

The struggles of Ceylonese Women in Rani Manicka's, The Rice Mother and The Japanese Lover

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Abstract: — The Ceylonese Tamils' migration to Malaya started after the year 1894. Most of them were educated and were employed in the British civil service in Malaya. Brides were often imported from Ceylon for these men who are well settled in this new country. This study intends to expose the struggles faced by these Ceylonese Tamil women who were displaced due to marriage in the pre-colonial Malaya. The struggles of these women will be based on the female characters in Rani Manicka's, *The Rice Mother* (2002) and *The Japanese Lover* (2010). Manicka, who is of Sri Lankan origin, was born and educated in Malaysia. She sheds light on the complications and challenges faced by displaced women in a patriarchal society and the roles they are expected to play. Both the novels selected for this study depict the journey of imported brides in Malaya and the difficulties faced by them in adapting to the new environment. These two novels will be studied in the light of postcolonial theory by looking into the issues of displacement and identity. This paper will reveal the difficulties faced by these women in adapting to the new place and culture. Secondly, it will explore the hardships faced by these women during the Japanese occupation and finally the roles that were destined to be played by these women. Being displaced in a strange land, the main characters in both novels are forced to adapt to the new environment and the new roles that the society expected them to play.

Keywords: -- Ceylonese women, challenges, displaced women, motherhood, roles.

I. INTRODUCTION

The colonization of British over Asia and rest of the world not only displaced millions of people but also distorted the culture and the identity of many immigrant people. The Ceylonese Tamils in Malaya came from the Jaffna Peninsula and the islands to the west which forms the territory of Jaffna which covers most of the Northern Province of Ceylon. The Ceylonese Tamils' migration to Malaya started after the year 1894 whereby most of them were appointed as clerks, teachers and government servants by the British. Armed with English education, modelled after the British education system, they were sought after by the British to assist in the administration of the British Government in Malaya. By 1931, there were about 12 700 Ceylonese Tamils in Malaya, "who were highly educated and skilled" and they were employed immediately in the British civil service (Manickam 2009:18). Many held high positions in the railways and public utility department in Malaya. Some of them came in after seeing advertisement on vacancies in Malaya. After the Pangkor Treaty of 1874, the British started building roads, railways, schools and hospitals and to increase its revenue, the Ceylonese were brought in.

The Ceylonese community which settled in Malaya had close connections with Ceylon. They were very small in number compared to the Indians who were brought in as coolies from South India to work as indentured labourers in British Malaya's rubber, tea, and oil palm estates. A sound education and close knit clannish unity have kept this particular community inward looking (Manickam 2009:22). So, when it comes to marriage, they only marry people from their own clan. Since the number of Ceylonese women was small in Malaya at that time, they preferred to get their brides from Ceylon. Many young women especially teenage brides were brought into Malaya with the hope of having a better future. Therefore, this study intends to expose the lives and struggles of these imported brides in Malaya through Rani Manicka's selected novels. Rani Manicka, who is of Sri Lankan origin, was born and educated in Malaysia. She grew up in Terengganu, a state in the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia and attended University of Malaysia where she received her business degree. Like any other postcolonial writers, Manicka too brings forward the issues of the displaced people in the new country. She sheds light on the complications and challenges faced by displaced women in a patriarchal society and the roles they are expected to play. The novels selected for this study are

The Rice Mother (2002) and *The Japanese Lover* (2010). It should be noted that *The Rice Mother* won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2003. Both novels depict the journey of imported brides and the struggles endured by them in Malaya. These two novels will be studied in the light of postcolonial theory by looking into the issues of displacement and identity. In *The Rice Mother*, Manicka illustrates the arrival of Lakshmi, a very pretty bride from Ceylon to Malaya after marrying a man two times her age. She has six children and the story continues with three generations of Ceylonese women. On the other hand, *The Japanese Lover* is the reminiscing of an old woman, Parvathi who arrived in Malaya as a teenage bride. She is trapped in a loveless marriage and faces a lot of predicaments until she meets General Hattori, the Japanese General. She becomes Hattori's lover and even marries him in a temple. It is a story of unconventional love between the captor and the captured. According to Ashcroft in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, postcolonial literature covers all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. There is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. The presence of British culture is prominent in the novels especially in *The Japanese Lover*. Parvathi's husband exposes her to the Western culture through his way of life. This paper will show the struggles faced by Lakshmi and Parvathi in adapting to the new place and culture. Secondly, it will explore the hardships faced by these women during the Japanese occupation. And finally the roles that these women were destined to play will be discussed.

