



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Language and Linguistics*

Tracing post-war trauma and developments in Sri Lanka through Romesh Gunasekera's *Noontide Toll*

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*Correspondence: sheloamit2007@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

Sri Lanka, a nation known for its three-decade civil war between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil, endured extreme suffering during and after the war. This paper attempts to trace post-war trauma and national development in Sri Lanka through a literary analysis of Romesh Gunasekera's *Noontide Toll*, which is set in post-war Sri Lanka. Using a qualitative approach rooted in trauma and development theories, the study examines the various coping mechanisms adopted by the characters in the novel whose individual traumatic experiences are part of the nation's collective trauma. It also explores the uneven development between the war-torn Northern and developed Southern regions, which is evident through the narrator's travel observation and introspection in the story. The findings suggest that the characters' coping mechanisms and the introspective journey across the country by the narrator, who travels outside South of Sri Lanka to the North for the first time, display the efforts taken by the nation to address the issues of war victims. The significance of the study lies in understanding that addressing post-war trauma as a serious concern and efforts to promote even development methods across the country together would contribute to the nation's growth, reconciliation, and healing.

KEYWORDS: collective trauma, post-war development, post-war trauma, South Asia, Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Literature has always been a reflection of the social reality and the voice of the common man. It is a meticulous display of the societal conditions viewed in appreciation or critically from various perspectives. Sri Lanka, a nation known for its three-decade civil war between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil, endured extreme suffering during and after the war. This paper attempts to trace post-war trauma and national development in Sri Lanka through a literary analysis of Romesh Gunsekera's *Noontide Toll*, which is set in post-war Sri Lanka. Using a qualitative approach rooted in trauma and development theories, the study examines the various coping mechanisms adopted by the characters in the novel whose individual traumatic experiences are part of the nation's collective trauma. It also explores the uneven development between the war-torn Northern and developed Southern regions, which is evident through the narrator's travel observation and introspection in the story. The findings suggest that the characters' coping mechanisms and the introspective journey across the country by the narrator, who travels outside South of Sri Lanka to the North for the first time, display the efforts taken by the nation to address the issues of war victims. The significance of the study lies in understanding that addressing post-war trauma as a serious concern and efforts to promote even development methods across the country together would contribute to the nation's growth, reconciliation, and healing.

According to a dictionary, development means the process of growth or betterment of something or someone. When the word or idea of Development is applied in different contexts, its meaning changes to suit the situation. Likewise, when it's about the progress of a country, development plays a vital role in displaying the country's wealth and well-being to the rest of the world. People and their welfare contribute to a bigger part of the development of a country. Usually, the idea of welfare and well-being are associated with overriding factors such as the state of the economy and the availability of and access to material needs. However, one factor that is generally ignored or relegated to a different domain altogether is the psychological well-being of the population. The World Health Organisation(2003) clarifies mental health or psychological well-being as a "state of well-being in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" and therefore emphasising its need in the process of development.

Importance of Post-War Trauma and Developments

Mental health has its importance even under normal circumstances in Western countries, but it is still considered a Western problem in most non-western countries, especially the South Asian region. Rather, it must be regarded as a pre-eminent factor, especially in conflict-prone countries that have experienced extreme violence and severe damage, that would create social impact and a sense of community among people, enhancing societal growth. Sri Lanka is one such country in the South Asian region, with a history of remorseless wars and mass killings and it is of utmost importance to address the collective trauma that the people are experiencing. This severely affects their mental well-being and impairs social growth. Dr. Shaili Jain suggests that the "unprocessed collective trauma has engendered future spirals of communal violence in South Asia, a violence that continues to be re-enacted in the 21st century" (Zutshi, 2020, para 5) thus hindering the process of development and its sustenance. This statement is validated by the continued political unrest which has lasted over three decades.

The notion of development has changed in the post-World War II scenario both as "an enterprise and a scholarly discipline" (Rapley, 2007, p.1). The development of a country is to rebuild or to reconstruct economically, socially, and culturally in all possible ways, especially the countries that were destroyed in the war. In the beginning periods of development, the primary goal was to economically develop a country which further led to a focus on the industrial sector. It promoted economic growth, uplifted the lives of people and the poor gradually began to get access to basic necessities. Even after independence Asian and African countries remained poor and were speeding up their process of development. Their prime reasons to develop their nations were to better the lives of their people and the desire "to convert newly won political equality with the rich countries into an economic equality" (Rapley,2007, p.2) that would aid them in regaining "respect and sense of self-dignity they felt had been denied them under colonialism" (Rapley,2007, p.2). It is evident that as economic development progressed in each country, only the rich became richer while the poor got access to only the basics, but their livelihoods didn't improve. Not all countries have the resources and economy to develop themselves independently hence they begin to partner with other countries and seek help. With aid from within

the country and from other nations, the growth of a country happens gradually and with various resources. Sometimes relationships within the country or with others might be threatened due to various ill factors such as ethnicity, religion, economic dependency, etc., and can cause bitterness between them. This creates political instability within and between the countries and slowly leads to larger complications like colonialism, world wars, terrorism, and ethnic and religious conflicts which in turn, adversely affect the development of the country. Based on the levels of development, the world was divided into developed, developing, and underdeveloped countries. When the developed countries start dominating and ruling the progression of other developing and underdeveloped countries, it destabilizes the political situations in the later countries. Some notable issues that have been happening in the past and till now, are lack of political freedom, unemployment, poverty, ethno-religious riots, sectarian politics, enmity between countries, bomb blasts, war, and conflicts. Such issues have become a part and parcel of the process of development itself. The idea and definition of development were altered and modified depending on the economy and scholarly enterprise of that time but the sustenance of the lower sectors of the society remains unchanged in all three worlds till today. There is no definite definition for Development as it's evolving through time and the requirements to justify what exactly development is, are subjective to the people and their needs. Andrew Sumner and Michael Tribe discuss heterogeneous definitions and explanations of development written by various writers/theorists in chapter one of their book *International Development Studies: Theories and Methods in Research and Practice*. They begin by arguing that there have been various debates among the development community where there are different schools of thought, contrasting views, dominant perspectives, etc. but the entire community agrees on one fact of development i.e. change.

