Chapter 6
Turtle Nest

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6.1. Introduction

Sri Lanka, officially the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, is an island country, in the northern Indian Ocean. It is off the southeast coast of the Indian subcontinent in South Asia. It was under the colonial rule and became independent nation in 1948. Sri Lankan literature is the literary tradition of Sri Lanka. The largest part of Sri Lankan literature was written in the Sinhala language, but there are literary writings written in other languages in Sri Lanka over the millennia including Pāli, Tamil, and English. However the language used for the ancient timing was much different to the language used in Sri Lanka now. Up to the present, short stories are a very important part of Sri Lankan literature. The output of Sinhalese short story writers is greater than that of the Tamil and English writers combined. Besides these writers, there are famous Sri Lankan diaspora writers who have written in English and have received global recognition through their writings. Philip Michael Ondaatje is a Sri Lankan born Canadian novelist and poet. He won the Booker Prize for his novel The English Patient. Shyam Selvadurai is a Sri Lankan Canadian novelist who wrote Funny Boy, which won the Books in Canada First Novel Award. Nira Konjit Wickramasinghe, Romesh Gunesekera, V.V. Ganeshanantha, Yasmine Gunaratne, Chandani Lokuge etc. are some other famous writers of Sri Lanka who live outside Sri Lanka and give voice to various issues of Sri Lanka and the immigrants. Roma Tearne's Mosquito is set against
the backdrop of the Sri Lankan Civil War. The year is 1996 and the thread of the ongoing Civil War in the country runs from beginning to end in the novel. *Mosquito* is primarily a love story celebrating the triumph of the human spirit and the enduring nature of art and beauty through the portrayal of the principal characters, but the novel also explores the subject of violence. (Introduction)

### 6.2. Life and works of Chandani Lokuge

Chandani Lokuge was born in Sri Lanka and she had her B.A. from university of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka and M.A. from Peradeniya University Sri Lanka. She came to Australia in 1987 on a Commonwealth Scholarship to complete her Ph.D. in English Literature from Flinders University, South Australia and is currently an Associate Professor of English at Monash University, Victoria, Australia. She is also the Director of the Centre for Postcolonial Writing there. She has a book of critically acclaimed short stories, *Moth and Other Stories* and has previously been published by Penguin with her contribution to *The Penguin Book of Modern Sri Lankan Stories*. Chandani's first novel *If the Moon Smiled* was shortlisted for the 2001 New South Wales Premier’s Prize for Best Novel. *Turtle Nest* and *Softly, As I Leave You* are another two novels by her. Lokuge is the recipient of grants from the Literature Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Victoria, Ian Potter and Myer Foundations.

#### 1. *If the Moon Smiled*

Chandani Lokuge's first novel *If the Moon Smiled, published in 2000*, tells the story of Manthri, a young woman in Sri Lankan who marvels at the promise of life and yearns for a future of fulfilled dreams. In this lucid and lyrical novel, Lokuge says the truth about our existence that all are reborn but something is lost too in the rebirth. This novel focuses on the issues of women, in which she discusses about birth and rebirth, moonlight and madness, pain and loneliness, strength and hope.

Manthri and Nelum form the female line of descent in *If the Moon Smiled*. Manthri represents both a luminous, magical Past and a pain-filled, shredded Present. She gives way in the course of a meandering family saga to Nelum who is Future personified. Manthri represents the sheer and utter desolation of a spirit that always hankers for what it cannot find - a home to belong to, a marriage that works, a phantom lover and a sexual
desire that is fulfilled, children who bring happiness, a religion that truly heals. Nelum warms one’s heart with hope because she fights ceaselessly to be herself, against all odds, including her mother. The elegiac tone gives away the secret of Manthri’s unhappy end. (Bose)

II. Turtle Nest

Turtle Nest is the second novel by Chandani Lokuge. Turtle Nest is set in a fishing village in Sri Lanka. It provides a picturesque depiction of visit of western tourists in Sri Lanka where the poor natives are trying to scrape a scanty living from the sea. A teenage girl wants to find out the truth about her real mother Mala, so she leaves her adopted parents Neela and Mohan in Melbourne in Australia. They migrated there from a small village in Sri Lanka. Mala is the central character in the novel. Mala is attracted strongly by the beauty of the Catholic religion. She is torn between and ultimately destroyed by the competing demands of her physical desires and her love for family and religion.

