has brought to life the sufferings and agony of the Tamil's residing in Srilanka. His work is considered as a testimony of the suffering of his own people.

**KEYWORDS:** Literature, Conflict, Memory, Physical, Epistemic violence, Testimony.

Conflict and Literature are inseparable, and there have always been writers and their works as resistance to the suppression. Resistance poetry is the weapon of choice of poets residing and suffering the brutality of the colonizers, with the strong will to express their voice but it often goes unheard. From heran to Darwish to Agha Shahid Ali, all have raised their voices against the suppression mostly from exile. A contrast can be drawn between the poems of Cheran and Darwish, inspite of both being resistance poets. While Darwish is in support of the nation and is part of the PLO, Cheran's poem act as a history to the real life situation in Srilanka.

'Personal is Political' is one of the basic concept of Conflict Literature. Every deed done by the colonizer is carried out with a political motive, and every act done in such a way affects the inner persona of an individual. Cheran's poem *To a Sinhala Friend* begins as "I come from a distant land" which clearly suggests a state of Alienation from the present nation. History and memory are inseparable. In the Srilankan context, the Sinhalis knowledge of the Tamil's is second hand. The objective looking upon the subject doesnot take place, instead a subjective construction of the Tamil's is being made which is wrong. In the same poem *To a Sinhala Friend* it has lines such as "the womb bears lead shots, instead of seed", which are the constructs made by the sinhalis over the Tamils, portraying the Tamils as dangerous. Thus the New historicist construction of the suppressed by the dominant oppressor comes into effect. By employing certain modes of communication, they are portrayed the opposite way they really are.

Conflict Literature talks about the various sects of violence ranging from 'Political Violence' to 'Epistemic Violence'. Political violence deals with the loss of life, genocides and habitat which Cheran has dealt with in great detail. In his poem *A poem that should never have been written*, he begins as "Leave the coffins open", suggesting that the people are dead only for the cause of freedom and the rest should never forget it. Memories are meant to be kept alive, which he further expounds as Forgetting is a crime. Epistemic violence is the worst form of violence that can be effected on a culture. It leads to the complete death of the culture, language and everything it is built upon. The 'burning of Jaffna Library', which was a storage of

Tamil literature with more than 95,000 books is one of the major destruction carried out by the Srilankan army, which almost led to zero knowledge of the past Srilankan Tamil life and culture and the great literary works. Erasure of the great books has led to the erasure of memory which eventually had led to Homogenization or the dominance of the oppressive group as the only people present.

Cheran has named his collection of poems as “Second Sunrise” for a reason. The burning of Jaffna Library with 95,000 books, with the entire culture buried with it has led to Sunset upon the Tamil life and culture and an anticipation of a better life and with the attainment of the past glory of the Tamil and it’s literature will eventually lead to the rising of the Sun again.

Resistance writers are not only bringing out the agony and pain of the sufferings, but they are also creating counter – histories. Counter – history is defined as “A history that goes against another history”. Black and MacRaild provide the definition as "It is, at the very root, the idea of conjecturing on what did not happen, or what might have happened, in order to understand what did happen”. Almost all the resistance writings are based on a sad past being written at the present hoping for a better future.

Cheran’s poems are a ‘Testimony of Human suffering’. Cheran has witnessed the Physical and Epistemic violence that was carried upon his own people. Aparna Ishwaran comments on the poems of Cheran as, “Cheran’s poems are a testimony of witness. A draft of human understanding at reconciliation. It is a document pleading for clarity in the most difficult of times when forgetting is a crime. He became a chronicler of specific events and a curator of Universal human emotion”.

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