Change being a prominent factor in development, it is necessary to understand the kinds of change and the effects it has had on society. Has change benefitted society? If so, which sectors of the society or people has it benefitted? Is it the dominant groups or the marginalized groups? How were the marginalized formed in a society? Have the developmental changes improved their lives? If yes, why are they still marginalized? Such inquiries are unavoidable while marking the development of a country. When attempting to answer such crucial questions, one needs to acknowledge that some of these questions might have answers but has no proper solutions to be executed. When the dominant groups of a society begin to decide what others should and shouldn't have access to, there arises the problem of the others voicing their rightful needs. This causes political and financial instability within the countries and its severe later stages lead to conflicts and war. The dominant groups of the world and within every country not only deny access to better lives but also threatens the identity of the lower strata of society.

Identity is an essential factor for an individual and a community as they have their own principles and traits that keep them distinct from one another. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Identity is "the fact of being who or what a person or thing is". Identity defines a person or a community or a thing. In a Postcolonial context, "the identification of an individual or a group or a nation is linked to the "Other", that means they recognize themselves "Us" with the existence of the other" (Dizayi, 2015, p.1000). Many countries like Iran, Iraq, Syria, etc., have turned into conflict-prone zones due to contrasting religious views and identities within them. Among such problematic countries, South Asia, a group of countries has caught the attention of the worldwide population in experiencing suffering and dealing with similar crises within the nations, in recent times. Initially, the South Asian countries India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka were clubbed together for trade purposes and also shared cultural similarities. It is essential to keep in mind that all these countries have experienced colonialism and were mostly colonized by the British. Until colonialism ended, the present South Asian countries were under the control of the colonizers and the only distinction they saw was that of the master-slave binary. As all these countries were multi-cultured and diverse, it was the post-independence period that made them realize the status of each culture or community in their own country. This realization led to negating the diversity and aided ethnic cleansing by the majorities in each country. Ethnicity, religion, and language are considered to be a few of the main aspects that define a country's or community's identity. When this identity is threatened, it creates a chaotic atmosphere in the society as well as in the minds of the people which further leads to violence causing damage to people and properties. In such conditions, people themselves become both the conflict perpetrator as well as the victim. This increases political instability causing civil wars within and between the countries. Such violent activities if continued for

a longer period, hinder the process of development causing damage to infrastructures, financial crises, delays in executing political agendas, and social transformations.

The Scars of War: Exploring Post-War Conditions in Sri Lanka

Similarly, Sri Lanka experiences constant political instability, terror attacks, ethnoreligious turmoil, etc., compared to other South Asian countries. In the year 1956, Sri Lanka faced a major political shift in Bandaranaike's electoral victory. This resulted in the "rejection of so much that had come to be accepted as a part of the normal order of things in post-colonial Sri Lanka" (de Silva, 2005, p.626). It further complicated the existing political situations and reforms that were formed and established, to be the "basis of Sri Lanka's post-colonial polity" (de Silva, 2005, p.626), by D.S. Senanayake. This change disapproved of the concept of Sri Lankan nationalism and introduced the famous democratic nationalism, linguistic nationalism. Consequently, the idea of "multiracial polity was no longer politically viable" (de Silva, 2005, p.626) as Sri Lanka was strongly considered to be the land of the Sinhalese and where "Buddhism stood forth in its purest form" (de Silva, 2005, p.626). This prioritises and sets the numerically superior Sinhalese-speaking people in the foreground and pushes the minorities especially the indigenous Tamils who denied the Sinhalese nationalism. The Tamils occupy the Northern and the Eastern Provinces and one of their most important demands was autonomy over these provinces "under the federal constitution" and "parity of status for Sinhala and Tamil languages" and solve the issues with the Indian Tamil plantation workers who have been working since colonisation (de Silva, 2005, p.628). These issues made the entire world and the United Nations look back at Sri Lanka during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka are an important part of the history of Sri Lanka and South Asia. Constant subjugation of the minorities especially the Tamils by the majority Sinhalese and Sinhala governments pushed their need to fight for their basic rights leading to the massive destructive war between them. Due to this unchanging factor of crisis and chaos, Sri Lankan History, Politics, and Literature almost always carry ethnic strife and religious animosity as a backdrop to the fragile conditions and stories narrated, thus portraying Sri Lanka as a traumatised society.

