

Lapis Lazuli

An International Literary Journal

ISSN 2249-4529

www.pintersociety.com

GENERAL ISSUE VOL: 7, No.: 2, AUTUMN 2017

UGC APPROVED (Sr. No.41623)

BLIND PEER REVIEWED

About Us: <http://pintersociety.com/about/>

Editorial Board: <http://pintersociety.com/editorial-board/>

Submission Guidelines: <http://pintersociety.com/submission-guidelines/>

Call for Papers: <http://pintersociety.com/call-for-papers/>

Lapis Lazuli

All Open Access articles published by LLILJ are available online, with free access, under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial License as listed on

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Individual users are allowed non-commercial re-use, sharing and reproduction of the content in any medium, with proper citation of the original publication in LLILJ. For commercial re-use or republication permission, please contact

lapislazulijournal@gmail.com

Of Life and Pests that Abound

Jigyasa Hasija

**Mosquito**

By: Roma Tearne

First published May 1st 2007 by HarperCollins Publishers. The issue being reviewed- 2008, Harper Perennial, Kindle edition.

Pages – 323, Price - ₹ 195.

ISBN - 978-000-7233-656

Literary Awards - Kiriayama Prize Nominee for Fiction (2008)

A book of survival amidst struggle, Roma Tearne's first novel *Mosquito* is about love and terrorism entangled in a web of deceit, sham and intimidation whose strong currents sweep the reader with its sheer brilliance that shines through grey areas of the narrative, much like the paintings one of the characters Rohan makes after escaping from the war-torn country of Sri Lanka.

While this nation was labelled as “one of the world's most politically unstable countries” by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank in 2004, the rest of the planet largely ignores the ethnic troubles and civil war taking place here located about 19 miles off the coast of India. As with many formerly colonised countries, a legacy of ethnic strife and a power vacuum created by the exit of colonial powers have mutated into terrorism, and bloody turmoil continues to plague Sri Lanka. Colonised by the

Portuguese and the Dutch in the 16th century, Sri Lanka became part of the voracious British Empire in the 19th century. The British imported Tamils from India as a labour force for the lucrative plantation economy, but after the island became independent following the second World War, the Tamils remained. In the 1970s, a number of Tamil militant groups formed, with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) finally emerging as the dominant group in a secessionist war against the Sri Lankan Government. The Tamil Tigers were the first terrorist group to use the suicide vest.

The protagonist is Theo Samarajeeva, a Sri Lankan author who has lived in England for many years. Following the death of Anna, his beloved Italian wife, Theo “an established writer, with a comfortable life in London” decides to return to his native Sri Lanka in 1996. Even though he’s warned continually about the political situation there, Theo believes that he’s immune from the violence. “Some perversity” makes him return to his homeland despite the fact that “a potential guerrilla war was simmering.” So, Theo returns to Sri Lanka at first moving to the capital of Colombo. Appalled by the violence and civil unrest, he moves to a house in a small coastal town. But his much-acclaimed novels express compassion for the Tamils, so Theo’s presence and his sympathies are noted.

Taking up residence in a spectacularly beautiful villa with a loyal servant, Sugi, Theo sets out to begin his fourth novel when he’s invited to speak at one of the local schools. Here he meets Nulani Mendis, a 16-year-old girl whose father was brutally murdered on the village streets. Nulani, a talented young artist, quirky and peculiar, traumatised by her father’s death, begins to visit Theo’s house. These two damaged people, the middle-aged writer and the budding artist, strike up an unconventional relationship that disconcerts the village community.

While the island’s beauty lulls Theo into a false sense of security, the novel throbs with tension. Just as the mosquitoes spread disease and death in Sri Lanka, violence spreads to all the characters in the novel, and no one is immune. Mistakenly, Theo imagines that he’s an insignificant political figure, but in spite of his best efforts to ignore the brewing civil war, both he and Nulani are swept up in the violence with tragic consequences.

The novel also explores vehemence through its other characters. Vikram, a Tamil boy orphaned by the atrocities of the Singhalese army, is recruited by the Tamil Tigers until chance lands him in an orphanage. Here, a well-intentioned guardian intervenes to alter Vikram’s fate by plucking him from an uncertain future and providing him with a stable home. But Vikram is permanently damaged by viciousness and grows up “monosyllabic and secretive.” A dangerous time bomb, almost completely devoid of feeling, Vikram is once again recruited by the Tamils. Vikram becomes a tool of his unscrupulous controller, Gerard, a man who exploits the traumatised, damaged Tamils by preaching vengeance but who secretly has political ambitions of his own. Theo’s London friends- Rohan and his wife Gillian-are touched by the war so brutally that they are unable to lead a normal life even after they escape from Sri Lanka.

The story spans as many years as the number of characters in the tale; the novel at first sight seems to be a work of fiction, and yet, the point in time and the position in which it is situated makes it seem utterly factual. One cannot help but compare the author in the book and of the book, as Tearne has sketched Theo Samarajeeva in a lifelike and convincing style. Ditto for the other characters, who are believable and influential. The

book shows how all the people are in one way or the other influenced by the civil war- while half of them are killed, the other half attempt to pick up the broken shards of their lives: The war does annihilate a few but it also fabricates strong people whose individuality contributes towards their being unique, independent and free. Roma Tearne has made the story very interesting. There are not many characters, but each one is strong enough to give an extra edge to the story. It is not a tale about heroism but about survival and how human beings adapt to situations when circumstances are mercilessly thrown at us by life. The characterisation is very close to life; every emotion is intense, deep and passionate, concentrated to the point that it makes the reader want to seize and capture those twists and turns with them. The book makes one speculate what must be going through the minds of the people staying in such instability. Their sensitiveness, fears and even dreams are so fragile. They are sometimes found to be too stone-hearted to be real and sometimes too fragile to bear one more wound.

The unusual title of the book is striking as well as apposite; it fits what Tearne wishes to transmit-an understanding that nothing is constant except change and the nature of mosquitoes. These insects are leeches which suck blood, are transporters which carry with them sickness and disease, and finally they are freeloaders who are idle and scroungers, slackers and hangers-on, doing nothing for the world except to bring unrest. Gerard and Nulani's maternal uncles are such 'mosquitos' who fit the description of these pests.

The author, a Sri Lankan artist now living in England, carves a fine tale, exploring violence on both sides of the ethnic divide. Tearne weaves art into her story through Nulani's remarkable paintings -- paintings that create "some other dimension," and transcend the appalling violence of the civil war. Juxtaposing the exquisite lush beauty of Sri Lanka against the senseless brutality of the opposing factions, Tearne's novel brings her characters together in a time of turmoil. When the narrator of *Mosquito* asks "Has there ever been a country, that once colonised, avoided civil war?" the pertinence of the hostile situations acquire a dramatic as well as thudding beat, becoming at the same time stunning and glowing, looming ever larger on the surface.

BIO-NOTE

Jigyasa Hasija is a doctoral scholar of Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi, with particular interests in cinema studies, literary theory and visual arts. She is researching on ecofeminist Hollywood movies. Prior to enrolling for a Ph.D., she worked on renditions of Meerabai's *bhajans* in Hindi cinema for an M.Phil from University of Delhi, and was a board editor with the *Daily Pioneer* newspaper. She holds a bachelor's and master's degree in English Literature from University of Delhi. She has also studied films at FTII, Pune.

Email: jigyasa.h@gmail.com