II. THE STRUGGLES OF CEYLONESE WOMEN IN MALAYA

a. Displacement and Identity

Displacement occurs when a specific cultural population is moved from its original homeland or bioregion and relocated to a different setting. According to Ashcroft, "the special crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" takes place after a displacement (Ashcroft 8). It is evident that the characters in these two novels try their best to get adapted to the new place. Both novels, *the rice mother* (2002) and *the japanese lover* (2010) depict the lives of ceylonese tamil women who were brought in as teenage

brides to Malaya. In *the rice mother*, Lakshmi was only fourteen years old when she was married off to Ayah who was thirty seven years old and a widower with two children. Lakshmi was born in Sangra, Ceylon in 1916. She had a white grandmother, Mrs. Armstrong and therefore had inherited some of the caucasian features. She was very pretty and the matchmaker, Aunt Pani convinced Lakshmi's mother into getting her daughter to marry Ayah, who was thought to be a very rich man from Malaya.

'Lakshmi, I have accepted a marriage proposal for you,' she said to the folded sari. 'A very good proposal. He is of a better caste than we are. Also he lives in that rich land called Malaya' (Manicka 2002:13).

Her mother felt that Lakshmi will enjoy a better life if she married someone who is well settled in Malaya. The first shock for Lakshmi was getting used to the ugly looking Ayah. She had dreamed of "a thousand romantic notions" about the mysterious stranger that she was to marry.

Sitting on the dais awaiting me was the biggest giant of a man I had ever seen. So dark his skin shone like black oil in the night. On his temples, like a bird of prey, rode large wings of grey. Beneath his broad nose, long yellow teeth jutted forward, making it impossible for him to completely close his mouth. (Manicka 2002:17).

Her silly romantic dreams "desperately gasped their last breaths". When she looked at her mother who was smiling happily and proudly, she realised that due to their "abject poverty, his wealth has blinded her to everything else" (Manicka 2002:17). Lakshmi didn't want to disappoint her mother. She overcomes the feelings of fear by giving a sharp stare at her husband and he dropped his eyes. She felt that she had tamed the wild beast with a look. "He didn't turn his head to look at me. The rest of the ceremony passed in a blur" (Manicka 2002:18). After the painful sexual encounter with her husband that night, Lakshmi felt disgusted but she consoled herself by saying that at least she would "live like a queen in Malaya" (Manicka 2002:19). Like many other women from the poverty stricken land of Ceylon, Lakshmi too longed for a comfortable life. Getting married and moving to Malaya itself is considered as a lifetime opportunity to free oneself from the clutches of the God forsaken life which the natives of Ceylon had inherited for generations.

Although she was married to an ugly man but she looked forward going to Malaya. When the ship approached the Penang Harbour, she became excited. The Europeans disembarked first with their “high-nosed, tightly corseted” women and followed by the others (Manicka 2002: 25). She met a Malay man named Bilal who came to pick them from the port. At first, she thought that he was a servant. She also experienced a new environment when they drove through the grocery stores and saw rows of ducks hanging at the butcher store. She was also dismayed to see Chinese women with very small “misshapen feet clad in black silk shoes” tottering slowly (Manicka 2002:26). She was surprised to see the “dulang-washers” who covered from head to toe, cycling to the tin mines to sieve tin ore in large trays from the mining sites (Manicka 2002:29). Everything puzzled and fascinated her. However, when she arrived in Kuantan, all her dreams of a rosy garden was shattered. She realised that her ugly husband did not own the gold watch that he was wearing (belonged to Bilal) and he had a lot of debts to settle.