This paper attempts to analyse developments in post-war Sri Lanka through a literary piece, a collection of interconnected stories in *NoonTide Toll* by Romesh Gunasekera with the support of concepts like reconstruction and the development of a war-torn nation and its people. This is further discussed with the assistance of various notions of the same established by experts in the field of development studies, economics, psychological traumas, and writers with similar concerns who form the basis of their arguments from the post-Cold War era. In the light of recent economic crisis and politically insecure conditions in Sri Lanka, it is a requisite to examine the country's varied facets of development during the post-conflict period, which could evade today's precarious state of affairs. One of the foremost reasons to examine these facets through a literary piece is that literature always has been a mirror of society. The stories, characters, and situations serve to understand the conditions and mindset of the common man in the country. When perusing such pieces of literature, one gets a wholesome idea of the country, its citizens, and its political notions. In this series of stories in *NoonTide Toll*, the author through the narrator, not only elaborates on the post-war conditions in Sri Lanka but also emphasises various developments happening in the country. Some aspects may seem passive and some may show rapid growth based on the intensity of damage caused by war both to people and property. The novel is set in the immediate years of post-war recovery, their conditions seem to remain the same in matters of wholesome and proportionately levelled developments. It promotes the idea that the lives of people from all levels of society must be equally progressive and that it is lacking in Sri Lankan society. Through the analysis of the novel, this paper not only focuses on material developments but also strives to expose the psychological effects of the war that needs to be addressed in terms of mental development. Such extreme conditions are skilfully manipulated by Gunasekera in both sets of stories - The North and The South - in the novel, thus insisting on the importance of mental health as much as the efforts to beautify the country, which together strengthens the development processes.

Romesh Gunasekera was born in Sri Lanka where he spent his early years and later moved to London. He is known for his notable works like *Reef*, *Monkfish Moon*, *The Sandglass*, *The Prisoner of Paradise*, *Noon Tide Toll*, etc. His works have been short-listed for various national and international awards, he has held honourable positions in various Universities and is considered to be an Honour to his nation, Sri Lanka. Most of his works are set in his native land Sri Lanka which holds both ethereal beauty and tumultuous political

conditions and are distinctively detailed through his stories. Being a diasporic writer, apart from his major themes like culture, memory, history, and nostalgia his works set to showcase brutal reality, strong emotions of hope and trauma, empathy, kinship, reconciliation of the past and present, resilience, creating live moments through his writing and choice of diction, the significance of travel – mentally and physically, tourism and tourists. Such notable concerns are also present in this episodic novel *Noontide Toll*, where each chapter narrates different stories about Sri Lanka, its yesteryear beauty, its traumatic past of war and tsunami, people's actions and reaction to this continuous condition of unrest in the country, a nation trying to recuperate and reconstruct itself, in all forms, from the ruins of war and tsunami, how different parts of the country adapt methods to cope with the financial and psychological damages to begin a new journey of a national and self-development, wide range of political and revolutionary discussions about other countries.

The episodic novel, *Noontide Toll* is divided into two sections, North and South, as the narrator Vasantha who previously worked at the "Coconut Corporation" (Gunasekera, 2014. p.2), begins his post-retirement journey as a van driver travelling from up north of Sri Lanka to down south with different passengers from across the world who have come to this once beautiful and now destroyed and wounded island for various purposes. The readers not only indulge in the passengers' stories but also analyse the growth of the character of the narrator, who seems to be a silent observer whose thoughts constantly ponder around his guests' conversations but never really discusses his perspective with them as his "responsibility was to bring these people to the fort and take them back without mishap" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.25). His quality gradually progresses and imitates the actual mindset of the present nation that grapples between post-war trauma and the dire need to move towards a better future that provides them with mere survival. The author has designed the novel such that the stories in the North section - Folly, Mess, Deadhouse, Scrap, Roadkill, and Renewals correspond thematically to the South stories - Ramparts, Janus, Fluke, Shoot, Turtle, Humbug respectively. He begins the novel and the North section with an introductory chapter named Full Tank, which symbolically marks the start of Vasantha's journey with his van's fuel in full tank, and the final chapter Running on Empty contributes as a coda to the South section which sums up his physical and metaphorical journey within the country.

The two parts in the novel are typical of the nation's divide based on languages where the North is dominated by the minority Sri Lankan Tamils guided by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who were considered the victims of the war and the South by the majority Sinhalese governed by the Sinhala government with the support of the country's military forces were the perpetrators and victors of the war. Gilad Hirschberger's article *Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning* helps to study the mindset of Sri Lanka and its people trying to make meaning from all their traumatic experiences of the 30-year-old bloody ethnic war and the natural calamity of the Tsunami in 2004. The perspective of the history of trauma and trying to make meaning from these cruel experiences is a constant process of construction and reconstruction (Hirschberger, 2018, p.7). Gunasekera, of Southern origin, uses the narrator Vasantha, also from the South to observe the plight of the North and its people. The author distances himself from the trauma by using the English language and having an outsider narrate stories. The author constantly reiterates throughout the novel that there is hope lingering amidst the chaos and scars of both the country and the human mind. It is important to notice that the author has chosen the narrator's name to be Vasantha which in Tamil means the goodness of spring season and prosperity, that's yet to happen in this wounded island through its slow (North) and rapid (South) developments in infrastructure, people's psyche, economic and social aspects.

Each story in this novel is created with varied perspectives and moreover, it's a travel through the country that is actually trying to emerge from its ruins, yet caught in the "past despite the prospects ahead" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.140). The North section of the novel depicts a raw picture of a post-war Sri Lanka where its people are struggling to thrive between forgetting the past and looking forward to their future which still has remains of the past. It is not easy to forget and start a life or rebuild afresh. It's not much of a busy part of the nation, unlike the South which is busy, fast developing, noisy, and very active. The North is very silent, composed of remains of the war and the leftover hopes of the people that are found lingering in the atmosphere of the North. This paper further strives to illuminate and understand aspects of how post-war developments were handled or dealt with, by Sri Lanka and its people through the juxtaposition of contrasting stories from both sections of the novel.

