The Context: Journal of English Studies
Volume 12, Issue 6, September 2025
ISSN: 2349-4948
www.thecontext.in

Article

Civil War and the Fragmented Selves: A Critical Study of Romesh Gunesekera's *Noontide Toll*

Anwesa Chattopadhyay

Assistant Professor of English, Directorate of Open and Distance Learning, University of Kalyani, Kalyani, Nadia, West Bengal, India;
canwesa1993@gmail.com

Accepted version published on 5th September 2025

DOI https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17061144

Abstract: Sri Lanka (previously known as "Ceylon") had been a site of ethnic tension over the decades, culminating in the Civil War, which continued for more than twenty-six years, taking the lives of millions. This horrendous event, despite taking several scores of lives with the ground being soaked in young blood, has produced an entire body of writings that essentially captures the traumatic experiences of the victims and survivors. Romesh Gunesekera's collection of short stories, *Noontide Toll* (2014), explores the complexities of reconstruction in the context of the three-decade-long Civil War between the Sri Lankan Government, ruled by the people of Sinhalese descent, and the Tamil Separatist guerrilla, also known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This paper aims to study the short stories from the collection that reflect the trauma of the War and its various manifestations.

Keywords: Civil war; ethnic tension; memory; crisis; trauma

Introduction

The small island nation of Sri Lanka (previously known as Ceylon) had been a site of ethnic tension over the decades, with its ultimate culmination in the Civil War, which continued for more than twenty-six years, taking the lives of millions. This horrendous event, despite taking several scores of lives with the ground being soaked in young blood, has produced an entire body of writings that essentially captures the traumatic experiences of the victims and survivors. Romesh Gunesekera's collection of short stories, *Noontide Toll* (published in 2014), explores the problems of reconstruction in the context of the three-decade-long Civil War between the Sri Lankan Government, ruled by the people of Sinhalese descent, and the Tamil Separatist guerrilla, or the

ISSN 2349-4948

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Behind the façade of peace, the horrors of war lurked in the minds of the civilians as the mysterious hoteliers try to conceal their scars beneath the collars, genial old soldiers are secretly identified as perpetrators of brutal crimes, and young Sinhalese men pine for Tamil girls whose brothers have died in their hands. This paper aims to study some select short stories from the collection that reflect the war's trauma and its various manifestations.

To locate the root of the crisis that had such a devastating impact, it is necessary to situate the events within the larger context. Historical records indicate that Sri Lanka has been inhabited since the earliest stages of human civilization. For more than two million years, the land has been inhabited by the descendants of the Stone Age, who thrived on ancient practices such as hunting and gathering. From around the fifth century B.C.E., the country was invaded by people from northern India, thereby laying the foundation for the modern Sinhalese population. A section of the Tamil population migrated to the island country two centuries later and settled in Jaffna. While the Sinhalese section of the society embraced Buddhism as their religion, the majority of the Tamils were Hindu or Christian, and ultimately became a minority group, forming a small section of the larger Sri Lankan population.

Mythological beliefs persisted that the legendary North Indian Prince Vijaya and his 700 followers landed near Puttalam after being banished from his own kingdom in the ancient Sinhapura. An ardent devotee of Gautama Buddha, Vijaya founded the first Sinhalese kingdom in the city of Anuradhapura. The early Buddhist emissaries brought a small branch of the Bodhi tree under which the Lord Buddha attained Enlightenment and laid the groundwork for Buddhism in the island country. However, tensions with the Tamil kingdoms in India disrupted the easy flow of life, and a Pandyian invasion in 433 BCE led to the establishment of the rock fortress at Sigiriya as the capital. Legends surrounding the fortress also reveal the heinous tale of King Kassapa, who built his residence on the top of the rock after murdering his own father. Kassapa's rule spanned a relatively shorter period of time, following which the capital returned to Anuradhapura before moving to Polonnaruwa in 1070, where it remained for the next 150 years.

