

The Trauma of the Civil Conflict on the Masses: An Analysis of Sharon Bala's *The Boat People*

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Abstract

The emergence of refugees and their problems remain a perennial and unresolved global issue till date. The consequences of the issues undoubtedly generate forced displacement, economic crises, and socio-cultural ramifications. The proposed study attempts to analyse the refugee crises in the pre and post civil war scenario with the help of select novel through the lens of trauma studies in literature. Sharon Bala's *The Boat People* deals with the events of Sri Lankan ethnic war and the problems of asylum seekers in Canada. The study adopts the theoretical framework of trauma in the arena of literary narratives. The characters of the novel are subjected to an investigation within the context of trauma studies, which enables a better understanding of the socio-political impact of the war. War atrocities generates fear of life, anxiety, forced displacements, uncertainty of life, statelessness, discrimination, and terror suspects, causing trauma. The select literary narrative in its characterization demonstrates the actuality of the Sri Lankan civil war and its after effect on the innocent civilians who became stateless and dispossessed in the war-torn nation. Further, it illustrates the myriad challenges encountered by the refugees in the host country. War is the core cause of refugee problems and their trauma. Ceasing war, rehabilitation, and restoration measures aid in controlling the refugee crises. In the last phase, the paper proposes a few adoptable measures to address the refugee problems.

Keywords: civil war, discrimination, refugee crises, trauma and dislocation

1. Introduction

Encountering a series of persecutions or violence leads to internal pain known as trauma. The emotional distress caused by war, natural disasters, and physical abuse can result in mental trauma. The term 'trauma' originates from the Greek word for 'wound,' referring to an internal injury or distress. Coined and elaborated upon by Sigmund Freud in 1960, the concept involves internal emotional suffering. According to the APA definition, "trauma is an event that involves actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (Smid, 2023, p. 97).

Sri Lankan English literature gained significant prominence during the post-independence era of the island. The significant diasporic writers of Sri Lanka are Shyam Selvadurai, Anuk Arudpragasam, Nayomi Munaweera, Michael Ondaatje, Sharon Bala, etc. Their works highlight the themes of ethnic conflict, trauma, forced displacements, refugee problems, malnutrition, corruption, human trafficking, massacres, and other socio-political problems taking place in Sri Lanka. The socio-political issues and the refugee problems mirrored in Selvadurai's *The Funny Boy* (1994), Munaweera's *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* (2012), Anuk Arudpragasam's *A Passage to North* (2021), Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000), and Sharon Bala's *The Boat People* (2018) are noteworthy. Sharon Bala stated that her novel, *The Boat People* was inspired by true historical incidents in Sri Lanka, "In October 2009 and August 2010, the *Ocean Lady* and the *M V Sun Sea*, two ships bearing together just over 550 Tamil Refugees from Sri Lanka, arrived in British Columbia" (Bala, 2018, p.333). The Sri Lankan civil war, forced displacement, mental trauma, refugee outflux, and identity problems are the core themes of the novel, *The Boat People*. It represents that the five hundred Sri Lankan Tamil refugees reached Canada by boat.

The novel detailed the trauma of the forced migrants, due to border controls, terror suspects, and identity-related problems of the refugees. In the post-colonial theory, Bhabha highlights the concepts of 'Hybridity' and 'Ambivalence'. In the concept of hybridity, Bhabha articulated his perspectives on hybrid culture. When two or more cultures converge, it results in the ambivalent state of the asylum seekers or refugees, (Shri Jai Narain Misra Post Graduate (KKC) College, Lucknow, n.d., pp. 84–85). These ideas apply to the status of Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers in Canada. The asylum seekers' uncertainty about resettlement, prison life, alienation, discrimination, identity crises, language problems, and socio-cultural barriers added to their further trauma and seclusion.