The novel is structured around Aruni’s slow extraction of her mother’s story from Simon, a family friend who had known and loved Mala. The plot of the novel flows through the stories of several characters viz., Simon, Mala’s younger brother Priya, and Mala herself. The novel tactfully interwove the earlier story of Aruni’s life, her early memories of Sri Lanka, and later experiences in Australia, which leads her back to find out about her mother. At last she follows dangerous path driven by her desire to feel she belongs with her mother’s beach people.

III. Softly, As I Leave You

Chandani Lokuge’s third novel, Softly, As I Leave You, discusses the migrant’s world of fractured consciousness and half-fulfilled relationships. It is a story of loss and separation within a family whose members are suspended between a sense of togetherness and separateness. The novel traces the life of Uma, a Sri Lankan girl who travels to Australia to complete a doctorate on Sinhala Literature but actually to escape the predetermined life that her family had planned for her. Uma’s sense of independence makes her rebel against the set life of an arranged marriage. She visits Chris’s bookstore for her research work. Chris is the son of a mixed marriage between a Venetian migrant and an Australian in Melbourne.
The story of Chris and Uma’s marriage represents the intricate complexity in cross-cultural relationships. For Chris the boundaries of race are not an issue but Uma progressively broods over her left behind cultural legacy. The birth of Uma and Chris’s son, Arjuna, is a turning point in Uma’s life. The novel brings forward the sensitive issue of confirmation of the impossibility of cross-cultural bonds. Through impressionistic narrative, the novelist incorporates traditional metaphor and allegory drawn from Sinhala classics and Indian mythology. (Siddique)

6.3. Turtle Nest: An Introduction

The plot of the novel is narrated in the form of present of the protagonist Aruni merged with the past of her mother for the search of the self. The opening locale of the novel is Sri Lanka. On the seashore in Sri Lanka, Aruni Ratnayake, a teenage girl, searches her maternal uncle Priya, whom she has never seen. Her real mother’s name is Nirmala. Aruni has come back from Australia to Sri Lanka to find her roots and about her real mother. She has been living in Australia with her adopted parents Neela and Mohan. She wants to know about her real mother Nirmala alias Mala and her parentage. Her predicament is narrated thus: “Young girl with suffering face … Desolate and confused, the eyes of the broken-winged bird that Priya held in his palm” (3). Aruni lives in a Hotel ‘Ceyshores’. Paul, who lives in this hotel, has come here from Australia on holidays and he is writing up a series on tourism in down south Sri Lanka. Paul thinks about his wife Sue and daughter Jo. At the age of forty five, he feels midlife crisis after twenty years of married life.

Lokuge has vividly described the activities at the seashore when Aruni reaches there. “She walks towards the sea. The sun is too bright, the sky blue as blue. A boy waves as he jogs along leaving behind a trail of footprints” (8). At the seashore, Simon is selling kurumba i.e. coconut filled with water. On hearing the name of Mala, Simon recollects the days that he has spent with Mala. Simon informs Aruni that he knows the gentleman and lady who adopted her. He informs that Priya lives near the beach and he may come soon and she can meet him. Simon is used to drive a convent car. Priya is a nomad on the beach. Aruni dreams of meeting him and getting information about her mother, motherland, birth place. “Her mother had lived in one of those huts. She had
walked on this very beach. She had given birth to her somewhere in this area… She hovers in the unknown—should she rush into the village, or back to the hotel? And back to Australia? …She does not know what to do” (7). At the beach Aruni thinks that these are her people. “These my people she thinks, digging her feet into the sand as far as they will go, her arms closing around herself in embrace—this my land, my home” (9). Simon remembers how Mala disappeared from their lives. And how they have finally given up their search for her by burying her memory in this unknown grave.

