Romesh Gunesekera's *Monkfish Moon*: Loneliness and Failure in Human Relationships in War-torn Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Sri Lanka, known as Ceylon until 1972, is a beautiful island country with full of natural beauty in South Asia which contains tropical forests and various scenes with biodiversity. Multilingual and multicultural people live in the country. The culture of this country is influenced primarily by Buddhism and Hinduism. There are two main traditional cultures here – the Sinhalese and the Tamil. Later the British colonial culture has also influenced the local people. Though Tamils co-existed with the Sinhalese from 3rd century, the latest history of this country has been faded by a thirty-year civil war which positively ended when Sri Lankan military defeated Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009.*Monkfish Moon* (1992), a debut of Romesh Gunesekera (b. 1954), is a collection of nine beautifully modulated and outstanding short stories in which the direct reference to specific historical and political event, the conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese, becomes vital to understanding the context of the stories. This paper suggests a revision of the ethnic and political tensions that have endangered Sri Lankan people's lives since independence in 1948. It also investigates Gunesekera's preoccupation with collision of human relationships for political and social turmoil and how individuals lead to loneliness.

Key Words: Human Relationship, Tension, Turmoil, Loneliness

Romesh Gunesekera, a British author growing up in Sri Lanka and the Philippines, addresses aspects of his native land in his first collection of stories *Monkfish Moon*. The settings of all stories are either Sri Lanka or abroad and the stories reflect socio-political features of Sri Lanka. This brilliant short-story collection portrays contemporary society wonderfully and all stories showpolitical turmoil and brokenness. The author is very much controlled and subtle in writing about the conflict. According to Camilla Orjuela, "The politicisation of ethnic difference has been a central theme in the conflict(s) in Sri Lanka" (66). Politicisation refers to the action causing an event political in character that creates awareness on politics. Gunesekera shows awareness for politics among the Sinhalese and Tamils who struggle for ethnic identity politicized by the war in Sri Lanka. In an interview titled "A novel means a new way of doing a story" with Rishi Majumder, published in 31 May 2015, Romesh Gunesekera states, "For me, if there's anything important about the book, it is to show a way of dealing with a reality, a politically problematic reality".Most of the stories explore the reality, especially political reality of various perceptions; the violence, cruelty, clash, and problems of Sri Lanka. The impact of ethnic and political mistrust on his characters' psyches is prevalent. Gunesekera writes about loneliness, the collapse of the relationships as well as the damage of relationships.

Monkfish Moon addresses the violence, conflict and strife, social and political atrocities that happen in Sri Lanka between two major ethnic and religious groups:

the Sinhalese and the Tamils and sometimes between Tamil groups. Seventy-five percent people are the Sinhalese who are predominantly Buddhist and speak Sinhala. Sixteenth percent of the total population are Tamils who are typically Hindu. Sometimes there is a division between Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils; both groups speak Tamil. Both the Sinhalese and the Tamils have Christian minorities within their own communities. Gunesekera mainly focuses on all nationalities and cultural identities framed by the conflict. All stories prove the extraordinary talent of Gunesekera through providing a narrative of the political turmoil. Orjuella writes, "For most part of the last quarter century, reports from Sri Lanka to the rest of the world have been dominated by war, terror, displacement, death and human sufferings" (5). War, terror, displacement, death and sufferings dominate and common people are profoundly affected by the chaos around the country. More than hundreds of thousands of people became displaced and many fled to First World countries for safety. The writer highlights specific historical and political events directly or indirectly, and emphasizes on civil war.