At the opening of the novel, Mahindan, and five hundred fellow refugees embark on a voyage by a rustic Cargo ship due to civil war and imminent threat of life on the island. The refugees' dream of starting a new life in Canada faded, when the refugees were imprisoned due

to terror suspects. They were targeted and discriminated against, due to their identities in both countries. Canadian border control officials suspect the asylum seeker because they believe there is a secret connection with Tamil insurgent groups in Sri Lanka. This nature of socio-political discrimination is a malevolent action of vicious people, “this discrimination is damaging, derogatory, and demeaning, thereby making individuals with mental illness second class citizens” (Bhugra, 2016, p. 336). In the urge to escape and the search for shelter, many of them lost their documents in the war-torn nation, which further intensified their mental trauma. Due to the lack of proper identity documents, they face difficulties in resettlement and returning to their homeland, “During crises, asylum seekers in immigration detention often face increased health risks due to crowded conditions, lack of protective equipment, limited access to healthcare, and increased isolation due to restrictions on visits” (Phillips, 2023, p. 242).

2. Literature Review

The research paper, *Crossing Boundaries in Search of Hope and Love* Sharon Bala’s *The Boat People* and Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *By the Sea - A Traumatic Journey* highlights the profound impact of the mental trauma and unending miseries of the forced migrants. Additionally, the research paper covers the characteristics of post-traumatic stress disorder, due to the loss of land, loss of loved ones, and loss of identity (Babu, 2022). Abhishek Ghosal’s research paper covers the conflicts in Sri Lanka and their further consequences. The work contends the contradiction between the politicization and plasticity of love, which is often ineffectual. He argued that the plasticity of love is to be politically beneficial for alleviating tensions among ethnic groups and determining the political strategy for reconciliation (Ghosal, 2019).

The entitled article, *In Search of Peace and Identity: A Post-Colonial Study of Sharon Bala's The Boat People* discusses the problems of the Sri Lankan forced migrants. The paper depicted the life of asylum seekers, their double or in-between status, and ill-treatment in the host country (Rubaraj, R. D. 2021). Ajith emphasizes the problems of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees and their confused state such as insider or outsider, and alien or citizen. It highlights the issues related to mental trauma, hybrid life for the refugees, immigration policies, and the failure to meet the basic requirements of the refugees, which is out and out pathetic (Ajith, 2022).

The paper, *Trembling Strength: Migrating Vulnerabilities in Fiction by Sharon Bala, Yasmin Ladha, and Denise Chong* engages the vulnerabilities faced by refugees in various modes and their unexpected results with the aid of mid-20th century literary works. It emphasizes climate change and its subsequent forced displacement of refugees. Also, it covers the weather fluctuations, alienation from families, and the state of helplessness through literature (Van Herk, 2021). The paper, *The Politics of 'Bare Life' in Sharon Bala's The Boat People* deals with the bio-political aspects of the immigrants' lives. The work emphasizes the trauma of the Tamil individuals seeking refuge in Canada from Sri Lanka. Also, the paper emphasizes the refugees being victims in both nations and the evil of terrorism (Sharma, 2020).

3. Methodology

The article utilizes literary text, along with secondary sources particular books and journal articles. The study incorporates the theoretical framework of trauma in the select literature for the ongoing discussion. It also details the traumatic experiences of the refugees due to their ethnic identity, discrimination, hopelessness, and loneliness. This method allows the examination of psychological and mental distress, emotional imbalance, forced displacement, discrimination, and identity-related struggles of the refugee characters. It is critically analyzed with the aid of trauma theory to justify the socio-political problems faced by refugee characters in the home and the host country.

