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## The Condition of the Younger Generation as Portrayed in the Poems of Sivaramani and Lalita Pandit Hogan: A Comparative Study

**Prof. D. Uma Devi**

Professor of Tamil  
Department of Indian Languages and Literary Studies  
University of Delhi

### Abstract

Lalitha Pandit Hokan's first poetry collection titled *A Nation without Borders, Poems and Kashmir Stories* reflects her identity as a displaced Kashmiri poet. Her poetry deeply captures issues of identity crisis, loss of homeland and culture, and forced migration. Her blood-stained verses are intricately woven with mythical stories and narrate poignant memories of a home she can never return to. *A Nation without Borders* becomes a priceless collection that portrays the lost cultural surroundings. Similarly, the poems of Sivaramanie speak about the everyday wars and crises in Eelam (Sri Lankan Tamil region), the terrifying conditions arising from these conflicts, and how such circumstances have affected the psyche of the younger generation the very individuals who are expected to shape the future of the nation. She shows how their minds have been pushed towards hatred and hostility due to the constant exposure to violence. Sivaramanie belongs to a generation that emerged from the literary and artistic renaissance which grew in the backdrop of youth uprisings in Tamil Eelam's political landscape. She actively participated in poetry readings and literary events that began gaining popularity during that time. Although she was shaped by the historical events of the 1980s, and began her literary journey in that decade, her themes and expression reflect a distinctly different period. Her early poetry carries the heavy shadow of poems written during the 1980s. In the context of Eelam Tamil poetry, Sivaramanie is a significant representative of a transitional era, and she is also seen as a forerunner of the poetic trends of the 1990s. This article attempts a comparative analysis of the works of Sivaramanie and Lalitha Pandit Hokan specifically examining how their poetry represents the condition of the younger generation from a theoretical perspective.

**Key words:** Eelam Tamil poetry, Forced Migration, Sri Lanka Civil War, Traumatic Experiences

### Introduction

During the turbulent 1980s in Sri Lanka, when violence intensified, many Tamil women began writing poetry. In their poems, the unhealed wounds of war were powerfully expressed. Themes such as imprisonment, disappearances, sexual violence, torture, widowhood, and the struggles arising from them became central subjects. These poems also engaged with broader social prob-

lems and systemic oppression faced by both women and men. Above all, a sense of hopelessness and uncertainty ran deeply through their works. A similar situation unfolded in Kashmir during Partition and its aftermath. Poetry born out of exile, war, and displacement carries within it the struggles of younger generations who bear the deepest wounds of history. Lalita Pandit Hogan, a Kashmiri Pandit poet in diaspora, writes of forced exile, fractured identities, and the impossibility of return. In contrast, Sivaramani, an Eelam Tamil poet, articulates the traumatic experiences of civil war, militarization, and the political radicalization of youth. Though rooted in distinct geographies, their works converge in portraying the psychological, cultural, and existential crises of young generations dispossessed of peace, stability, and belonging. The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and subsequent civil war had a profound psychological effect on Sivaramani's life, shaping her both as a human being and as a poet.

### **Sivaramani and Lalita Pandit**

Lalita Pandit Hogan's *The Country without Borders: Poems and Kashmiri Tales* is her first collection. As an exiled Kashmiri poet, she powerfully expresses identity crises, the loss of homeland and culture, and forced displacement. Her verses, often blood-stained in imagery, are finely interwoven with mythological narratives, reflecting memories of a home she can never return to. The collection stands as a priceless testimony to the lost cultural environment of Kashmiri Pandits. Among young women poets of Eelam literature who identified themselves with progressive thought, Sivaramani stood out for her distinct and unique voice, leaving a lasting impression. Yet, through her tragic suicide at the age of 23, she left behind only a handful of works. Her unique collection of 22 poems, *Sivaramani Kavithaigal* (Poems of Sivaramani), was published posthumously in 1994 by the Women's Study Circle. The volume includes an introductory essay by Chithralakshma Maunaguru, *Sivaramaniyin Vaazhuvum Kavithaiyum – Oru*

*Arimugam* (Sivaramani's Life and Poetry - An Introduction), which offers valuable insights into her worldview and poetic personality.