Mother had been tricked. The thought was heavy: My husband was not rich, he was poor. Pani had duped us. I was all alone in a strange country with a man who was not what he was supposed to be (Manicka 2002:30).

Lakshmi missed her mother very much and decided to write to her the next day. But she decided to not to tell her mother that she had married a poor man.

And I would never tell her about the soft clink that the shining gold watch, which had so impressed her, made when it fell into Bilal’s upturned palm, just before he nodded and returned to his real master. (Manicka 2002:34)

The fourteen year old Lakshmi embarks on her wifely duties once she realises that she has no other choice but to play a part and take the responsibility to settle her husband’s debts. The house that she was brought into belonged to a very rich Chinese man called Old Soong. At the end of the month, when Ayah handed Lakshmi an envelope with two hundred ringgit, she became overjoyed and thought that the marriage would work after all. However, her happiness was short lived when the money lender came to collect his debts. She paid him twenty ringgit and he left but the queue continued until she had only fifty ringgit to last the whole month. Besides that, she also found out that she had

multiracial neighbours. Her immediate neighbour was a lorry driver and his wife Minah, who welcomed her to the neighbourhood with coconut jelly was a friendly woman. She also met Mui Tsai who is a “pitiful domestic slave” in Old Soong’s house (Manicka 2002:42). Mui Tsai and Lakshmi became good friends. The snake charmer in her neighbourhood frightened her the most. He made medicine out of his poisonous cobra and Lakshmi worried “his escaped cobras were lurking” in her bed (Manicka 2002:35). She had to adapt to the new environment, people and culture in order to survive in that new land. The most horrible situation was adapting into a married life with an ugly husband whom she regarded as stupid.

Dull eyes regarded me, for a minute. I thought of a heavy animal, its lumbering slowness, its stoic endurance in the face of persistent flies and its filthy, swishing tail as it just stood there. Stupidly. (Manicka 2002:39).

Lakshmi slowly learned to adapt to her new environment and her role as a wife. She took control of her husband’s debt and started saving a small amount of money in a tin which she kept in the rice sack. She started cultivating a vegetable plot behind her house. She also managed a chicken coop. It was built for her by “a man from across the main road” (Manicka 2002:47). Her friendship with Mui Tsai blossomed to the extent that Anna, Lakshmi’s second child was breastfed by Mui Tsai (Manicka 2002:88). Lakshmi often heard about Mui Tsai’s ill treatment as well. Though displaced in a place that is alien to her, Lakshmi managed to pull through. Her firstborns were beautiful twins, Lakshman and Mohini. However, her other four children were ugly. She felt that her daughter, Lalita was “extraordinarily ugly” and her son Jeyan was born with weak legs that could not support his body weight. Faced with these seemingly endless predicaments, this once pretty and fragile maiden from Ceylon, slowly evolved into a tough woman. Upon her mother’s advise, she dug up holes and stand Jeyan inside it until he could walk. The displacement taught her to be a strong woman and mother. With six children in tow by the age of twenty, her identity changed from a teenager to a mother and wife. These changes took place forcefully in her life. Together with these changes in roles came the inevitable responsibilities which she managed with amazing guts.