Ceylon was invaded by the Portuguese in 1505, and a good rapport with the King gained them easy access to the land. The Portuguese invaders were allowed to build a fort at Colombo, with favourable concessions in return for the King's protection. The country came under Dutch control in 1658 and was further invaded by the British in 1815. As the British began ruling the nation in 1815, the Sinhalese population was roughly 3 million, while the Tamils comprised only a small portion, with around 300,000 people. With the consolidation of British power over the island, nearly a million people of Tamil origin were brought over to work as laborers in the tea, coffee, and rubber plantations. The Tamils formed a majority in the northern part of the country, where many educational institutions were established, in line with the infrastructural development. Even in the civil service, Tamils gained preference over the Sinhalese, which fostered antagonism among the civilians. The situation of communal unrest pervaded throughout the colonial rule. However, there was a brief period of unity

between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, which culminated in the formation of the Ceylon National Congress in 1919. A constitution was framed with some considerations, but it was not effective until the country gained independence in 1948.

In 1978, the country was renamed Sri Lanka and became a democratic socialist republic. The new Sinhalese government implemented specific rules and regulations that discriminated against the Tamils. Soon, Sinhalese was declared the official language of the country, which inevitably eliminated the Indian Tamils from government service. A law was also passed that barred the Tamils from getting citizenship. These measures heightened the ethnic tension as the Tamil people were denied equal rights and opportunities in the country. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was formed by Prabhakaran in 1976 to acquire a homeland for the Tamils in Sri Lanka in the northern and eastern parts of the island. This led to the beginning of the Civil War in 1983, which continued for the next twenty-six years, finally concluding in 2009 with a death toll of over 1,50,000 from both sides, including the civilians.

The long Civil War in Sri Lanka, despite taking several scores of lives, with the ground being soaked in young blood, has triggered the production of an entirely new body of literature that would essentially capture the horrors of war and the ensuing trauma. Several writers from Sri Lanka and abroad have reflected upon this ethnic conflict in their fictional and non-fictional accounts. *The Broken Palmyra* (1990) by Rajan Hoole offers a composite account of the Tamil crisis in Sri Lanka, thereby exposing the citizens' agony over the contemporary chain of events. The Diasporic dilemma and a sense of belonging permeate the writings of A. Sivanandan, whose classic novel *When Memory Dies* (1997) vividly portrays a country struggling with the dual pressures of colonialism and ethnic division. *A Story of Brief Marriage* (2016) by Anuk Arudpragasam presents an altogether different approach to exposing the brutality faced by an individual in the final phase of the war that ended in 2009.

Originally a British writer of diasporic descent, Romesh Gunesekera was born in 1954 to a Sinhalese Christian family in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He spent his early years in Sri Lanka and the Philippines before moving to England in 1971. Gunesekera started his career in writing at an early age and received the Arts Council Writers' Award in 1991. As a diasporic writer, he drew on his memory and past experiences to reflect on the various issues that have arisen in the island nation. His first collection of short stories, *Monkfish Moon* (1992), reflected the ethnic and political tensions that have perturbed the nation since independence. The stories in the collection offer a living account of the turmoil and remembrances of individual lives (both in Sri Lanka and Britain) that have been indelibly marked by the political catastrophes of history's passage. His first novel, *Reef* (1994), won the Yorkshire Post Book Award (Best First Work) and was shortlisted for both the Booker Prize for Fiction and the Guardian Fiction Prize. The book is narrated by a young Sri Lankan boy named Triton, who is sent to work for a marine biologist named Mister Salgado. Forced to leave Sri Lanka by the worsening political situation, they move to London, where Triton opens a restaurant. Gunesekera's second novel, *The Sandglass* (1998), centres on the character

ISSN 2349-4948

of Prins Ducal, a Sri Lankan businessman, and his search for the truth about his father's death. It was awarded the inaugural BBC Asia Award for Achievement in Writing and Literature. His next novel, *Heaven's Edge* (2002), is set on an island in the near future. His latest works include *The Match* (2006), *The Prisoner of Paradise* (2012), and *Noontide Toll* (2014).

Romesh Gunesekera's *Noontide Toll* (2014) explores the scars of war and the problems of reconstruction in the context of the three-decade-long civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil separatist guerrilla, the LTTE. Originally a collection of fourteen interlinked stories, *Noontide Toll* is divided into two sections: the first section is entitled "North", and the corresponding second section is entitled "South." The stories are narrated by Vasantha, a van driver for hire, who drives the aid workers, returning exiles, and tentative entrepreneurs across the battle-scarred landscapes of Sri Lanka. The Civil War is finally over, but the trauma of the past is still haunting. Behind the façade of peace, we are made to remember the war: mysterious hoteliers conceal scars under their collars; genial old soldiers are secretly identified as perpetrators of brutal crimes; young Sinhalese men pine after Tamil girls whose brothers died at their hands. Vasantha keeps his own counsel, lingering on the periphery of his passengers' stories, but as time goes on, he reveals a small quantity of his own story too. The title of the book echoes the horrors of death that had traumatized the people of Sri Lanka and soaked their lives in a pool of blood.