Sivaramani was deeply engaged with the con-

traditions of society, the oppression of women, poverty as a shared problem of Third World nations, and the double burden borne by women. She actively participated in women's organizations and was critical of both nationalism and militarism. Though she began writing in 1985, her poems capture not only personal emotions but also deep political, social, and economic insights. For example, in *The Oppression of a Wartime Night*, she poignantly portrays the trauma of children during war and how real events prematurely transformed their lives. Her poems record the everyday wars of Eelam, the atmosphere of fear, and the tragic transformation of the youth—who should have been nation-builders—into bearers of hostility and hatred. Her despair, shaped by the violent sociopolitical context of the 1980s, ultimately drove her to suicide. Yet her legacy continues as testimony to a generation suffocated by violence.

### **Exile and Identity: Memory of the Lost Homeland**

Hogan's *A Country without Borders* interlaces myth and memory to articulate the irrecoverable loss of homeland. In one of her poems, she writes:

The house still stands there,  
but my footsteps cannot reach it.  
Walls remember me,  
but the land does not.

This lament conveys the burden of memory for younger generations who cannot inhabit their ancestral land. For Kashmiri Pandit youth, identity is fractured between memory and absence, creating an enduring generational crisis. In contrast, Sivaramani's poetry speaks not from exile but from the midst of violence. In her poem *In the Time of War*, she mourns the premature loss of childhood:

In the oppressive night of our time of war,  
our little ones grow big ...  
They have learnt like cattle  
to habituate themselves to all of this ...  
This has become our children's play."

Through images of broken laughter, ruined mornings, and children turning sticks into guns, Sivaramani captures how war robs innocence and forces premature adulthood.

### **Violence and the Youth Psyche**

For Hogan, the wound of displacement turns inward. The youth she writes of live in liminal spaces, often in exile, caught between cultural nostalgia and the reality of assimilation abroad. They inherit longing without resolution. Sivaramani's poems reflect a more immediate reality youth pulled into the vortex of armed struggle. His verses capture the moment when "dreams of books and classrooms" were replaced by "guns and slogans." He observes how war transforms the psyche:

The schoolyard is empty,  
but the battlefield is full.

Children, no longer reciting alphabets,  
but memorizing the sounds of rifles."

This shift encapsulates the way political violence hijacks youthful aspirations, breeding bitterness and hostility instead of constructive nation-building. Children's play itself becomes contaminated with violent imagery Sivaramani observes: They want only ripping out a moth's wings and turning staves and twigs into guns to kill a friend. Instead of imagining fairytales, children imitate acts of destruction. The moth (a delicate creature) becomes a symbol of vulnerability crushed by violence, just as children's own innocence is crushed.

In another version of the same poem *A Night in War Time* she says:

"A burst of gunfire shatters the stillness of a star-filled sky

destroying the meaning of children's stories".

Even bedtime usually a time of safety and imagination is corrupted by war sounds. Fairy tales lose meaning when reality is dominated by explosions and death.

### **Myth, Memory, and Resistance**

Hogan often invokes mythological imagery, weaving Kashmiri folklore and Hindu cosmology to preserve cultural identity. By invoking goddesses, rivers, and mountains as eternal witnesses, she provides a cultural anchor for exiled youth. Sivaramani, in contrast, engages with immediacy. Her poetry is not just remembrance but resistance, chronicling bombings, arrests, disappearances, and daily fear. By transforming lived reality into literature, she turns poetry into testimony.