4. Theory of Trauma

Trauma is an internal 'wound' resulting from encountering physical or mental suffering. The word 'trauma' comes from the Greek, meaning 'to damage' or 'to harm' (Perrotta, 2020). Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event, which may include denial, shock, anger, fear, alienation, or any form of abuse. According to the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (2015), trauma is defined as any disturbing experience that leads to significant fear, helplessness, confusion, anxiety, depression, or frustration, affecting a person's attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning. Traumatic events encompass those caused by human behavior (e.g., violence, war, abuse, accidents) as well as natural occurrences (e.g., earthquakes, landslides, cyclones, etc.). Feriante & Sharma (2023), highlighted the two major types of traumas, 'Acute Trauma' and 'Chronic Trauma'. Acute trauma refers to trauma brought on by a single, isolated event, which may have either short-term or long-term consequences (e.g., accidents, physical assault, natural disasters, etc.). Chronic trauma develops from repeated or prolonged traumatic events (e.g., war, community violence, homelessness, domestic abuse, etc.). In the opening of the novel, *The Boat People*, around 503 refugees are forced to flee from the island due to the fear of life and mental distress. In the homeland they encounter depression, alienation, terror suspect, and uncertainty of life which leads them to chronic trauma and war trauma, where “War trauma occurs when one loses the sense of having a safe place to retreat within or outside oneself to deal with frightening emotions or experiences” (Courtois & Ford, 2009, p. 12).

5. The Historical Context of the Sri Lankan Civil War

While speaking about the demography of the island nation, Jayawardena pointed out that: “Sri Lanka is a multicultural, multi-ethnic and a multi-religious country with 74.9% Sinhalese (majority ethnic group), 11.2% Tamils, 4.1% Indian Tamils, 9.3% Moor and 0.5% others” (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). Although the island holds a rich heritage, standard culture, lovely beaches, and several beautiful sights, it has also undergone hundreds of conflicts in history. The major conflicts that occurred between the majority Sinhalese and minority Sri Lankan Tamils were due to a variety of socio-political factors. This pattern of violence and conflicts led to five waves of

forced displacements in Sri Lanka spanning from 1983 to 2009 (Jayawardena, 2020). The root cause of the civil war was the implementation of political acts that adversely affected the Sri Lankan Tamils. The first provocative political law was the 'Ceylon Citizenship Act in 1941', in which the govt. restricted the citizenship rights of Ceylon Tamils. The impact of the act was that thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils became stateless, "when all these applications were processed by November 1964, only 140,185 persons (or 13% of Estate Tamils) had been accepted as citizens by registration and 975,000 remained stateless" (Shastri, 1999, p. 80). The second one was, the 'Sinhala Only Act' implemented in 1956, "Section 2 of the Act declared simply and devastatingly: "The Sinhala language shall be the one official language of Ceylon" (Venugopal, 2022, p. 10). The legislation established Sinhala as the official language of the country, causing tension among Sri Lankan Tamils due to its repercussions, "The policy angered Tamil elites who were in positions of power during British colonial rule, and would lose that opportunity with this policy. The extent that the Sinhala Only bill would affect poorer Tamils such as the Plantation Tamils is unclear as those Tamils were illiterate in their own native language of Tamil" (Wijedasa, 2022, p. 19).

'The Policy of Standardisation Act in 1971', made an injustice in the educational quota system by favoring the Sinhala students to enter and qualify the medical and engineering colleges. K. M. de Silva noted the bias of the act that the admission criteria for medical faculties set the qualifying mark at 250 (out of 400) for Tamil students, while it was only 229 for Sinhalese students. Notably, this disparity persisted even when both Sinhalese and Tamil students took the exam in English. In essence, students from two ethnic groups, sitting for exams in the same language, had unequal qualifying marks (Policy of Standardisation - Alchetron, the Free Social Encyclopedia, 2016). The 'Srimavo - Shastri Pact in 1965', limits the citizenship of Sri Lankan Tamils on the island, which controls the entry of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka (Pillai, 2012). "Policies such as the Citizenship Act, Sinhala only Act, land policies, university admission policies hurting the minorities. This led them to believe that they are being alienated from mainstream politics and putting their culture on the line of absolute neglect" (Fazil & Fowsar, 2020, p. 147).