Loneliness is an essential condition of the existence of every human being and it consists of anxious feelings for the disconnection with other beings. A person suffers from loneliness even when he is surrounded by family, relatives, neighbours and friends. Loneliness can be analysed from philosophical, sociological and psychological perspectives. Existential sense makes people overcome the psychological crisis of loneliness and people become lonely in marriages, relationships, families and successful careers. People become lonely due to psychological conflicts, pain, and consciousness of loneliness and motives of seeking connections. Loneliness is primarily associated with the 20th century modernist movement. For the advancement of science and technology in the modern era, people gradually leave rural community and enter urban isolation where society is strange to each other. T. S. Eliot (1888 – 1965) maintains modernist tradition and his characters become alienated from one another and from the surroundings. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Eliot writes about the loneliness of Prufrock who pretends to be working under the delusion that he is part of a society but he is quite alone. Individuals can be lonely for the lack of interpersonal relationships, stressful events and personal limitations. Rogers expresses, "Loneliness exists at many levels and in many degrees, but it is sharpest and most poignant in the individual who has, for one reason or another, found himself standing, without some of his customary defences, a vulnerable, frightened, lonely but real self, sure of rejection in a judgment world" (109). There are different degrees of loneliness and a man feels helpless and burdened when he does not get shelter in loneliness. In "A House in the Country," Ray, the protagonist had a secured job, a flat, a car, a happy circle of acquaintances when he was in England. He had a relationship with a woman and after separation, he became lonely and helpless. Though he was physically in terms with many people, he psychologically felt alone. Broken selves, Hegel states, ". . . exist in a state of alienation" (Lavine 250). Separation makes people lonely, but they have to survive in every critical situation. Lavine's statement"empty and meaningless" (332) is relevant

for Ray who becomes lonely and returns to Colombo during war.

Relationships create interaction and separation makes people alienated from society. In "Describing relationships," Robert A. Hinde states, ". . . the nature of a group both influences and is influenced by the relationships within it, and influences and is influenced by the society of which it forms part" (10). In a particular socio-cultural structure, people interact with beliefs, values, conventions and institutions. People feel stressful if existing relationships break from family, friends and others. People become alone for personal limitations that they cannot catch the attention of others; they do not know how to make friendship and how to love etc. Ray returns home with a great expectation to overcome loneliness and to live peacefully. He gets a houseboy, Siri, but his peace obliterates when he observes the silent and peaceful Colombo turns into a tumultuous place. Ray never imagined that "peace would come so close to war" (Gunesekera 12). He dreamt of an idyllic and peaceful life, but it would be shattered by the eruption of political unrest. Gunesekera describes,"The night had always been noisy: frogs, drums, bottles, dogs barking at the moon. Then one evening there was silence . . . There was no wind . . . The fireflies had disappeared. The trees and bushes in the small garden were still. Only the stars above moved, pulsing in the sky" (11). All these dismal images such as frogs, drums, bottles, dogs barking reflect the gruesome political condition of Sri Lanka's turbulent history and its traumatic consequences. Ray, Siri and other citizens are frightened of the silence and still weather and the situation demand election or military solution.

The inter-personal relationship between Ray and Siri, master-slave relationship, is not conventional, as they talk, drink beer and discuss different socio-political issues. Ray encourages Siri to talk and develop human relationship giving some privileges. He does not allow Siri to go out to buy batteries at nearly eleven at night. He thinks Siri's emancipation avoids the modes of dominion and tries to increase his confidence. Though Ray understands Siri's presence, he wants change in the status of working relationship, which is of a relationship of close friendship. Lavine states, "Hegel has seen, according to Marx, that the slave lives by the work he performs and he becomes independent through this work, whereas the master remains dependent on the slave's labor" (222). Marx thinks that slaves get freedom through works and masters always depend on the works of servants. Ray is untraditional and wants a change in the master-slave relationship. He becomes "generous with the pay and reasonable of his demands" (Gunesekera15). Ray can overcome tradition because of his education and consciousness. The typical master-slave relationship does not work here. In capitalism, master applies power over slaves and Ray is humanistic in his behavior.

How Ray behaves and talks is abnormal as Siri expresses, "Why do you treat me like a…" (15).Siri feels conflict in his mind seeing Ray who feels himself responsible to protect Siri. Human mind either gives importance to authority or asks questions to their servants. Ray is so generous that he loves Siri who gives the highest in turn. Simplicity brightens his character so highly that when Ray has bought furniture for

his room he says, "I don't need all this . . . I have nothing to put in the cupboard. The old bed was fine, just as it was" (15).Ray tries to make Siri's life comfortable and his manners seem to be strange to Siri. Ray wants to deconstruct the master-slave system destroying social discrimination and challenges societal structure. The bond between two human beings is normal and Ray asks about his family, family members and his village house. Ray suggests, "Go back to the country? Village life?" and Siri answers, "Yes, Yes, I could go back to a life in the country…If there was a house like this in the country" (18). People feel fascinated of city in the modern period. Siri expects to build a well-furnished house in his village and Ray encourages, "Maybe you should start saving some money" (18). Ray wants to buy a land and make a house for Siri who replies, "Why, sir? Why do you want to do for me?" (20). It's a question for a slave that a master wants change in slave's life.