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Another displaced character that Manicka portrays in *The Japanese Lover* is Parvati. Unlike the pretty Lakshmi, who was cheated into marrying an ugly man, Parvathi in *The Japanese Lover* faced a different kind of fate. She was also a teenage bride from Ceylon who was brought into Malaya with lots of promises. However, Parvathi's problems were basically because of her looks. She was very dark and lacked beauty. She was born in 1916, in Vathiry, North Ceylon. She was the only daughter in the family of five sons. When she was born the fortune teller prophesised that she would marry a rich man but the marriage will be a disaster due to the two inauspicious planets, *Rahu* (the head of the snake) and *Kethu* (its tail) that are situated in her "House of Marriage". She is also bound to get "disturbances" from other men (Manicka 2010: 6). So, the priest had suggested that she pour milk on the head of a snake statue to appease it and pray to the *Pulliyar*. When she was sixteen, her father cheated a match maker by giving someone else's photograph instead of Parvathi's. The match maker arranged her to marry a very rich man in Malaya. Then, she and her uncle boarded a ship from Colombo to Penang. After a long voyage with seasick women and the ship drifting through the "inky nights among stars", Parvathi finally arrived at Penang Harbour (Manicka 2010:19). Like Lakshmi, she too was amazed to see people of all shades of colour. She was amused to see tap water and electricity. She missed her mother more when she saw the soft mattress and bed. Everything seemed new to her and she constantly asked the "cobra" that she had worshipped back in her country to help her. Unlike Lakshmi (*The Rice Mother*), who struggled to make ends meet, Parvathi is thrust into a lavish lifestyle. Upon her arrival in Malaya, Parvathi is dressed in fine garments, with a veil covering her face and was taken to a crowded hall. She saw a tall man, much fairer than her with fierce rolling eyes as her groom. Soon, they were married and the veil was lifted and she refused to meet her husband's eyes. Later, they drove off in a long black car to *Adari*, a beautiful mansion by the beach. In this beautiful fairytale mansion, she was greeted by a line of servants and later her husband, Kasu Marimuthu harshly ordered one of the servants to take her to the West Wing of the mansion. She realised that this was the moment that she most dreaded ever since the marriage, the moment of truth. Her father had cheated the marriage broker and now she has to face the consequences. She was sent in to the "Lavender Room" which took her by surprise and awe. Kasu Marimuthu returned home drunk. Kasu Marimuthu, one of the wealthiest businessman in Malaya upon

discovering that the bride promised to him wasn't as beautiful and fair as depicted in the photograph grew mad and threatened to send her home in disgrace saying "I asked for a bird of paradise and I'm given a puny peahen" (Manicka 2010: 27). Kasu accepted Parvathi after being threatened and advised by his servant, Maya who said that it was his karma that he had to marry her. However, the acceptance came with a heavy price. Parvathi had to transform herself in order to live up to his expectations. She was taught to use the Western toilet and eat Western food. She also had to learn up on how to use the cutlery as her found her to be very uncivilised.

'You can remove my wife's cutlery, Gopal. She will eat with her hand.' Turning to her he said, 'Tomorrow you will learn to use cutlery so that for the time you are here at least, you will be civilised.' (Manicka 2010:64)

Kasu also engaged a personal teacher to teach Parvathi to read and write in English. Worst of all, the displacement caused her to change her identity. Kasu Marimuthu changed her name to Sita. "For the rest of your stay here you will answer to the name Sita", Kasu ordered. Since his first wife's name was also Parvathi, Kasu disliked it as Parvathi's features and looks were far from his first wife.

"You're nothing like her and you don't deserve such a name," he spat viciously. "She was tall and fair, a dazzling beauty. I will never use her name on you." (Manicka 2010:59)

He humiliated Parvathi further by saying that in ancient stories, inconsequential characters are known by more than one name and she is obviously not the heroine of the story. Later, through Kamala, another servant, Parvathi learned about the Anglo-Indian first wife of Kasu Marimuthu. She was told that she had absconded to Argentina with a polo player who often attended Kasu's lavish parties.

Eventually, Parvathi learns to handle Kasu. Later, Parvathi found out that Kasu had an affair with a dancer and had a daughter. She brought in the girl, Rubini to live with her after the dancer died. Rubini detested Parvathi very much. She blamed Parvathi's existence for her mother's death.

'And every time I see you I think of myself asking my mother for Papa and her answering, "He's gone home

to his wife. We can't be selfish. We have to learn to share." (Manicka 2010: 187)

As time passed, Parvathi evolved into a tough woman. The displacement built her spirit not to give up on anything easily. Before the coming of Japanese, Kasu fell ill. He was paralysed and bed ridden. Parvathi took care of him well with the help of Maya, her servant. Finally Kasu confessed to her of how glad he was that he had married her.