6. Challenges Associated with Refugees

Refugees are people who are forced to seek asylum or shelter in an alien country, due to various forms of political unrest, violence or persecution, threats to life, inconvenient incidents, natural disasters, etc. The recent UNHCR report stated that "At least 100 million people were forced to flee their homes during the last 10 years, seeking refuge either within or outside the borders of their country" (UNHCR - UNHCR Global Trends 2019, 2022). "The number of refugees alone was at 19.5 million, half of whom were children" (McBrien, 2017, p. 114). The prolonged refugees often seek citizenship and other fundamental legal identities in the host country, because "refugee status is officially recognized, once a person is fearful of being persecuted is beyond the borders of his/her country of residence and terminates, once they have repatriated or become a resident of another country" (Shultz et al., 2020, p. 130). The primary driver of forced displacement and refugee crises is the occurrence of civil wars. Throughout the three distinct phases – pre-flight, flight, and post-flight – refugees face a multitude of challenges. These challenges encompass various forms of persecution that significantly impact both their physical and mental well-being. "A traumatized person can feel a range of emotions both immediately after the event and in the long term. They may feel overwhelmed, helpless, shocked, or have difficulty processing their experiences" (What is Trauma? 2020, p. 2).

In the 'pre-flight phase', the victims encounter violence, losses of belongings, family, relatives, possessions, jobs, etc. In the 'flight phase,' the individuals make an arduous journey to an aimless destination, resettlement issues, and other problems in refugee camps. In the 'post-flight phase' the refugees face issues related to culture, community, language, climate, environment, etc. (Marquez, 2017) The forcefully uprooted people, often seek refuge in search of peace or to get humanitarian assistance from other countries. For example, during the Syrian war, the uprooted people were given humanitarian assistance by Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel. She implemented an open-door policy in 2015, and this humane policy and compassionate approach were much acclaimed by most nations:

"On 12 August, Germany's Minister of the Interior that up to 800,000 people would be seeking refuge in Germany by the end of 2015; by 24 August, Germany had dropped Dublin rules by opening its doors to all Syrian refugees, represented by then about half of the refugee flow coming from Greece and the Balkans" (Heisbourg, 2015, p.11).

Asylum seekers and refugees often find difficulties when attempting to enter or return to the host or home nation. "Typically, refugees travel to a refugee camp in a country of first asylum and register themselves for refugee status. Refugees fall under the protection of the UNHCR" (McBrien, 2017, p. 116). Refugees often confront issues related to acquiring legal status, social discrimination, education, employment, social integration, mental trauma, economic crisis, identity, malnutrition, and citizenship-related problems. So, the refugees have not been able to lead a happy life in their motherland or host countries, due to several socio-political factors.

Identity played a significant role in the conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils on the island. Tamils were marginalized and often treated as outsiders in Sri Lanka, despite Tamils claiming themselves as indigenous people they were oppressed and it resulted in mass outflux, "discrimination had definitely induced anger, frustration and estranged feelings among refugee youth" (Chan, 2011, p. 81). The implementation of socio-political acts (Sinhala Only Act, Standardization Act, Citizenship Act, etc.) affected the Sri Lankan Tamils. "The Tamil population had been subject to discrimination and occasional violence since Sri Lankan independence in 1948" (Betts & Higgins, 2017, p. 274). In the case of the Vietnam boat people, they experienced discrimination in Hong Kong, "among the boat people turned Vietnamese migrants, though having obtained a Hong Kong identity card, many are not yet Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) passport holder" (Chan, 2011, p. 71). The condition of being stateless is widespread, "by the end of 2015, the number of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) was at the highest level ever recorded" (McBrien, 2017, p. 114).