Throughout the novel, Lokuge has mentioned the poor condition of people of Sri Lanka. Poor boys speak in English and show turtles and corals to foreigners. They search for rich tourists and thereby earn their livelihood. The people used to cut up turtles for selling their meat to rich people. Addiction to narcotic substances is common among these poor people. Sri Lankan people are addicted. “After a good catch, the families got together by the catamarans in the evening. The men drank toddy mixed in arrack, and the women brought over fried sprats, and prawn vadai. Some of the women drank openly with the men” (23). The third world narrative tells how the poor Sri Lankan boys like Priya, are indulged in sells of ganja or Hashish.

Gradually, Aruni gets used to sitting on the sandy sea beach with Simon. The novel describes the past of Aruni’s mother Mala and her childhood. Mala’s Mother’s name is Asilin. Mala and Priya get involved with turtle that comes to their home in rain. At the age of 12, a boy named Rathu takes Mala behind boat. Rathu harasses her physically. These are common scene on beach of Sri Lanka. Simon knows all these facts and so he warns Aruni to be conscious on the beach. “You must be a bit careful on this beach, missy” (25).

Aruni, on being asked by Simon, tells her story and how she becomes eager to come to Sri Lanka from Australia. “Unwillingly, Aruni begins a fragment of her own life, lived away from home, in the adopted world. ‘Once I heard a song in Melbourne. My father had told me, a few days before, that my real mother had been a fisher-girl from the south of Sri Lanka. When I heard that song, I knew I had to come here and find out more about her’ ” (25-26).

Aruni’s adopted parents migrate from Sri Lanka to Australia to get relaxation from being known to everyone. Everybody knows about Aruni and the fact that Neela has
adopted her. So, Aruni’s mother tells her father Mohan, “I’m sick of this country where everyone knows everyone, and everyone must know everything. Let’s sign those migration papers and go away to Australia. Might be better there, where no one knows anything” (34). Aruni is a kind of hybrid existence. She says, “Neela is a Buddhist, My father is a Catholic. My real mother, Mala, was also a Catholic. I have no idea what I am. Everyone’s a bit of everything when they’re Sri Lankan” (36). Aruni, in her talk with Simon, continuously searches her roots, her sense of belonging. She says, “I am not a stranger. I belong here, I belong to him, to Priya. He is my uncle” (42).

Lokuge mentions about the economic activities of the fishermen in the past and how they have become prosperous and the terrorism has affected the fishermen. Simon explains that in monsoon boats can’t go to sea and days are same. There is a mention of terrorism in Sri Lanka.

But long years ago, missy, before terrorism started up in the country, most of the younger fishermen packed up and went up East during the monsoons…They were absent for months, but it was lucrative, and they sent down extra money. That’s how Priya’s house has one lime plaster wall to it, and that’s how the family got their line of electricity. But then the Tigers started attacking the Sinhalese fisher colonies in the East…As the war went on and on, the rich tourists stopped coming over, so all those others in the fishing village who lived off the tourists went empty handed. See, even these days, missy, how hotels are almost empty, with only the poorer tourists coming in on cheap deals (46-47).