'I want you to know that I am glad I married you, he said. 'I was a fool to chase after beauty. It's a handful of air. When I am gone, do not wear the white sari of the widow ...'(Manicka 2010:172)

Kasu Marimuthu who wanted a modern and beautiful wife, finally realised that he actually had married the right woman. Both Lakshmi and Parvathi had to adapt to the new environment that they were displaced in. Their lives transformed tremendously compared to the kind of life that they had lived in Ceylon. Although life here in Malaya was more comfortable compared to their lives in Ceylon, but mentally they were tormented. Mainly, it was because of their spouses. In order to survive the demanding and harsh world, they had to transform themselves to the need of the new country. Lakshmi who realised that Ayah had many debts, started to run her family in a very economic manner and slowly released Ayah from his debts. On the other hand, Parvathi in *The Japanese Lover* transformed into a new woman in order to please Kasu Marimuthu. She learned to read and write in English and eventually evolved into a very sophisticated woman. She was expected to adapt to a more Western lifestyle. She was taught and finally prepared to host parties that involved the rich acquaintances of Kasu Marimuthu.

The Sufferings during the Japanese Occupation

As these women were slowly adapting to their new environment, gathering their hopes, believing that they will strive in the new land after all, fate had other plans for them. Their plans and dreams were suddenly interrupted with the arrival of the Japanese army. Their dreams were short lived and their hopes were maimed forever. All the struggle and hard work to build a new life in the country and the little happiness these women managed to salvage were forever ruined by the Japanese. The Japanese attack on Malaya started on 8th December 1941. The Japanese forces marched into

Malaya through Kota Bahru, Kelantan, a state in the east coast of Peninsular Malaya. The following day, bitter fight took place in Kuantan, where both these novels are set. At that time, Malaya was producing 40% of the world rubber and 60% of the world's tin. Capturing Malaya was like winning a jackpot for the Japanese. The Japanese force was led by General Tomoyuki Yamashita who managed to make the British surrender within two months. Within 55 days, they had overrun the entire Malayan peninsula. As for these women, life is never going to be the same again. Both women were terribly affected by the invasion of the Japanese in Kuantan. Both the novels depict the struggles of the women during the Japanese occupation and how they survived the pain and bitterness of being a woman and a mother. Manicka clearly illustrates the sufferings of these Ceylonese Tamil women in the hands of the Japanese soldiers. In *The Rice Mother*, Manicka shows how the beautiful daughter of Lakshmi had to be hidden from the Japanese soldiers. Lakshmi feared that her daughter, Mohini will be abducted by the Japanese soldiers and turned into their comfort woman. Lakshmi was very cautious that she hid Mohini in a secret hole in the ground at all times. The hiding place was a hole that had been cleverly cut out of the floorboards of the house. She covered the trap door with a huge chest which was sent to her by her mother from Sangra. When General Ito and his men invaded their neighbourhood, the first house they ransacked was the old Soong's house. Since Mui Tsai was available, "they didn't bother to look too hard for the other carefully hidden daughters" (Manicka 2002:123). So, Lakshmi thought that her daughter, Mohini will be safe. One day, as Lakshmi sat with her children talking, the Japanese arrived at her door step. Lakshmi who was supposed to drag Mohini into the hole lost his footing and fell through the trapdoor instead. Mohini, who realised that there was no space for her to hide, quickly shut the door and moved the chest on it. General Ito and his men took the fourteen year old beautiful Mohini forever from her family. When Lakshmi begged General Ito to spare her daughter, he kicked her hard in the stomach. In order to stop the General from taking away her daughter, she exposed Ah Moi's hiding place. The cruelty of the Japanese stunned Lakshmi.

They were arrogant, uncouth, cruel and unforgivable, as long as I live I shall hate them with a mother's wrath. I spit their ugly faces. My hate is such that I will never forget, even in my next life. I will remember what they have done to my family and I will curse them again and

again so that they will one day taste the bitterness of my pain (Manicka 2002: 203-204).