Over the past few years, literary works, mass media, journals, and social media have extended their duty to spread awareness among the masses. These fields strive hard for the welfare of the people in the fields of gender equality, eradicating discrimination based on race, caste, refugee problems, etc. The issues gained public awareness and the crises of the victims were somehow controlled over the period. Babu highlighted the importance of the refugee studies,

“Refugee studies help to revamp the status of the forced displaced people, because “refugee literature can be viewed as a tributary of the mainstream postcolonial studies as it has a lot to do with injustice, power politics, violence and violation of human rights in the current world” (Babu, 2022, p.79).

The refugee literature draws attention to the social issues of refugees and their pathetic situations. The ultimate goal of this literature is to enhance the social status and recognition of the forced uprooted migrants. “Literature is more interested in making these voices heard. Literature of this kind can change the minds of the readers which can lead to transformation in society” (p.84), and ultimately, it may mould the whole of humanity to behave in a civilized manner.

7. Sri Lankan Civil Conflict and Refugee Problems in Sharon Bala’s *The Boat People*

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, “a refugee is “a person, who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, and membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (Turam, 2021, p. 761). There are many difficulties at play, when people are forcibly displaced from their native to journeying long distances in search of safer regions, “Displacement provokes a journey from an endangered place (e.g., home, community) to a comparatively safer location” (Shultz et al., 2020, p.131). The refugees encountered immense mental trauma and multiple socio-political challenges in the war-torn nation and host countries, “A collapsed marketing system – including infrastructure degradation/destruction, lawlessness and violence – may render difficult the access to affordable, reliable, and safe modes of transportation, basic food, and shelter” (p. 131). In the novel, *The Boat People*, Sri Lankan Tamils undertake a perilous voyage to escape from the horrible civil war in Sri Lanka and search for safety and peace, “Mahindan gripped his son. Sellian shivered in his arms, from fear, from exhilaration, he couldn’t tell. Soon Mahindan was shaking too, armpits dampening. His teeth clattered. Their new life. It was just beginning” (Bala, 2018, p. 4).

“Five hundred and three migrants: 297 men, 181 women, 25 minors. All of them claiming asylum” (p. 40). The refugees are victims, seeking sanctuary in pursuit of tranquillity and humanitarian aid, “Victims are vulnerable due to the limited access to essential economic, social, and psychological resources” (Shultz et al., 2020, p. 131). The boat people made a perilous voyage to Canada in the hope of starting a new life, however upon arriving in Canada, their anticipations were shattered by the mistreatment and discrimination, that they encountered, “The migrants were taken into custody and we are now conducting a deep search of the ship” (Bala, 2018, p. 6). The Canadian journals and media flashed the news that the five hundred Sri Lankan Tamil terrorists were arrested and imprisoned. The border control officials and the govt. tagged the refugees as terrorists, “This Government minister, Prasad said. Just listen to what he has to say: The vessel and its illegal passengers are part of a larger criminal organization. Make no mistake, there are terrorists on board” (p. 145). Unfortunately, enough, the victims escape from the height of the civil war and are caught in extra turmoil in the host land, “Indeed, this attempt is to make them lead bare life of homo spacer. To do so, the Canadian authority is trying to tag the survivors as terrorists” (Rubaraj, R. D. 2021, p. 60). While the Eelam Tamils may be considered illegal migrants, it’s unfair to tag them as terrorists and imprison them without proper investigation, because “the Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka as illegal migrants or stateless persons for a quite long time, from 1983 to 2020” (Kulandai, 2021, p. 8).