The first section of the book, titled "North," takes us to the northern provinces of Sri Lanka. The first story, "Full Tank", acts as a Prologue to the entire narrative of pain, echoing the trauma of destruction. Vasantha, a retired clerk who has invested all his savings in purchasing a tourist van, is on his way to the ancient Jaffna fort with Mrs. Cooray (from the new Heritage Agency) and two young men from Holland. They halted for the night at the local "Hibiscus Hotel," which did not offer any promise of luxury or extravagance. The tourists and Mrs. Cooray retire for the night, and Vasantha gradually finds his way to the staff quarters, where he is allotted a room. In the absence of any other driver, he was lured by the possibility of having a long, uninterrupted sleep without any external interference.

The second story, entitled "Folly," opens the following morning, and the readers are introduced to a new character, the overtly enthusiastic guide, Dilshan, who had served the Sri Lankan army during the Civil War. Under Dilshan's efficient guidance, the visitors are taken to the famous Dutch Fort at Jaffna, which has been a silent witness to the violent saga of bloodshed and destruction. Dilshan took them around the massive structure and narrated some disjointed facets of history. The visitors were taken near the prison, and Dilshan narrated the tragic tale of a lady commander from the LTTE, who had just given birth to a child - the incident churned up old memories in Dilshan's mind as he struggled to find a logical harmony between his sense of duty towards his nation and his guilty conscience. The Europeans inspected the exteriors of the Fort and explored the possibilities of executing a heritage project. In the end, they could not decide whether it would be feasible to execute a renovation project and turn the place into a heritage site because of the atrocities that were committed in the name of 'War'.

Their investigation, which definitely implied a racist interrogation, is ironically overturned when Vince discovered a piece of plaster on a brick, on which "JUSTICE OF PEACE" was written in English. The story closes with Vasantha's pragmatic observation: "The past is what you leave as you go. There is nothing more to it" (25).

In the story entitled "Mess", Vasantha took Father Perera and his friend Patrick (from England) to the military base located in a small town, some thirty kilometres from Jaffna. The van rode slowly through unfathomable darkness. A local soldier who stood near a culvert, smoking a cigarette, showed them the way after some casual interrogations. As they reached the army camp, all were welcomed inside a big room and offered welcome drinks. The major soon joined them and turned out to be a jovial man. A long, extensive discourse on the contemporary situation, politics, and civil strife made way for the sumptuous dinner (exactly at 8 p.m., according to the military watch). Vasantha found it challenging to deal with such a variety of dishes; however, he could not help but admire the taste of the famous Jaffna mangoes. After a brief casual exchange and a mandatory group photo, the guests prayed for their leave. On the way back to the town, Father Perera and Mr. Patrick meditated on the true intention behind visiting the army camp - it was to find out whether the Major was the same person who was once in a brief yet intense affair with Patrick's sister. In the end, he could not be sure, despite every possibility, whether Major was indeed a guilty man or not.

The "Deadhouse" narrates the tale of Dr. Ponnampalam, a retired Professor of History who had migrated to the United Kingdom in the early 1960s. After living more than fifty years of his life as a Sri Lankan diaspora in Britain, he has returned to his hometown in search of his ancestral home, "Palm Villa." Vasantha rode Dr. Ponnampalam and his apparently disinterested son, Mahen, to the massive building, which had been converted to a guest house under the genuine initiative of its present owner, Madam Sujitha. Milton, the caretaker of the guest house, welcomed the trio inside and even took them around. Despite his earnest effort, Dr. Ponnampalam could not recognise his room, where he had spent the initial years of his life. They were soon joined by Madam Sujitha, who turned out to be a generous host. Sujitha informed them that her father had purchased the house several years ago. Due to its massive structure, it was pretty tricky for the new owner to maintain the house. After her father's death, Sujitha shifted to a small house in the neighbourhood and established a school for children. However, at the time of the civil war, the house became their temporary retreat, offering shelter from the violent atrocities that were taking place all around. The guest house had recently been opened to welcome the tourists, but had not been visited by anyone to date. Dr. Ponnampalam's nostalgia for his lost place was met with a sense of disappointment when he realised that he was no longer an inlander, which he had supposed himself to be. The utopian picture of his home, which he had painted in his mind until that day, grew dull after he visited "Palm Villa". Therefore, when his son asked him if they could settle in the same place in the near future, Dr. Ponnampalam expressed his anguish thus, "I do not know, son. I am not sure. I learnt something growing up here. It was a refuge once, but even in those days, the place seemed haunted. Can you imagine what it would be like to live there now?" (77).