Tourism played a major role in the Sri Lankan economy, as the island was known for its striking beauty

and rich natural resources. The first ethnic strife in the year 1983, caused the collapse of the entire tourism industry making the island an unsafe region for tourists. The war did more damage during the 30 years of continuous attacks on people and land. In the post-war period, that is after May 2009, the tourism department considering its promising pre-war establishment, launched the “Tourism Development Strategy” (Fernando, 2017, p.46), a five-year plan (2011-2016) that would accelerate their economy and also encourage international tourists. It was the time when the “deadly conflict was frightening away tourists, fuelling inflation, discouraging investments, motivating capital flight (human as well as financial) and nurturing a culture of violence” (Richardson, 2007, p.11). So, their only intention was to promote their country as safe, exotic, and accessible to the world and also to attract foreign investments that would catalyse their development strategies. Such strategies though helpful on a larger scale also raise questions of whether they ameliorate or aggravate the trauma of the people – direct and indirect survivors of war, and whether the incoming foreigners and investors would empathise with the current conditions of the country because these strategies are implemented in the immediate post-war scenario. Tourism is not just about travelling through the country for sightseeing, it’s inclusive of foreign investments, entrepreneurship, efforts to display a better picture of the torn land, acceptance or denial of the new changes, to gain financial revenue, modernisation, the idea of re-settling in/returning to their homelands, and compare other countries with similar problematic state of affairs. These themes are discussed in each story of the novel. Whether these notions of change and development promote better lives for the people is what this paper aims to examine.

In Folly, the two Dutchmen Paul and Vince were taken on a tour around Jaffna by the Heritage agency with assistance from Mrs. Cooray and guide Dilshan. They were tour operators who were invited to look around the place for a heritage project but they seemed quite unimpressed with “the rubble” and “the debris sorted according to size and colour...fragments of bombed-out buildings” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.17). She tried to excite them with the “perfectly preserved example of an eighteenth-century Dutch colonial fort” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.16) but its condition seemed impossible for a project as they felt “the heritage dimension interesting to us but the question is the cut-off point. Architecturally, the Dutch period will be rewarding but expensive” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.23) to revamp unlike the British gallows as the war was too sensitive. Mrs. Cooray strongly asserts to Paul that “the war is not heritage. The priority is tourism” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.23), and Chinese and Indian tourists may enjoy the white beaches but for European tourists “beach is not enough these days” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.23). They were interested in including the soldiers’ stories that were “a living archive” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.23) that would have a personal touch and add local flavour to the tourists but to Mrs. Cooray it was just “a bigger dead” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.23) story or past. Similarly, in Scrap Sepala a guide from the government took the Chinese executives around Mullaitivu, an important battleground, in search of scrap materials as recycling it, would have been a major profit and positive approach to waste materials for the government. He explains that “resources on the planet are limited and we are developing a first-class eco policy” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.86) but the business was left abruptly. All of these scraps are “confiscated property” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.86) brought in by the military from Vanni. As they journeyed down the land, Sepala felt discouraged and condemned the idea of a battleground being turned into a filming place, especially after his conversation with the director who has no concern about the history of the place and retorts “are you talking history? We are the future machang” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.90). Though certain acts displayed in these stories may extol the idea of moving forward, they lack concern and responsibility towards the lost and living lives that have experienced war firsthand. The scrap yard in Mullaitivu presents a very appalling picture of the mass killings in the Northern Vanni region, famously known as the “No-Fire Zone” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.89) that happened during the final weeks of the end of the war and which made the entire world focus on Sri Lanka. Reminded of a few questions on change and development in the introductory portion of this paper, these two stories may have attempted to answer them that changes of this kind are too much to handle for a traumatised society, as it plays with the emotions of the people, which simultaneously hinders the development process like the scrap business that was left abruptly, the perspective of the film director that was not well received by the commoners, the remains of the country was looked upon only for its resale value among the tourists. During the era of post-Cold War developments, there was a phase that was considered “postdevelopment” and this thought questioned the “whole concept of development, arguing that it was never intended to better people’s lives” (Rapley, 2007, p.4). It states that development was not focused on people’s prosperity, rather it was more

about establishing power and control over them and letting them enter the “formal works of circulation, where they could be taxed and thereby consolidating the state’s control over their lives” (Rapley, 2007, p.4). Hence this phase denied and rejected developments “as a celebration of individual or subaltern emancipation” (Rapley, 2007, p.4) and that’s exactly echoed in Gunasekera’s stories when some aspects of growth and power are not welcomed by the citizens.

Similar situations of commercialization of the mutilated land – literally and symbolically, are noticed in parts of Ramparts, in the stories Shoot and Humbug. Romanticising the South with a “spanking new spa in a fancy hotel” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.127), wedding photoshoots, awaiting new cruise ships, and the need for pleasure palaces for the tourists seem to highlight that the island is “open to all the filthy winds of change” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.140). In Shoot it’s a fashion lingerie photoshoot of “frolicking poppy girls” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.160) at the Galle stadium, and the cameraman Sanji is Milan-based but originates from Vavuniya in Northern Sri Lanka. It was a time of the “digital revolution” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.158) and the shoot was all about glamour, and the place was surrounded by “a throng of schoolboys” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.165). The plan to modernise and rebuild the Hambantota Rest House and the nearby port after Tsunami, in Humbug, distressed Miss Susila who travelled from England with her husband Mr. Colin, to visit this place as she was mesmerised by its description by Leonard Woolfe in his book *The Village in the Jungle*. They weren’t aware of the “refurb” (Gunasekera, 2014, p. 215) and a young man explained saying,

“This, you know, is very old, so my company has come with some big plans to modernize... Now phase one is to knock that part down and put state-of-the-art bedrooms: climate control, rain -showers, triple X adult TV, you know. Full works. Then phase 2 is to go up...” (Gunasekera, 2014, p. 216).