Mr. Gigovaz and Priya are Canadian lawyers in the novel. They have committed their work to advocating for the welfare of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. They became aware of the Tamil refugee issues in Canada through journals and media, “A man in a television news jacket panned his camera from right to left. Gigovaz walked past, oblivious. Priya read the signs. Send the illegals back! Go home terrorists!” (Bala, 2018, p. 16). Gigovaz and Priya are aware that the Eelam Tamils were persecuted due to their ethnic identity, and that they had no affiliation with any insurgent groups. As such, they promptly took the necessary steps to address and resolve their predicament, “Such advocacy activities help the society to communicate and make necessary social movements with the help of NGOs and thereby challenge the governance on various societal issues” (Muraleedharan & Andrew Bryer, 2020, p. 32). Initially, the border patrol officials separated the refugees based on their gender identities. They provided accommodations for children in the female prison, and Sellion was placed under the care of Mrs. Savitri Kumuran (one of the boat people). Mahindan and Sellion couldn’t bear the separation. They were never separated even a day from the birth of Sellion, “Chithra had died in childbirth. For Sellian’s whole life, Mahindan had been both his father and his mother. Not a day had passed when he hadn’t seen his son” (Bala, 2018, p. 14). Separating refugee families without verifying the conditions and mental health is unjust. “Sellian began to cry. Appa! Don’t leave me! Don’t leave me! Mahindan’s throat constricted. What choice did he have?” (pp. 14-15). The victims have no means to return to their war-torn homeland and come out of the prison to establish a peaceful life, it adds further mental trauma to their lives, “Displacement can hurt the mental health of displaced populations when compared with non-displaced groups” (Siriwardhana et al., 2014, p. 11).

Bala emphasized the identity politics in Canada through the conversation between Mahindan and Mr. Gigovaz. Mahindan came to know about the court proceedings of the Canadian govt. over the boat people,

“The first step was to prove their identity. The government would inspect their documents. There were many forms to fill. There would be a review to decide if they could leave jail, then a hearing to determine if they could ask for refugee status” (Bala, 2018, p. 26).

The term 'uncertainty' plays a pivotal role in the problems of refugees, "the angle of future uncertainty about consequences of immigration and the categories economy, society, security, and local resources/space, ... after encountering a series of attacks in their homeland, their life became uncertain status" (Gottlob & Boomgaarden, 2020, p. 850). The asylum seekers don't have any idea about the upcoming hearings, getting out of prison, resettlement, or returning to their homeland, "Another hearing to see if they would be given refugee status. It was a process, and the process would take time. No one could say how long" (Bala, 2018, p. 26). The hopes of the refugees dwindled and turned into frustration, due to the slow process of the officials. After being parted according to their gender, the females and children were confined alongside individuals, who had committed real crimes, "Refugees may face difficulties in refugee camps, as well as in their new host countries, where lives remain in limbo, until legal refugee status is received" (George, 2013, p. 171)

Mahindan recollected his frequent challenges in Sri Lanka, due to his ethnicity and identity. He experienced distress and continuous mental trauma because there was a lack of peace in both Sri Lanka and Canada. In Sri Lanka, the Sinhala government executed restrictions on essential goods in the Tamil region, impacting not only insurgent militant groups or revolutionaries but also the innocent individuals, who were not part of the conflict: "The government had enacted embargoes on LTTE-controlled areas, halting shipments at ports and vehicles at checkpoints to inspect every crate and car trunk. As a result, everything from milk to extension cords was in short supply" (Bala, 2018, pp. 57-58). The prices of essential household items, medicines, construction materials, and more doubled overnight. Mahindan and his parents led a simple and happy life before enacting political acts and laws. In the effects of the civil war, their peaceful life shattered, and their problems doubled in the alien nation.

For those who have experienced forced displacement, their lives have become considerably more challenging and stressful due to the loss of families, friends, familiar surroundings, identity, and culture. "As a result of the protracted conflict in Sri Lanka, families and communities have been uprooted from familiar and traditional ecological contexts" (Thomas et al., 2022, p. 2). In Canada, the prisoners or Tamil refugees were watching television and completing their duties, but Mahindan was solely longing to reunite with his son and wanted to know about his well-being. He alienated himself from his fellow refugees due to unbearable grief, "In Kilinochchi, Mahindan had never worried about Sellian when they were apart. At home, he'd been grateful, relieved to have a break" (Bala, 2018, p. 79). Before experiencing violence, these individuals lived peaceful lives. In lockup, Mahindan was distressed about his situation, "his inability to leave, to walk out the doors and go collect his son, stirred up every apprehension. Was the child well? Was he eating? How frequent were the nightmares? Had he wet the bed again?" (Bala, 2018, p. 79).