In the following story entitled "Scrap", Vasantha narrates his experiences with a group of young Chinese men whom he drives to Mullaitivu, the main town of the north-eastern coast of the country, where the thirty-year-long civil war had ended. As they entered the town, scraps of bicycles, buses, lorries, and other vehicles that were used during the war became visible, bearing the echo of the past that can never be overlooked. Eventually, it is revealed that these materials were confiscated by the national military forces from Vanni, the mainland of the Northern Province, and had been scrapped in Mullaitivu for recycling purposes. Ironically, they stopped for refreshment at a military camp, which had previously been an LTTE cantonment. Standing near the edge of the big swimming pool, which did not contain water, Chen, a young Chinese man, reflected on the hollowness that encapsulated people's lives in the aftermath of the civil war.

In "Roadkill," a story set in 2011, two years after the army has finally crushed the decades-long Tamil Tiger insurgency, Vasantha drives a wealthy Sri Lankan couple, Mr. and Mrs. Arunachalam, into formerly rebel-held territory, where the husband wants to show his pregnant wife a property he hopes to turn into their home. They break their journey at a recently built hotel that represents, as Vasantha spells out, "the new era of the old town" (94). However, the past pulls like a counterweight. Vasantha meets the Assistant Manager of the hotel, Miss Saraswati, who tried to sound professional but could not conceal her anger and frustration regarding the civil war and the turn of events that had taken place thereafter. Through the scraps of conversation that followed, Vasantha comes to suspect that she is a former Tiger cadre, her trigger finger "callused and discolored." His assumption turned out to be true when he discovered the lady with a gun at midnight, on the dark balcony, still haunted by the memory of the attack. This was confirmed by the presence of a deep scar on her neck, which bore an emblem of her tragic past. Before he left the place with his tourists, Vasantha tried to make Miss Saraswati more comfortable. "After a war, it is best not to ask about the past," she responds wryly at Vasantha's attempt to make amends with her (102). As he was driving out of the hotel premises, "Miss Saraswati looked at me. I wanted her to smile, even that put-on smile, but she was blank. Her black eyes gave nothing away. I wished for a moment that I knew what she was thinking, and then I was glad that I did not. There comes a point when you do not want to know" (109).

"Renewals," the last story of the section, narrates Vasantha's experiences of visiting the Jaffna Public Library with his passengers, Mr. Desmond and his two assistants. The library, which was then one of the biggest libraries in Asia and contained thousands of books and manuscripts of ancient Tamil literature and heritage, was burnt down by a section of the Sinhalese population on June 1, 1981, thus leading to the beginning of the Civil War, which continued for the next three decades. It was renovated and opened to the public in the early years of the twenty-first century, after several decades of communal unrest. As Mr. Desmond and his company left for some business that needed some time, Vasantha took a tour of the enormous building, which once contained valuable literary resources. He enters the section which houses the newspapers and periodicals and chances upon a young boy who initiates a conversation with him. The boy talks about his family and mourns the loss of his dearest elder brother

in the Second Battle of the Elephant Pass in 2000. Thus, being orphaned, he wishes to leave his homeland, where nothing is left, where there is no hope for "renewals". As the boy meets his beloved, a Tamil girl who has also lost her family members in the Civil War, and retreats to the reading room, Vasantha meditates on the human desire to break free from the haunting memories of the past. However, he admits, "Maybe you can never really leave the past behind. It is in your head and outside your control" (119). The story, ironically, ends with Mr. Desmond's apprehension of the lady in the library who wanted to restore the classical texts that had been lost in the rampage.