War-torn situation creates uncertainty in civil society. Ray observes, "The sky that morning was grey. Large, heavy clouds rippled overhead. Crows crowded the flame tree by the main road. Bats hung on the telephone lines" (16). Sky, cloud, crows and bats indicate the gloomy picture of the country. He also notices, ". . . the sky was dark and smudged. Crows were flapping about" (20) due to political turmoil. He observes, "Many of the white flowers had fallen. But in the garden next to the temple a tree with the blood-red variety of the flower stood in rich bloom" (20-21). The falling of white flowers indicates the death of innocent people and various kinds of blood-red flowers indicate the bloodshed of different civilians. Ray sweats and feels anxious seeing smoke and ashes. Orjuela writes, "In war zone towns and villages, a variety of conflict lines affect the lives of ordinary people" (7). Common people and the minority communities in cities and villages led their lives in terror. In the conflict of twenty six years ofcivil war Tamil Hindus and Christians were suicide bombers, Muslim and Buddhist Singhalese were also violent. In "This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War review – a moving portrayal of the agonies of the conflict," William Dalrymple expresses the memory of Samanth Subramanian who states, "They ambushed soldiers and assassinated politicians, but they also killed monks and pilgrims in the majestic Buddhist shrine of Anuradhapura, shot up Sinhalese women and children across the country, and blew up aeroplanes and trains". Tigers brutally attack and kill many innocent Sinhalese across Sri Lanka.

Curfew is common that becomes insignificant when people go through this every now and then. So he shares personal and national issues with Siri who thinks that, "nobody really cares, do they? Except for themselves" (Gunesekera13). Ray thinks that everybody thinks about him, but many people are humanistic. He imagines of building two small houses, one for each of them will never materialize. Ray is more practical and matured as he knows better than Siri that no building, no city, no country, and no home anywhere is safe. A Muslim news agent, Ibrahim, who secretly sells Tamil publication, is killed and his shop is burnt. Siri asks Ray, "And you, Sir, have seen the world. Tell me where. Where is a good place?" (24). Siri dreams to go to a utopian land which is absurd. To convince Siri Ray says, "It has happened all over

the world" (24).Chaos, tumult and violence are common phenomenon of the world.

Destruction of war makes Siri decide to go away from city and Ray becomes lonely and depressed after Siri's departure. To overcome loneliness, he expects the existence of Siri. So he expresses, ". . . the veranda can wait" (24-25). He will wait forever for Siri, because he wants deconstruction-reconnection in their relationships through building a new house and the cinnamon garden. He becomes alone and feels, ". . . he was on fire, but the palms of his hands were wet. Out in the garden fireflies made circles. Frogs croaked. The sky trembled like the skin of a drum" (25). Ray feels nervous and sweats; the outer stormy environment is associated with his psychological storm. John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick write, ". . . loneliness developed as a stimulus to get humans to pay more attention to their social connections, and to reach out toward others, to renew frayed or broken bonds" (7). Loneliness promotes a person to be connected and reconnected with other human beings. Gunesekera shows anxiety in relationships, in separation and in permanent loneliness of Ray.