The asylum seekers and refugees encountered suffering in various forms, "Military attacks, and explosions." "Jail life." "Mass killings." "No support from law." "Separated from family." "We can't explain how bad it is; we don't want to think about it. Now we want to live" (Kuttikat et al., 2018). In the novel, Mahindan's frustration was increasing day by day, and losing hope after spending over three and half months in prison and attending frequent hearings, but there was no judgment, "what is the problem? Mahindan had asked after failing yet another detention hearing. I gave all my papers. Why does the judge still keep me in this place?" (Bala, 2018, p. 100). The actual intent of the asylum seekers or forced migrants to escape from the violence and lead a peaceful life in the reached country: "Refugees were seen as victims in need of humanitarian aid, not as politically able subjects, who may have some sort of formal political claim on the international community and worthy of recognition as anything other than hapless victims" (Saunders, 2018, p. 33). In Canada, Grace, the adjudicator of the case enquired about the details and identity of the refugees. One of the refugees, Hema recounted her traumatic experience, due to the civil war in Sri Lanka, "The husband was only the first casualty. My sisters and mother, the woman said. All dead. My nephews and cousin brothers also gone, stolen by the LTTE" (Bala, 2018, p. 126). Grace gained insight into the true extent of the causes of forced uprooted people from the island through the accounts provided by the victims. They revealed individuals disappeared daily, and women were subjugated to both physical and mental torture.

Gottlob & Boomgaarden's (2020), statistical analysis mirrored the mental and emotional weakness of the refugees due to the uncertainty of life, "most-frequent emotions linked by citizens to refugees and the future were: frustration (18%), uncertainty (nearly 12%), and fear (10%)". Mahindan encountered stress, depression, displeasure, and frustrations due to the loss of his wife, displacement, separation from his son, and prison life. He met inhumane and ill-treatment due to his identity, "Even with the pass, he said, where to go? Without a Sinhalese name, without knowing to speak their language? The Sinhalese, they hate Tamils. In my country, we are treated like animals. They just do not understand life" (Bala, 2018, p. 166). Sellian experienced profound crises as a result of being forcibly separated from home, and his father, the harsh realities of prison life, sent him to a childless family in Canada, and faced challenging circumstances. He harbored a strong aversion to returning to the war-torn region, prison, jungle, unknown shelter, or camp. Subsequently, he was referred to specialized psychiatric treatment due to his mental illness, which had a profound impact on his psyche.

The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict led to the tragic suffering of thousands of innocent individuals, which resulted in both injuries and fatalities. In the Tamil region hospitals, the injured innocents have occupied the entire clinics. The hospitals run out of medicines, doctors, and nurses. To cope with this situation, several schools were temporarily repurposed as hospitals, where classrooms were transformed into operation theatres.

8. Conclusion

The two major types of traumas are 'war trauma' and 'chronic trauma,' which result in psychological and mental distress. In the novel *The Boat People*, Mahindan and his son, Sellian, experience psychological and mental distress due to the loss of loved ones, jobs, businesses, possessions, etc. They encounter various socio-political issues in their homeland and socio-cultural issues in the host country. The

common refugee problems identified in the text are widely noticed in contemporary society. The research paper proposes a few rehabilitation measures for the refugee problems, they include, strengthening governmental and NGOs support to aid refugees in controlling the refugee crises. The home and host country governments must make necessary arrangements for the rehabilitation of their lives, and assist the return migrants. Ensuring refugees' education, employment, skills, and recognition of their talents can contribute to their economic standards and fulfill basic needs. The Governments and NGOs rehabilitation and restoration measures help them revamp their lives and meet basic requirements.

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