Life was never the same for Lakshmi and her family after losing Mohini to the cruel Japanese. Her regret for not being able to save Mohini haunted her till the end and that incident affected the whole family terribly. Lakshmi herself became a bitter person while Mohini's twin, Lakshman never came out of the guilt of not being able to save his sister.

Manicka also highlights the cruelty of the Japanese in *The Japanese Lover*. One week after Marimuthu's death, the Japanese invaded her mansion, *Adari*. She had to make the right decision to save her stepdaughter, Rubini from being taken away to be a comfort woman. She remembered that her husband and the Mamis had declared that the Japanese were only interested in the fair-skinned women, and "even then only to rape and use them once" (Manicka 2010:185). She was in disbelief when General Hattori said that she can take Rubini's place if she wishes to spare her.

No mercy, no smile of encouragement. Nothing. Just a blank wall asking her to be his ianfu, his comfort woman. She had begun life in the white sari of a widow only last week. (Manicka 2010:185)

Their mansion, *Adari*, is officially taken over by the Japanese. General Hattori set his office there and Parvathi's family moved to their provision shop on Wall Street. She was to serve him whenever there is a call from him. 'I'll send someone at midnight tomorrow for you,' he said and that was the beginning of another episode in Parvathi's life. She became General Hattori's comfort woman. Her frequent visits made the General become obsessed with her and she became his puppet. He dresses her in Kimono and colours her up like a Geisha. As time passed, Parvathi too fell for the General and in October 1944, she marries the General, in a far away Murugan temple. It was unspoken rule for the Japanese army men not to take wives as "they were not to leave progeny" (Manicka 2010:223). Parvathi longed for the war to be over but "the thought of parting from him was unbearable" (Manicka 2010:222). Parvathi felt distressed. She was married. Yet this was not a marriage, not really.

They were doomed lovers of Japanese legends: as the shining bells toll at the coming dawn, they take their own lives. (Manicka 2010:223)

Manicka shows how Parvathi who at first thought that she had sacrificed her life for the family and community, had helplessly fallen in love with the Japanese man. When the Japanese army surrendered, the General came to bid her goodbye. He presented her an umbrella with cherry blossom design and promised to come back for her.

If for any reason we lose contact are unable to reach each other, remember that on the day this country gains independence from the British, I will meet you at the main railway station in Kuala Lumpur, let's say noon on the platform where the trains depart for Kuantan. (Manicka 2010:242)

Malaya got its independence on 31st. August and as promised Parvathi went to the railway station to meet General Hattori but instead she met his wife. She learned that the general had died and requested his wife to hand her a gift.

'At first, I wanted to throw it away. I hated him for what he had done, but I couldn't turn away from it. And the longer it stayed in the cupboard, the more it haunted me. I wanted to see you, the woman that made him look like that. Now that I know, I can go back in peace'. (Manicka 2010:285)

Time soon passes and Parvathi became known as Marimuthu Mami. She lived in a storeroom and still had the cherry blossom design umbrella with her which brought back so many memories, pleasant and unpleasant.

New Roles in Malaya

In *The Rice Mother*, Manicka highlighted the different roles played by Lakshmi. Lakshmi's role as a mother is depicted in a very realistic manner. She is a mother but not a perfect mother. The author attempts to be honest about the unexamined side of female characteristics in this novel whereby Lakshmi is pictured as a woman who has flaws and those imperfections have touched the reality of being a woman. Lakshmi, who was a child bride married to then a Malayan expatriate named Ayah, grows out to be very matured and enterprising. In spite of having six children with Ayah, Lakshmi lives an unfulfilling married life with Ayah who does not serve his purpose as a husband but somehow, Ayah loves his wife dearly. Lakshmi, tends to favour her first beautiful twins Lakshman and Mohini. She became selective towards her other four children (Anna, Sevenese, Jeyan and Lalita)

and her affection towards the twins was special. However, Lakshmi, Jeyan and Lalitha do not fit into her high ideals of perfection and beauty thus she never quite had the same adoration that she had towards her twins. She is pictured as a mother who practices favouritism. After losing Mohini to the Japanese, she became a very impassionate person. Nothing could compensate her loss.