"Captives" is the most interesting story that represents a relationship between two guests and a host. The story is narrated by Udaweera, a Sri Lankan. Sri Lankans are very hospitable as Mr. Udaweera eagerly waits for the arrival of the first guests Mr. and Mrs. Horniman, two English people, to reside in the hotel situated in central Sri Lanka. Hornimans, the couple, are familiar with modern Western culture and visit Sri Lanka to encounter other cultures. They mainly desire to see the frescoed mountain fortress *Sigiriya*. Udaweera, the manager, persists personally guiding them to the site. Udaweera gives the couple Blue Suite with two rooms and a bathroom. In the occasion of the honeymoon Mrs. Horniman becomes impressed and mentions, "My goodness, this is the real thing"(Gunesekera 30) taking note of the room with four-poster bed and lace canopy. Udaweera is pleased and exclaims, "Look Madam, hot water!" (30) and "Tonight the whole *maligawa* is yours!" (33). Udaweera tells them to feel homely. The relationship between East and West is reflected in the cultural interaction as culture is a matter of acceptance and rejection. Udaweera offers to bring Sri Lankan popular food *Bistake* (slice of wild pig), coconut sauce, sliced bread, fried bitter-gourd, sliced tomato and cucumber. Udaweera asks whether they want to climb Srigiriya-the rock fortress built by Kassyapa and they agree. He proposes that Nimal will guide them, but Mr. Horniman states, "I wanted to explore. And why can't we do it alone? Always guides. You can't do anything in the country without guides" (36).Tourist guide is a profession in South Asian countries, but Mr Horniman as Western wants to explore Sri Lanka without a guide.

Udaweera wants a chain of relation with Mrs. Horniman who misunderstands him and out of his tension, hestates, "I wanted Mrs. Horniman to understand that I was not a base or vulgar man" (45).Udaweera wants to prove that he is not a bad man. He likes to accompany Mrs. Horniman alone. He can be compared with Forster's Dr. Aziz who lingered with Adela Quested in the Marabar Caves. Unlike Aziz, Udaweera is allowed to have real sensual feelings, although nothing happens between the

manager and Mrs. Horniman, just as nothing happens between Aziz and Adela. Udaweera comes to know that after the visit the couple will return to London. Mrs. Horniman expresses, "It will be funny going back there, to be living alone again, after all this" (44). She indicates that after going to London they will be separated and lonely what is usual in Western society. Udaweera imagines touching a Western woman when he knows that Hornimans are not married. After their departure Udaweera suffers from guilty consciousness and he and his servant Nimal befall alone and get disconnected from his guests.

A person may face loneliness at any stage of life for broken relations caused by social disruptive events. Some people move to foreign lands, become lonely and cry for home. In existential philosophy loneliness is the essence of being human. Lavine argues, relating Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's ideas about individuals, "…the crisis of the modern world is a problem concerning the individual, the human self. The consciousness of the human subject is the only key to the diagnosis and possible cure of the problems of the modern era" (326). Individual problems create crises and conscious human beings try to overcome any adverse situation. In "Batik," Gunesekera represents the impact of ethnic conflict and difference that generates hatred among people. In the story the relationship between Nalini, a Sinhalese and Tiru, a Tamil, was in "perfect agreement" (52). They migrate to London, decorate their new house wonderfully and cook Sri Lankan food such as chicken, rice, dal over there. Nalini shares relationship with her mother who anticipates the reality of the ethnic conflict and says, "Do whatever you think is right, darling. I trust you, but there are enough problems in life without asking for more" (55). Nalini's mother understands ethnic crisis but she respects the individual choice. She talks about many problems of the world and the differences of cultures and religions of two ethnic communities in Sri Lanka. Nalini thinks about change in traditional concept and expects harmony and peace through the relationship. She believes, "…she and Tiru could show her mother the world had improved. Things come together, they grow better" (55). They are determined to prove their love as ideal that can make all the things together. They have moved to London, settled and made hybrid identities. They are so attached that "Even when he was quiet she knew she was in his thoughts. Their lives were about themselves" (55).She feels her existence in his thinking.

Their relationship politicizes and crumples and Nalini feels her husband going distant for violence. Tiru is "without a word, he went out into the sitting-room . . . turn the TV on. He had been like this for weeks" (54). He always watches TV, reads newspaper and feels disturbed for the war-torn situation. The idea of racial superiority worsens the intolerance and increases a psychological conflict between them. Orjuella rightly states, "Two nationalisms, with opposing views of how the state should be constituted, are constructed in opposition to each other" (6). The dichotomized conflict affects two communities for their two ideologies. Tiru stops speaking with Nalini, his sudden change affects and they feel separated psychologically.