Hearing this, Miss Susila cried out since it was a “historic building” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.216) that carried heritage and meaning to it. Redevelopment, in the name of modernisation, may invite new opportunities but the land loses its authenticity and the reality that defines it, especially for expatriates like Miss Susila. The idea of reconstruction, rebuilding, and recycling emphasises the major role of China in aiding economic growth in Sri Lanka and journalist Unnithan (2013) refers to it as a “theatre of reconstruction” in one of his articles on post-war infrastructure developments. This intervention of power politics and the expansion of infrastructure to enhance transportation, business, and safe movements in the South like the “road to Hambantota” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.210), and the talks of new highways, ports, and airports, seems to ridicule the conditions in the North where each road has military checkpoints, “every road seems to lead to a hospital” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.3), crumbling walls and buildings, Northern dirt tracks, the scrap yard, “garbled structure”, the underdeveloped Spice Garden Inn hotel, pot-holed roads, intense damage to the flora of the region, etc. Considering these plans of action, in which some are partially pragmatic, it is crucial to recollect the time when Sri Lanka was a model to developing nations. Morris, an economic historian highlighting the model of “non-economic aspects of development success, discovered that Sri Lanka’s “quality of life” compared favourably with European nations such as Portugal and Yugoslavia, though its per-capita GNP ranked it among the world’s poorest” (Richardson, 2007, p.12). Today’s broken island gained its independence with peace and “sustained one of the few authentically competitive democratic systems in the Global South” (Richardson, 2007, p.12).

Perusing this web of stories, one cannot simply put aside the vehemence in each page, in each character, in each story – told and untold. The account of war encounters and mutilations makes one wonder how the nation could have fallen from its grace. Violent and insurgent events do not happen overnight, rather “they culminate trends of intensifying violent political conflict incidents, including violent countermeasures by state security forces intended to maintain or restore public order Search trends are warning signals that conflict may metastasize out of control” (Richardson, 2007, p.19). It was almost a three-decade war and its aftermath effects went unnoticed by most international development analysts and practitioners as “deadly conflicts in developing nations did not concern”(Richardson, 2007, p.12) them with aspects of the development of a nation. The ramifications of the conflict were psychological – as in the case of Miss Saraswati who shows signs of denial and silence when talking about war and LTTE, arise; financial – as in the stories that exhibit negative impacts of modernisation and commercialisation in the name of tourism and international investments; infrastructural damage done to roads and buildings especially the “citadel of knowledge” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.113-114)

the Jaffna library that was rebuilt post-war. The nation had to literally emerge from its ruins in every aspect of development. One of Richardson's findings on post-war developments in Sri Lanka was that most civil wars with and without ethnic insinuations have always been scrutinised through the lens of Cold War politics in which the nation's political instabilities were sustained by support from superpowers, similar to the aid provided by China to rebuild Sri Lanka that is noticeable in this novel. He also adds to his observation that "possible relationships between development policies and outbreaks of violent conflicts had been explored even less" at the time (Richardson, 2007, p.12).

Although development concerns of finance and infrastructure are prioritised, the receiver or the contributor (people or citizens) to such progress must be valued. Only when they participate in the give-and-take process actively, different facets of development can be implemented and assessed. Why is the emotional/mental state of a citizen important in developing and sustaining that development? The UN strongly believes that the mental state of a person is an essential part of the development process. It suggests that mental health investments contribute to a better society as "poor mental health is both a cause and consequence of poverty, compromised education, gender inequality, ill health, violence, and other global challenges. It impedes the individual's capacity to work productively, realise their potential and make a contribution to their community" (WHO, 2010). Mental health is considered an "invisible disability" among the international communities and is often neglected and left untreated; in most countries, it is considered taboo (UN). Since the novel is set in the post-war and post-tsunami periods, it is highly essential to discuss and analyse the human psyche under the microscope of trauma and their means to cope with it. Each tourist has come to this once beautiful and now destroyed, shattered land with a purpose. Some were tourists, some had come for business and marketing, and some came to revisit their past and reconnect themselves to this island. Vasantha listens to numerous stories and perspectives from his tourists, builds a close bond with a few, visits places that he hadn't in all these years in Sri Lanka, and sees trauma and devastation around him. Everything he experiences during his journey is a serious reflection, lamentation, and analysis of the past. He journeys with his tourists from the North to the South of Sri Lanka, the novel is divided similarly and thus typical of the nation's divide based on languages where the north is dominated by the minority Sri Lankan Tamils and the South by the mainstream Sinhalese. The stories from both sections deal with a traumatised society, the perspectives with which the North and the South reflect and cope with the trauma differ, as the North has experienced more during and in the aftermath of the war. They are a mix of direct and indirect survivors of trauma and the effects of trauma that have been passed on to generations post-war.