When Lakshmi first came to Malaya, she realised that Ayah had lots of debts. It frustrated her and she decided to take control of the finance.

...Finally, taking a deep breath and looking him directly in the eye, I told him that from now on I would be the only one paying the bills. He would receive a small allowance to buy newspaper or a cup of coffee from the canteen at work, but he could borrow no more money and was to refer to me on anything pertaining to our financial health. (Manicka 2002:46)

With her stern talk, Lakshmi was able to silence Ayah's role as the head of the family and instead she became the head whereby she controlled the finance in the family. She managed the family's finance well, cleared all of Ayah's debts and managed to save up substantial amount of money. She remained the head of the family even after Ayah's death.

Besides that, Lakshmi was an enterprising woman. She was a good peasant where cultivation is concerned. She had cultivated her own vegetable plot and reared chicken. During the period of Japanese occupation, Ayah had lost his job and they lost their "entitlement to the precious ration cards". She realised that she had "no time to moan and groan or to appreciate the pitying looks from the ladies in the temple whose husbands had managed to retain their jobs"(Manicka 2002:205). She sold some of her jewellerys and bought cows. She sold milk to the coffee shops and used the money to buy her groceries from the black markets. In short, she was a survivor.

During the Japanese time I made my own soap with leaves, tree bark, cinnamon and flowers....I made my own coconut oil.. (Manicka 2002: 206).

Parvathi in *The Japanese Lover* too played many roles. As a teen bride, she was exposed to so much of hatred. Kasu Marimuthu disliked her because he was

cheated into marrying an ugly creature. He wanted to have a beautiful wife and Parvathi's dark complexion put him off. However, Parvathi was given a chance to reform herself. She received Western education and was trained to be dynamic woman. She became the woman of the house. Later, when Kasu died she became the head of the family. When the Japanese invaded her home, she as the head of the family had to come to a decision. She became martyr in order to save the chastity of her step daughter, Rubini. Thus, began another new role for her as a comfort woman for the Japanese General. Though at first, she was only used as a sexual partner, but later General Hattori fell for her. He somehow saw beauty in her dark complexion. They even got married. When the war ended, General Hattori returned to Japan, promising to keep in touch with her and return to Malaya on its independent day. This promise never materialized as he died before that. Parvathi becomes a senile and locks herself in the dark store room. Being alone, she reminisces her past.

III. CONCLUSION

These two novels by Manicka are the voice of the silenced women during the pre-colonial and postcolonial period in Malaya. Many of the Ceylonese women who were brought into Malaya through marriages faced untold predicaments and agony. Adapting to a new environment, culture and society was not easy for these women. They agreed to marry men who were settled in an alien country with the hope of having a better life than their mothers and grandmothers. However, most of them did not live the life that they had anticipated. Through these novels, Manicka is awakening the forgotten plights of the women who suffered silently in Malaya. She becomes the voice for the child brides who were brought to Malaya with full of deception to marry older men who were believed to be financially secured and will redeem them from the unending misery they lived in their native land. The beautiful Lakshmi was deceived into marriage to an ugly widower just because he is believed to be rich in Malaya. On the other hand, the rich Kasu Marimuthu is cheated by the matchmaker whereby the ugly Parvathi was married to him. However, both women came into Malaya as childbrides to marry men much older than them. The invasion of Japanese into Malaya and the Japanese soldiers' acts towards women was a big shock to the women in Malaya then. Many women were captured and made into comfort women. In both novels, Manicka shows how the women suffered in the hands of the Japanese soldiers. Both women, Lakshmi and Parvathi

represent the soul of many women who lived, suffered and died in silence due to the fate which were not of their making.

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