Sri Lankan civil society is centred on patriarchy, but Tiru does not preserve that. The communal atrocity destroys harmony of their motherland and it simultaneously affects the emotional sides of the couple. Both become lonely, helpless and strange by the brutal news about the army patrol killing in the north and the murderersattack the Tamils in Colombo. The author writes, "In the world that Nalini and Tiru had brought together, the world they clasped so tightly together, they had thought there was no room for such things" (56). Theybelieved that nothing would be able to break their bond. The conflict is not only ethnic but also religious. He had talks with Eelam "a call for an independent Tamil state" (55) though he is not active in politics. Barbarous and brutal memories make them helpless. Their green tropical motherland transformed into "grotesque images of smoke and devastation . . . of the whole city" (56). More than hundreds and thousands of people have been displaced internally and internationally in the different waves of violence as Tiru's sister and brother-in-law migrate. Nalini is humanistic and he prays for peace. People who live abroad feel motherland greatly and the gloomy event spoils peace of their minds.

The turmoil worsens the situation and some claim that extremists created the problem to separate two communities and some think "it was a carefully rehearsed plot by Sinhala's chauvinists to burn Tamil families out house by house" (56). There's a quiet intensity to the characters as Tiru is consumed by news coverage and he collects all articles from all newspapers regarding the events. Technology connects him with his home and he becomes anxious and alienated. He seems" to want to brutalize his own sensibilities in an act of solidarity with the victims he began to call his people" (57). He becomes angry, when Nalini states, "I'm pregnant" (58). The happy news of pregnancy do not make him psychologically emotional. He reacts, "Now they are talking of bombing" (58). Nalini waits for the improvement of relationships, but Tiru is concerned about conflict. His correlation between his wife's pregnancy and bombing is very antithetical. Staying in the same house, they become lonely.

Nalini is optimistic about relationship and Tiru is obsessed with the war-torn Sri Lanka. He humiliates Nalini and thinks that she is callous about the turmoil. Nalini replies, "No, you are the one who doesn't understand. You think you know everything but you don't" (59). Nalini's pain is that Tiru brings the ethnic conflict in their relationship. Lavine states, "…alienation dominates the relationship of love" (333). Alienation can be observed in love-relationships. When Tiru gives Nalini a cup of water, ". . . she took it carefully from him, not letting her fingers touch his" (59). She throws away the cup and it bursts into hundred pieces which indicates the broken relationship. She wants to collect all the pieces and stick them together with a lick of glue or spittle. She thinks that they mutually can reconstruct the relationship. But all things cannot come together as a Modern English poet, W. B. Yeats (1865 – 1939) says in "The Second Coming", "Things fall apart, the center cannot hold/Mere anarchy loosed upon the world" (3-4).Things break into pieces in the modern time and it is difficult to repair. Civil war disrupts Nalini and Tiru's marriage, their businesses and

home. Their relationship has swiftly and violently brought down and after that Gunesekera mentions, "She felt hand on her. It was warm. She knew he could feel her pulse. He pressed his hand to her and kept it there" (60). Tiru is psychologically obsessed with war and recovers from the trauma for Nalini's strong mentality.

"Ullswater" is a sad story of a man who regrets the distance with his brother after his death;a woman regrets that she left him behind. It is also a story about Ranjit, the niece of the narrator, who tries to renew their "frayed family ties" (65). Fragmented relationships between two brothers and memory of father make the narrator and his niece feel uncomfortable. Ranjit wants to know about his father from his uncle. The narrator says:

> I hadn't seen Senaka for years, ever since I moved down south. There were never an occasion for us to get together . . . we had our own worlds, our own occupation. He had his books, he was married, and is any case did not care for company, and I was busy running around trying to find a job, looking for ideas; I had tried all sorts of things before turning to teaching English: politics, newspapers, the post office, even the palm-oil trade – but for me it has always been a hand to mouth existence. (64-65)

The narrator and Senaka were busy with career and they forgot brotherly relationships. Senaka was absorbed in books from his childhood and she could be anything as Civil Service holder or barrister "if he didn't want to fight for our natural rights" (66). They make the happiest family in the town. The narrator remarks, "Love was not only blind but blinding. Desire blinded" (68). Love makes people blind and separation makes them psychologically agonized. Senaka's indifference makes his wife Sonia lonely.