The second section of the book is titled "South". It begins in the "Ramparts" as Vasantha takes three young Russian men on a trip to Galle. After dropping them off at a new spa in the city, Vasantha makes a lone drive to the Galle fort in the evening, strolling down the ramparts. He chances upon a young soldier, and together they meditate on the idea of 'love' and the inconsistencies which shape the discourse. Through the conversation, it is revealed that the soldier had chanced upon a beautiful lady and had fallen over for her instantly. However, as the horrors of the war crept over people's minds, the soldier had been obliged to kill a man who turned out to be the girl's brother.

"Fluke" tells the story of a businessman, Mr. Weerakon, whom Vasantha takes to a Conference on Marketing in a posh hotel that houses several esteemed guests from different parts of the country. The story reveals the attempt to rebuild the country's economic standard, which has been devastated by the ensuing series of civil strife.

"Shoot," the next story, begins with a reference to the Tsunami of 2004 that took thirty thousand human lives in a single day. Besides this, it led to severe damage and destruction of the coastal towns that had to be rebuilt in the years that followed. Here, Vasantha takes Sanji, a photographer who has come from Milan with a troupe of Europeans for a fashion shoot in the Galle cricket stadium. Originally of Sri Lankan descent, Sanji had joined the Tamil forces in the initial years of the civil war, but soon grew disillusioned by the turn of events and migrated to Italy "as if to prove he was more adept at pressing a shutter release than pulling a trigger" (161). As the narrative unfolds, the readers are exposed to the helplessness and vulnerability of the person who had previously shot at his opponents with a gun. However, now he has to shoot the semi-naked bodies of some white-skinned models who are equally helpless and fragile in the exotic climate.

"Turtle" follows Vasantha's ride to a small island country. This time, he has been hired for a week to take a young Czechoslovakian couple around the small island country. The lady, Eva, was still coping with the trauma of the "Velvet Revolution," which had led to the subsequent demise of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia and re-established democracy in the state. As they spend a romantically exuberant evening on the island, the story of the nightguard who had lost his entire family in the Tsunami makes them realise the inevitability of fate and man's vulnerability to nature.

"Janus" narrates the story of Brigadier Bling, the Janus-faced man who was both flamboyant and ruthless at the same time. However, he has another side to his

ISSN 2349-4948

character, which is more sensitive and prone to emotion. A guilty conscience has cursed the Brigadier after his cave operation turned out to be a mishap. He tries to repent for his sin by taking care of the family that has suffered so much. However, can the past be buried? Can people forget the horrifying memories of the war and move on? The story shows the impossibility of the discourse as Brigadier Bling would never overcome the guilt of taking the lives of innocent civilians, and tries to make amends for his sins, which, he knows, could never be forgiven.

In the story titled "Humbug", set in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Vasantha takes a young couple from England to Hambantota, a town near the sea coast, in the southern province of Sri Lanka. The town was hit hard by the Tsunami in 2004 and has been the site of major development projects, including the construction of a new port and an international airport (which was completed in 2013). Leonard Woolf, the future husband of the famous British novelist Virginia Woolf, had served as a British Colonial Administrator in Hambantota between 1908 and 1911. He inscribed his experiences in a novel called The Village in the Jungle (published in 1913). The young couple, Miss Susila and her husband, Mr. Collin, had planned this trip to Hambantota after reading the descriptions of the place in Woolf's novel. Miss Susila was carrying a big bag of books and would never part with the bag at any point. However, the place is no longer the same after the Civil War and the Tsunami, and was on the verge of becoming a modern seaport to cope with the growing demands of modernization. It was indeed a shocking experience for the young lady who had hitherto perceived Hambantota to be the same "Village in the Jungle". They met an old man at the "Hilltop Cafe" who had some connections with Leonard Woolf through his father. The old man refused to accept any food or any financial help, except for a few books for his public library. He could obviously sense the presence of valuable resources in the lady's bag. However, Miss Susila expressed her apparent discontent in parting with her favourite books. Instead, she reluctantly offered a "humbug", a sweet from England (230).