The narrator belongs to the southern part of Sri Lanka and it is through his observations, perspectives, and travel that we get a picture of the entire country, especially the northern part. The author chooses an outsider to be his narrator, a way of distancing himself and the narrator from the actual traumas of the society, a way of being able to reconcile with the victims, to be free from guilt, thus portraying the horrific history from an entirely different angle, probably repenting for the wrongdoings of their group. Vasantha begins the story by saying "every time I drive across the Causeway to Jaffna. I feel I'm entering another country" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.1), affirming to the readers that he doesn't belong to the north and that everything we hear and see in the stories is his voice and sight about the damaged environment. It is his recalling of the ethnic strife and the damage done to the northern part of Sri Lanka and its people. He might not have experienced the cruelties of war, but presently feeling the silence and a sense of terror around makes him believe he is "in a land where every road seems to lead to a hospital" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.3) and even the most beautiful sunset reminds him that "in this wounded country, even the sky bleeds every evening" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.3). This is the kind of setting from which the narrator begins his journey through the country and yet feels that "you don't have to feel trapped. If you are on the move, there is always hope" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.5), thus ensuring that there is always a ray of hope even in the darkness. Movement is the sign of life, and it's symbolic of the nation and the people moving and coming back to life.

According to Freud, Trauma is a 'wound' caused to the mind and not to the body that is easily treated and healed (Caruth, 1996, p.3). When it is inflicted on the mind, "it imposes itself again, repeatedly in the nightmares and the repetitive actions of the survivor" (Caruth, 1996, p.4). This repetitiveness of the wound or trauma can happen in many ways, and Romesh Gunasekera has elucidated it in his stories vividly- when there is a slow-paced development in recovering from the tragic event, the intensity of the damage to people

and property, flashbacks or memories attached to a particular place, symbols that stand permanent in the remembrance of the event, the guilt of being helpless, efforts to forget and reconcile. In Roadkill, Vasantha stays in an inn in Kilinochchi, which is run by Miss Saraswati, a former tiger. His arrival to Kilinochchi is significant as he recalls the historic importance of this place as it was once the capital of the “Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.93) and where they had their “Civic Center, their secretariat, their press conferences... LTTE travel passes, GCE school exam papers, landmines, and black-stripe grenades were issued” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.93-94). Being an outsider, he sees the developments of this place as a reflection of the South, a place that is relatable to him, and he calls it “a northern cousin dolled up with coloured flags, ribbons, and streamers” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.94). While conversing with Miss Saraswati about her inn, he compares the fast-paced developments in terms of tourism, post-war in the South to that of the North and finds himself painting a picture that “was probably impossible to imagine in this dumping ground of bombs” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.98). These attitudes are typical of an outsider to the north, who expected the place to have come back to normalcy but finds that the place and its people are still in the process of forgetting and reconciling with the past. It is more of a mental process, especially for a survivor like Miss Saraswati. Even though she has moved on with her life, the past is still a part of her like the Wound that Freud talks about. It keeps haunting when Vasantha reminds her of her past through his conversations, to which, she replies “You have to bury the dead and move on” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.101). Being a single man, Vasantha likes to travel because it gives him a “glimpse of a place that is different in touch, taste, smell, sound and look, from the place I am stuck in” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.101). He wants to know the history and he is mostly in a state of contemplation. His eagerness and want to know the “other side” of his country shows how the superiors have been oblivious to the others and their difficulties in their own country. The author being an outsider himself, probably uses Vasantha to exhibit reconciliation towards, or coming to terms with the North. As Cathy Caruth comments on Freud’s story on Tancred “the suffering he recognizes from the voice he hears, represents the experience of an individual traumatized by his own past- repetition of his own trauma shapes his life- the wound that speaks is not precisely Tancred’s own but the wound, the trauma, of another” (Caruth, 1996, p.8). He also registers the fact that Sri Lanka is a diverse country even in the smallest of things “as simple as boiled rice” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.96) which feels like “eating pebbles” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.96). So the effect of trauma is experienced not during the “original event of the individual’s past” but it recurs in an “unassimilated nature” only to “haunt the survivor” (Caruth, 1996, p.4). The idea of a survivor, as far as *Noontide Toll* is concerned, needn’t necessarily be the individual who directly experienced the traumatic event but it can also be an individual to whom the tragic event has been passed on through history who tries to reconcile, someone who is an oblivious outsider yet tries to understand the intensity of the event, empathise with it and hopes for the place to recover, someone to whom this place is home but has nothing that feels home.

Collective trauma involves collective memory which “persists beyond the lives of the direct survivors of the events, and is remembered by group members that may be far removed from the traumatic events in time and space” (Hirschberger, 2018, p.1). The people who have a memory of traumatic events have shaped and experienced it differently from the direct survivors. This collective memory of the past event is passed down to generations like in the case of Dr. Ponamapalam telling his son Mahen about the war in Sri Lanka and its intensity. This collective trauma threatens the second and third-generation survivors with endless effects and “at social level second and third generation survivors display heightened individual and collective fear, feelings of vulnerability, injured national pride, humiliation, a crisis of identity...such that the pain of the past generations is conflated with threats facing the current generation” (Hirscheberger, 2018, p.3). Mahen exhibits this trauma when he initially seems disinterested in coming to his native land as he was unaware of the beauty and seriousness of his nation. He wasn’t told about this country of his by his father and this is obvious when Vasantha thinks “if I had been a father, I would have made sure my son knew our proper place in the world. It is good to know where you stand. But maybe that is not easy if you are uprooted like these two” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.54). Later, towards the end of the story, Mahen tells his father that he’d like to live here and they both fancy how it would be to live in this old house of theirs. Also, he reminds his father of the school project, a drawing of their old house, and says, “I didn’t think it was real. I didn’t know what you were on about then” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.75), and both Dr. Ponampalam and his son Mahen who belongs to the present generation, feel the connection with their past. It clearly exhibits an identity crisis, a longing to connect with the past, and

a fractured patriotism towards their house and the country.