During Sri Lankan national Independence and Second World War, Senaka was indifferent about atom bomb and other issues. The narrator narrates that after war, Lankans are busy to construct a new society and Senaka is absorbed in books and love. The narrator states, "While people like me ran around vainly trying to shape a new society, he preferred to sit in his garden and watch his flowers grow and read his books . . ." (69). He is infatuated for building his career in England as he is not frustrated of Sri Lanka's freedom and political leadership. He expects humanitarians like Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1948) and Subash Chandra Bose (1897 –1945), prominent leaders of the Indian independence movement in British-ruled India who brought change in India. But in Sri Lanka "Everyone wanted to be Head Boy in the Governor's house" (66) which creates obstacles for the development of relationships. Senaka does not feel anyone or anything he belongs to.

In the mid-twenties love blinded Senaka got married to a daughter of a wealthy man. This marriage creates separation between two brothers and Senaka loses his individuality. The things given by his father-in-law suddenly emerged to him to be "a complete illusion" (70) when he faces the reality of outer world. A sense of individualism makes him alienated, but the narrator understands the psychological condition of his brother that he feels, ". . . the whole place, the times, the land, the sky,

the country, family, history, destiny all conspired against him" (70). Senaka feels uncomfortable everywhere, even he feels uneasy with the sound of a heavy ceiling fan. Cacioppo, John T. and William Patrick write,"Chronic loneliness not only makes us miserable, then, it can also make us sick" (34). A constant sense of loneliness makes people sick. Senaka's mental state becomes critical, the narrator endeavours to deconstruct relationship. The narrator asks, "What's happened, Senaka?" (72) to recollect their lost time, but they sit there like strangers.

Senaka misunderstands and feels lonely even within his family. He says, "You hated me. You hated me for intruding, for being born, for being me. For not being one of you. You thought it was my bloody fault…" (72). His negative approach crashes his psychology and to give importance to his own choice and satisfaction he leaves family and society. Being conscious about his self, even he is indifferent about his son. He says, "Go! Leave me alone" (74). Senaka wants to live alone. His drunkenness and hopelessness make him so frightened, vulnerable and weak that, "Two days later he was dead. He shot himself in the head" (75). Senaka's hopelessness makes him despaired; he tries to escape from distress. When he cannot deal with critical situations, he commits suicide. Modern anxiety excessively raises the rates of suicide which indicate a suicide epidemic. Ranjit is alone and disconnected from his parents and country. Still he wants to know with harsh voice, "…what his father really want?" (76). His eagerness to know his roots was so intense that he waits to be connected with memory till the end of the story. The narrator emphasises that Sonia is not accountable for separation. He connects Ranjit with his mother who leads a lonely life.

In "Storm Petrel"two friends meet in Britain. The narrator and CK went to Sri Lanka about Seventy-nine. The country was very peaceful and economically sound. The narrator states, "Then ten rupees, even five rupees, was good money . . . But now! Everybody has fists of money. Fifty rupees, hundred rupees, it's just nothing. Nothing!" (79). The narrator differentiates the glorious past when money has value and gloomy present when money becomes valueless. The optimistic little clerk has just been back to Sri Lanka on holiday, expresses to the narrator about his dreams to return a guest house by the Indian Ocean in his motherland. His statement is, "I am going back – home to Sri Lanka!" (81). CK is haunted by some sense of loss and thinks of returning. To him Ceylon is very prosperous and tourists feel attraction for that. People abroad always feel to return to their sweet home. Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* writes, "…imaginary homelands" (10) and "broken mirror" (11). Immigrants imagine to return home and memory is like a broken mirror to them. They want to repair but cannot. CK becomes surprised seeing the development even in village and he plans to build a guest house in Sri Lanka. That time he imagined to be connected with his relatives and native people as in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Peter Barry writes, "a deep nostalgia for an earlier age when faith was full and authority intact" (83).The modernist feature nostalgia allures people to recollect childhood but nothing ideal exists in the native country. Just