The last story of the volume, "Running on Empty," offers a picture of the country as it gradually finds itself in the process of recovery from the crisis that had been lingering for almost thirty years. The cities were curfewed, the streets were filled with military tanks and armed soldiers who were appointed to resist the Tigers and suicide bombers. The roads ran empty except for a few VIP cars guarded by the security personnel. However, the situation has undergone immense changes as the civil war came to a close. However, now, "the streets are clean, hosed down. The decades-old debris of blown-up banks cleared, the burnt-out carcases of buses carted away" (232). Moving past the ancient structure of an old hotel, Vasantha recalls its ancient demeanour, which he had witnessed in his early years:

The hotel is over a hundred years old. It has seen both the best and the worst of times—days of plenty, days of strife. Japanese Zeros heralding the Second World War, Sunday crowds eating pink candyfloss, army parades turning the grass to dust, athletes in training, magicians and charlatans of every shade, kite flyers, Tiger moths, suicide bombers, wedding couples on the cusp. They come and are briefly illuminated, then all too quickly completely forgotten in the noontide's toll (233-234).

ISSN 2349-4948

The title of the book, *Noontide Toll*, echoes the horrors of death that had traumatized the people of Sri Lanka and soaked their lives in a pool of blood. Theoretical explorations on the nature and causes of trauma would help in understanding the parameters that shaped the people's psyche in contemporary Sri Lanka. In her essay "Trauma and Literary Studies: Some Enabling Questions" (2006) Elissa Marder investigates the etymology of the word and states that "The word "trauma" comes from the ancient Greek meaning "wound". It is generally believed that trauma is a wound but of a different kind, "it is a very peculiar kind of wound" (1). In her Introduction to the book, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Cathy Caruth discusses the traumatic effects in the post-Vietnam War era, and states that it was in 1980 that the American Psychiatric Association officially acknowledged the phenomenon called "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" (PTSD). The general definition or description of post-traumatic stress disorder posits that,

> ...there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (4)

It means an event occurs at a certain point and involves a traumatic experience. The effect of the event is not completely experienced at that time, but only at a later time, in the "repeated possession" of the one who experiences it. Caruth argues that, "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (5).

The issue of "cultural trauma" has been discussed by Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. in the book *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004). In the first chapter of the book, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," Alexander states:

> Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever, and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways (1).

Romesh Gunesekera's *Noontide Toll* draws an extraordinary portrait of post-Civil War Sri Lanka, which is grappling with the ghosts of its troubled past. Gunesekera exhibits the predicament of the island nation of Sri Lanka after the Civil War. He perceives the island nation with respect to its scars of Civil Strife, which are visible not only in the geographical locale of the nation but also in the psyche of its traumatized subjects. To grasp the rehabilitation process in post-war Sri Lanka, readers need to comprehend the role of memory in the narrative design of *Noontide Toll*.

While the War was finally over after a prolonged period of time, its traumatic effects could never be ignored or erased so easily. In "Folly," Dilshan could never erase the memory of the lactating mother, the commander of the LTTE cadre, whom he had shot to death. Miss Saraswati (in "Roadkill"), who had been an LTTE cadre, could never forget the horrific events and would still be haunted by the possibility of a future attack. The Soldier (in "Ramparts") could never overcome the guilt of murdering the brother

ISSN 2349-4948

of his beloved. The Nightwatchman (in "Turtle") was still haunted by the shocking memory of losing his whole family in the Tsunami. Manel (in "Janus"), who has lost his brother and was terribly wounded in a violent fight with the opposing army, could never really overcome the trauma of loss that haunted him throughout his existence in the war-torn country.

Thus, Gunesekera's fiction acutely captures the crisis and trauma of the Sri Lankan people in the context of the Civil War, which has disrupted the nation's stability in many ways. Vasantha, the central character of the book, epitomizes the traumatic effect of the war by deliberately choosing to become a van driver instead of a behind-the-desk job to recover his sanity after the horrifying war. He drives through the devastated areas of the island - it is his act of revisiting the past. This act of revisiting the past can be viewed as an attempt to heal his troubled self.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data sharing policy does not apply to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Works cited

Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. University of California Press, 2004.

Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Gunesekera, Romesh. *Noontide Toll*. Penguin, 2014.

Marder, Elissa. "Trauma and Literary Studies: Some Enabling Questions". *Reading On*, vol.1, no.1, pp. 1–6.