Remembering the past, exhibiting rage, and accepting it, is a way of unearthing meanings from the collective memories and understanding that one must move on and find consolation in whatever is still left. According to Hirschberger, “the collective memory of traumatic events is a dynamic social psychological process that is primarily dedicated to the construction of meaning” (2018, p.2), wherein meaning here refers to identity formation, reconciliation, a basic understanding of the instruments of the conflict perpetrator, and re-constructing the place by remembering how it was earlier. This idea is seen throughout the novel in various instances but it is prominently present in the first two stories Folly and Mess. It is through these two stories that the author attempts to recreate the past, good and bad, in order to find meaning through which the narrator finds hope and closeness to the trauma and memories of his clients. These two stories act as the starting point for various realisations and acceptance that there is a better future ahead and one has to move on with whatever is left and not find fault with the ones present in their own country. Be it the perpetrator or the victim, it is the presence of people and memories that are still alive in the country and that are essential for a country’s growth and development in all possible ways.

The author constantly reiterates the need for dialogue, a medium of reconciliation between the victims and perpetrators to understand each other’s situations and anger. This is exemplified in the case of Father Pereira and Patrick who have come to meet the Major at the military base. They have come to check if this is the Major they have accused of a war crime of beating up a girl in Negombo. They have blurred pictures of a man with whom they are here to check on the Major and also take a clear picture of him so that they can reaffirm with the victim’s family. Father Pereira and Patrick left the place with doubts and assumptions. Towards the end of this story, the statement that “they should have asked him, not assumed” makes more sense as anyone who is so furious as Patrick could have interrogated him more about this issue and cleared their assumptions rather than discuss “PE routine and the taste of forbidden fruit” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.52). This air of uncertainty accentuates the need for open dialogue and communication among the people of the nation. In other words, it is simply a microcosmic scenario of the aspect of “Social Dialogue” – a prominent strategy used in many developing countries to promote and enhance development, especially after World War II. Social dialogue, according to International Labour Organisation, means “to include all types of negotiation, consultation or simply exchange information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers, and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy” (NORAD, 2011). It is believed that in developing countries, “successful social dialogue structures and processes have the potential to resolve important economic and social issues, encourage good governance, advance social and industrial peace and stability, and boost economic progress” (NORAD, 2011). Dialogue and communication are notable strategies in the phase of development as well as in its sustenance for a longer period of time. When it is restricted and a one-way process, it causes chaos among the citizens who voice their needs and rights through rebellion. It stands evident in the story Turtle, when the couple from Czechoslovakia- another fractured country, converse with Vasantha about their yesteryear authoritarian communist regime that displayed power by building new roads, and “it showed who was in charge and who controlled the destiny of ordinary people” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.170). The communist regime installed censorship and as Eva says it was “strangulation, but done cleverly. They left no external marks” (Gunasekera, 2014 p.171). So the people learned many foreign languages and communicated through it except Russian. In this equivocal regime, “our theatres used silence, our artists used darkness our writers used the surreal, symbols double entendres. That was the way to speak about things” (Gunasekera, 2014, p.172). Consequently, the communist lost control after the “Velvet Revolution” that changed the world (Gunasekera, 2014, p.170). Such national conditions, be it in Czechoslovakia or Sri Lanka, affirms that when dialogue is encouraged within the country on a wider platform both political and social, will shun possibilities of confusion, chaos, and uncertainty and augment people’s perspective of each other and their demands for better living.

Finding meaning and dealing with trauma has played a greater part in the efforts taken by the narrator and characters to overcome or at least vent out their pain and loss. As Hirschberger points out that, “the effects of collective trauma on the construction of meaning is not limited to the victim group that needs to reinvent itself and reconstruct all that was lost, but also the perpetrator group that must redefine itself and constructs a positive moral image of the group in the light of the atrocities it committed” (Hirschberger, 2018,

This is ideally what Romesh Gunasekera attempts throughout this novel and it has gained significance, especially in the stories about the North. The narrator, the major, and the author who acts as representatives of the South or the perpetrator group seem to have redefined their image positively, by understanding and embracing the North, its environment, its silence, its darkness, what the people are going through, their struggle to forget the past and finding pillars to hold on to whatever that's left for them in their vast dark land.

Forgetting is an important sub-concept in this novel and it's discussed by Nietzsche in his second essay "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" in *Untimely Meditations*. According to him "Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic" (Nietzsche, 2007, p.62). By this he doesn't mean memories vanishing, rather it "enables selective remembering; it defuses and neutralizes past experiences that are not beneficial for present and future life" (Aydin, 2017, p.125). This act of forgetting is crucial in this piece of literature that deals with traumatic events and the country's ways of normalizing the chaotic atmosphere. Chaos is not just present in the country and its affairs but very intensely in people's psyches. Anything they see around or for that matter the very presence of being in the country reminds them of the horrible past and the emotional turmoil experienced by a majority population. The devastated beauty they see around "even the grass had been beaten to dust by the bands of Tiger cadres" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.14), the Jaffna library burnt and rebuilt again, "the bronze statue of the Jaffna giant. I wonder how long he had been there...pondering the fate of his molested motherland" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.14), the scenery in Scrap where Vasantha notices "fields packed with broken bicycles...a scrap heap of bicycles" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.83), etc., makes the people repeatedly think about the event. Judith Herman rightly states in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* that "traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life" (1997, p.33), which is exactly what happens in stories of the North section in the novel.