before materializing his dream, he hears about the massacres in Vavuniya, in Colombo during the turmoil as, ". . . in just two months the whole island would be engulfed in flames: the East Coast like the North would become a blazing battleground. Mined and strafed and bombed and pulverized . . ." (84). The war increases his tension and he decides to take time before returning permanently to his root. The modernized decaying buildings indicate the disintegration of Sri Lankans and the war-torn situation forbids C K to return home. His expectations and dreams give a new dimension in his life to explore a free future. He says, "You know, I am already a happy man now" (84). The happiness that he wanted in his native land is available abroad. Gunesekera writes about Sri Lankans who live abroad, feel scared and despaired during and after the turmoil.

"Ranvali" is based on relationships among different characters and it also conveys sadness and regret of the narrator who realizes that she made mistakes about certain aspects to her father. After realization she is unable to improve their relationship because he is no longer alive. To analyze characterization of her father she is contrasted with the qualities of the father. Her past memories encourage her to revisit her father's old holiday bungalow and she discovers new feelings toward her Communist father who said, "What this country needs is a revolution, a communist revolution!" (93). The followers of communism used to believe that communist revolution would bring a change in Sri Lanka. The narrator mentions, "He wanted a bloodless revolution: a change in a way we all lived brought about by a shift in our minds" (97). Her father wanted non-violence and change in history and in civilians' lives.

When he was seventy one, Sri Lankan revolution and bloodshed happened. Gunesekera writes:

> The bodies of hundreds of young boys choked the rivers for weeks. The water turned red. They wanted a revolution: young and angry and now forever dead. Father's friends would have been known some of those activists: they might have been to our house drinking coffee into the early hours of the morning, arguing: Why didn't he see what was coming? Thuggery, *goondas*, terrorism. (98)

The author shows that many young revolutionaries and children were seen dead in the river and the water turned red. This indicates the bloodshed of war and some friends of narrator's father were among them. Her father looked for peace and quiet.

The setting of the story is in a heavenly bungalow in Ranvali, by the coast of India. Narrator's father brought Carolis to the bungalow and he lives here even after her father's death. Master-slave relation was very emotional and Carolis states, "He was such a man of the world but in the end liked nothing better than to come to sleep here at Ranvali, alone with the sea and the breeze, away from people, away from talkers, away from all the tangles of the town. He came every chance he got, every week, alone" (92). In his lifetime narrator's father builds Ranvali to live peacefully and for recreation. Carolis feels for master more than his daughter. He becomes lonely and

misses his master. The young lady happily goes to the bungalow that is painted beautifully, full of colour and life as her "speeding heart sang", she portrays "the slim whitish trunks of the palm trees flashing by and the blue blur of the sea foaming; going like the wind" (89). She describes how the "yellow flowers and spindly coconut trees leaned towards the sea, where the white surf curled on a ribbon of slowly disappearing gold sand" (92). All descriptions about nature, people and her encounters with them at Ranvali reflect her remembering of happy memories of her childhood.

In "Ranvali" the storm that encircles the bungalow when the young lady visits there. It clearly expresses her thoughts and gives a greater sense of the inner turmoil. The storm is an essential part of the setting that Gunesekera uses to remind certain feelings. It signifies narrator's inner turmoil at discovering original feelings about past. The bungalow and the storm serve as conditions to her reflections on her father. She explains after storm "the whole place was flooded. Lots of young coconuts were down and plenty of branches, but fortunately only one tree had been hit" (100).The images of falling young coconut indicates the death of innocent people and the storm reminds the gloomy past.

"Carapace"is a story about a middle-class young woman Anura Perera, who selects partner from boyfriends and leaning toward the one she doesnot love. Vijoy, a cook of a sea beach, will not be able to afford to buy expensive things and visit Singapore. But Mr Perera can take her to live in Australia and he can "give her modern house, a big car, fancy clothes, shoes… expensive things . . . unswerving respect" (109). To materialistic people relationship has no meaning in comparison to money. Anura chooses Mr Perera so that she can achieve material gain. In "Straw Hurts," Gunesekera deals with political violence after independence. Civilians were concerned about horrible incidents. Politicians usually want power through violence. People were talking about election everywhere especially in tea stalls as all politicians wanted to win. Manika says, "Whoever wins, my life will not change" (119). This is the realization of a mother. But her son thinks, "But *amma*, we have to win, to change the world" (119). Young generation thinks about a change.