### **Loss of Innocence**

The most haunting theme in Sivaramani's work is how war robs children of their innocence. She ends her poem with the bitterly ironic question: These are the games our children play in the long night of war Have our children grown? The question suggests that "growth" has been forced unnaturally. They are not maturing through play, love, or learning, but through exposure to violence and trauma. Their "growth" is a loss of innocence not a gain of wisdom. *A night in war time by Sivaramani Sivanandan*

A burst of gun fire Shatters the stillness  
of a star filled sky Destroying The meaning Of  
children's stories

The stress of a night during wartime will make  
adults out of our children.

Because of every blood-soaked, faceless human corpse that's hurled across the passage of their mornings lovely as a tiny sparrow's and the smashed ramparts falling on their lively laughter, our little boys have ceased to be little boys.

The report of a lone gun on a star-lit night, smashing the silence and exploding, reduced to naught the meaning of all children's stories. And in the brief daytime remaining, they forgot how to make chariots from thorn apple seeds or to play hopscotch.

To shut the wicket gate before nightfall, to recognise any unusual barking of the dogs, to refrain from asking questions and to remain silent when the question had no reply – later, in herd-like fashion, they learnt it all. Wantonly ripping out a moth's wings and turning staves and twigs into guns to kill a friend, thinking of him as the enemy, became our children's sport.

Amidst the stress of a night during wartime, our children had turned into "adults."

### **Symbolism**

Sivaramani's strength lies in her use of simple everyday symbols Hopscotch & seed chariots symbols of play, joy, imagination destroyed by war. Moths fragile lives torn apart casually, like civilians in war. Staves and twigs as guns nature itself weaponized in a child's imagination. Stories under the night sky replaced with gunfire a metaphor for stolen dreams. Sivaramani, in contrast, engages with the immediacy of political memory. His poetry is not just re-

membrance but resistance. By chronicling the experiences of the Tamil youth amidst bombings, arrests, and disappearances, he transforms poetry into a testimony.

Lalita Pandit,, reveals this aspect in her poem “Anantnag” in these lines:

What of that? Now you are a stranger, an enemy. (38-39)

Children stare with suspicion. They have learnt to hate;

they are afraid. Hollow eyed ghosts walk the streets. (45-49)

Lalita Pandit also writes about the breakdown of the tragic events of early 1990s in her poem “Azaadi:1989-1995”: You thought Azaadi Could be courted, wooed and wed

Without shedding blood You thought it could be made

To become a wife who does not stray:

Never demands a price, a gift, a sacrifice. (73-78)

Ever since their migration from the land of their birth, now almost a quarter of a century ago, Kashmiri Pandits have felt a gradual erosion of their identity coupled with profound sense of rootlessness in which, as Lalita Pandit writes in her poem “Anantnag”:

Still, my expatriate feet drag me back to you.

Evening shadows stare at me with blind eyes. (32-35)

The breakdown of the armed conflict in Kashmir and the exodus thereafter has been highly crucial to the collective consciousness of Kashmiri Pandits

### Comparative Reading

Shared Ground: Both poets illuminate how younger generations inherit trauma—whether through displacement (Hogan) or daily violence (Sivaramani). Both expose psychic scars of war and the struggle to retain identity.

Divergence:: Hogan’s work is retrospective, mediated through memory and myth, while Sivaramani’s is contemporaneous, shaped by urgency. Hogan’s younger generation is suspended in nostalgia; Sivaramani’s is propelled into radical resistance.

### Conclusion

Taken together, the poems of Lalita Pandit Hogan and Sivaramani demonstrate how war,

exile, and political violence distort the natural trajectory of youth, replacing dreams of progress with trauma, anger, and alienation. Their poetry memorializes these generational wounds and serves as cultural testimony, preserving the silenced voices of the young. As poet Cheran observes, Sivaramani’s despair embodies the irreparable loss of dislocated Tamils: a wounded psyche, stripped of land, security, and dignity. Both poets, in different contexts, affirm how war not only reshapes memory but also crushes the innocence and possibilities of future generations.

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