In Deadhouse, Dr. Ponnampalam, who left Sri Lanka even before the issue, and his son, haven't been direct victims of the strife, but the very idea that their motherland and its people are devastated and shapeless disturbs them. All these years they have been watching the country's sufferings on the TV. And when the country is temporarily at peace as the war has ended, they have come to "see what is left of the nightmare", and "he felt he had to come back and look for his own history" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.55). Similarly, there is no evidence in the novel of Vasantha's direct encounter with the war, yet he feels the disturbed atmosphere around him and wants to emerge anew like his country right now. Since these characters haven't suffered the war directly, it doesn't mean they are not affected. This is their country and their people who were destroyed and killed. They do have connections with everything that is Sri Lanka even if they are physically located in different places. Vasantha, though he is in the country itself, he belongs to the Southern part which wasn't affected much as it is predominantly a Sinhala region. He connects himself with the idea of war and desolation itself rather than siding with either of the regions and their objectives. He wants to make things right, "if damage is there, I want to invite it in. make it mine so that I can do something with it" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.106). He tries to empathise with the situation around him and tries to reconcile.

Hirschberger strongly asserts that collective trauma is noxious to individuals and groups as it "constitutes a cataclysmic event that affects not just at the individual level but society as a whole" (2018, p.3). It changes the survivors' perception and understanding of the world and "disrupts people's global sense of meaning by exposing them to the darker sides of human nature" (2018, p.3). The young man in the story *Renewals*, expresses such attitudes of feeling lost and having zero connection to his own land. He says he is there only for Dante's book and his girl who also lost her family and they plan to move to another country and start life anew. They feel they have nothing that connects them to this land and has weakened "the prevailing sense of communality" (2018, p.3). Hirschberger argues that collective trauma threatens the "fundamental sense of security with long-standing effects among the second and third generation survivors" (2018, p.3). He explains that survivors personally experience 'high rates of psychological distress' and "at the social level the second and third generation survivors display heightened individual and collective fear, feelings of vulnerability...a crisis of identity" (2018, p.3). In the novel, when Vasantha asks the young man whether the Jaffna library looks the same after it's rebuilt, he says he "was born after the damage" (Gunasekera, 2014, p.116) and only knows that

they have lost a lot. The young man hopes the library “will one day have a hundred thousand books, like it used to” (Gunesekera, 2014, p.117). Even if it doesn’t have the earlier collection of books that speak of Tamil culture and traditions, he says “it would still be worth waiting for” (Gunesekera, 2014, p.117). He longs for something that would probably allow him to connect with his land, a collective memory that helps in the “preservation of a positive collective identity” (Hirschberger, 2018, p.3).

Gilad Hirschberger further writes that traumatised societies constantly attempt to construct and reconstruct meaning through their history of trauma “not so much in an attempt to understand the past, but because of a pressing need to make sense of the present” (Hirschberger, 2018, p.7), also because the present shapes their past. This effort taken by both the victim and perpetrator groups is neatly presented in the North section of the novel which extensively brings the North and South to meet face-to-face.

Conclusion

A nation’s progress, particularly one that has been through various layers of damage due to war, solely relies on rebuilding, reconstruction, and reconciliation. Annie Gowen writes in her article *Can reconciliation heal Sri Lankan war wounds?* in The Washington Post on the speech of Sri Lanka’s President Maithripala Sirisena in 2015, at an event honouring soldiers, expresses that damaged houses, buildings, and roads have been rebuilt but, no efforts have been taken to reconcile and “rebuild broken hearts and minds” (Gowen, 2015, para 6). The article also highlights various promises by the Sirisena’s government and the Tamil society in Sri Lanka believes, his and his successor’s motives and strategies are inadequate to unite the Tamils and the Sinhalese. In this analysis of the novel, it is evident that the Northern section of Sri Lanka is not as progressive or modernised as the South. It stands testimonial to partiality shown towards one community of people and their well-being. When livelihoods are uncertain like in the novel, it is difficult to maintain peace and order within the country. It affects the sustained developments and problematises the law and order in the country as is evident in the present day Sri Lanka.

Reconciliation and psychological reconstruction must not be promises made but practically executed similar to the efforts taken to reconstruct infrastructures. Sri Lanka is very much known for both war and its exquisite beauty and tourism. Certainly, Romesh Gunasekera made his readers travel through thick and thin of this scorched land, which is building and re-building itself from the ruins and showing the light of hope for a better future someday. This novel is the effort of an outsider – the author and narrator, to approach the path of reconciliation and reconstruction through empathy, a profound understanding of the differences between North and South, criticising the act of modernisation and at the same time encouraging to see beyond the past, is an expression of hope for sustainable future in Sri Lanka, despite its present tumultuous environment.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

Corresponding author (First author): Sheloamith C has done an in-depth analysis of the selected literary text and chose the appropriate theoretical framework to write the paper.

Co-author: Dr Veena Selvam is the doctoral supervisor of the first author and has contributed by guiding the first author to conceptualise the ideas and the methods to approach them. She has reviewed the paper and offered valuable suggestions and constructive feedback.

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