In the title story "Monkfish Moon," Gunesekera's melancholy is clear. Peter, a wealthy Sri Lankan businessman, never moved though, "Monsoons came and went, governments topples, the country lurched from left to right, but he remained untouched in his swivel-chair, holding audience with cigarette in one hand, a whisky-soda in the other and a vast stomach in between" (125). He brought the world in his hands and he did not lose a cent even during the rebellion of seventy-one, the Eelam wars of the Tamil Tigers. He begins to show exactly how far the course of his life has moved during an awkward dinner party with family and friends."In this country now everybody is frightened" (126), declares Peter, an obese business magnate. He talks about shooting, burning and the adulteries of the people. The country's political history gives an idea of ferocious battles between Tamil and Sinhalese and the assassination of the president. The description of Sri Lanka in Mr.

Gunesekera's stories shows that it is a profoundly troubled place. Mayhem threatens behind the simplest act, and even outsiders and emigrants cannot escape the violence.

Peter thinks that the Sri Lankans are frightened because "they feel guilty for all the things they have done and all the things they haven't done…Guilty people are frightened people" (126).He further thinks that Sri Lankans feel guilty of everything that they have done. They did many wrong things and Peter is very open-minded and expresses that he wanted to be a monk and write poetry. Instead of choosing to make money, live like a sensualist and growing fat off his country, Peter claims to be fearless, guiltless, with "nothing to hide" and "nothing to fear" (126). Peter's expectation to become a spiritualist like a monk does not materialize as he says, "…I really wanted to be a monk. I told you, didn't I? A *monk*. Give up everything you know?" (138). The war-torn situation changed the track of Peter's life – his mission was to become a monk, but he becomes a businessman.

The political history of Sri Lanka is crucial as portrayed in *Monkfish Moon* and in *Reef, a novel by the same author*. *Gunesekera* writes, "The whole country had been turned from jungle to paradise to jungle again, as it has been even more barbarically in my own life" (25). The author observed the negative change of Sri Lanka and he uses allusions to violence to portray the condition of people's daily life. He contemplates on loneliness and the loss of human relationships in all stories of *Monkfish Moon* where contemporary war-torn situation in Sri Lanka is prevalent. The political turmoil makes Lankans sad and guilty, increases fear in their minds both at home and abroad. They reflect the shocking fragility of the whole modern world as Mrs Horniman states"History is not a simple matter" (39). History speaks and it is so important that it leads people to know bloodshed, hate and separation. Gunesekera with subtlety and unmannered melancholy writes about their lives dominated by war, terror, displacement, death and sufferings. People intertwine in multiple relationships that become intense or superficial or boring and it changes. Orjuela writes, "Building peace is both about ending wars and about building just societies where conflicts can be solved nonviolently" (62). Peace prevails after war and it builds a new society without violence. Gunesekera so skillfully writes the history, culture and politics of Sri Lanka and he does not glorify and romanticize the warin *Monkfish Moon*; rather, he shows an exploration of loneliness and broken relationships. He portrays a division between characters as employers and employees, best-intentioned characters, alienation between husbands and wives, separation between brothers and friends.

Human relationships are sometimes biological and sometimes depend on personal preferences. The tensions of ethnic strife influence his characters' psyches that lead to solitude and despair. Gunesekera shows the individuals and communities who face identity conflicts that arise at home and abroad due to civil war. People get a new form of identity as Orjuela writes, "We live in an era of extreme nationalism and violent conflict, where identities are instrumentally politicised,

polarised and threatened. Interestingly, this is also the environment within which there is a cry for alternatives—for the promotion of inclusive identities, cross-ethnic understanding and solidarity as a key to conflict transformation" (184). Identities of civilians were politicized, polarized and threatened and people wanted change in their identity. Conscious civil society worked to establish peace in the war-torn situation of Sri Lanka. Gunesekera explores the humanistic approaches of civilians who work to deconstruct and reform the identity of the nation.

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