In Sri Lanka, men remain idle at home during monsoon and as they remain at home many women become pregnant. The exploitation of poor fishermen like Jamis is narrated. They are getting boats on lease and the owners of boats charge heavy interest from them. The poorest families have just one meal a day, and that is rice and coconut or a bit of dried fish. Mala’s mother gives birth to twins when Mala is just two years old. So, Mala is used to suck Asilin’s milk. Mala’s mother goes to take care of Asilin’s twins leaving Priya at Mala’s responsibility. When Mala is grown up, she is used to visit Rathu’s home for sexual pleasures. Simon remembers the past that how Mala’s song attracted fish and how made Simon frown, but he always let her have her way.
Mala and other women of Sri Lanka have been exploited by the White tourists. Mala gradually starts earning money from the White tourists by allowing them sex with her. Mala is very active in her childhood at Christmas concert. Earlier Mala has acute scarcity of money and now she has plenty, she buys new dresses, purse etc. and lies Simon and Priya that she gets it from the Church. Soon, the beach boys and even some of the older men began to hang around Mala. “Now the village gossiped about Mala all the time. It made Priya blush when even the smaller boys began to joke about his sister. They said everybody knew Mala was a free-for-all- a basketball that could be shoved from hand to hand” (90). Mala has become very bold in mentioning her stay with a white gentleman in the hotel. Gradually the beach lost Mala to the White men. She is used to stay away more and more during the day, and even in the evenings and late into the nights. Later on Mala becomes pregnant. Mala accuses the family that all are responsible. She says to her father “You dare accuse me of smearing our name? ... I’ve seen you, you filthy pig. I’ve seen you with Seela and Maggie and all those other women, drunk, fiddling with them in the huts...Don’t think I’ve not heard the gossip” (101). She says to her mother, “And how many times have you taken the money that I brought home from the suddhas? It was good enough to keep all the family from starving, wasn’t it? Everyone in the house knows where the money comes from” (101). Mala gives birth to a half-white- half brown baby. Its father is unknown. Mala reveals nothing about the baby, not even after her father beats her up and kicked her out of the house. The half-caste is over two months old. But it has no name. Priya’s mother is waiting for it to die. One day, Mala runs away leaving no trace.

The fishermen community living near the seashore could not get good enough money and their wives sale fish but some share is taken away by mudalali. Even the poor boys are exploited by the whites by tempting them for chocolates, and cigarettes, chewing gum shiny nylon shirts and shiny watches. Priya earns by mending a net or repairing a boat. Priya’s mother could not afford him to go to school. They are getting aid from the church but it is not sufficient. Asilin warns Priya not to go with the suddhas i.e. the whitemen who tempt him for chocolate. She also asks him to earn by mending a net or repairing a boat. Priya has been abused physically by a whiteman tempting chocolates
at cabana. The whiteman harasses Priya physically and the poor Priya surrenders just for chocolate and survival. He feels pain in his body as he has been raped by the whiteman.

Lokuge mentions about the poverty in Sri Lanka and how orphans are victims. The small baby of Mala has been sold by Jamis to a beggar colony. Simon does not tell Aruni that how beggar children are crippled by their pimps, their bones broken and twisted out of shape so they will be considered more deserving of charity. There is a storm in the sea and inner storm in Aruni’s mind after hearing her mother’s past. She recollects her past that her father told her about the storm, turtle and the sea animals.

Aruni thinks about Australia and Sri Lanka. She tells Paul that she is a local there. This is her own country and she belongs to there. Aruni does not find Australia as her home. She finds alien in Australia. Aruni brings the harsh reality of her family in Australia, “They’d shifted around a lot, she says—from Brisbane to Sydney to Adelaide to Melbourne, all in ten years. Her father could not get a job to match his qualifications. So they migrated from state to state, hoping to strike gold somewhere” (73). Aruni is in dilemma, whether to go back to Australia or live here only. Aruni feels intimacy with the beach boys selling turtles. The novelist narrates about the turtle and the life cycle of turtles and how in a poor country like Sri Lanka, the poor beach boys make the turtle, its selling and meat of it as their profession and instrument of earning. Lokuge mentions about the contemporary events through newspaper. The government of Sri Lanka is still negotiating peace. This country is so small but very much territorial. Mention of Test-tube baby and Paul compares if test-tube baby will search who her father is.

In part two of the novel, Lokuge mentions about Neela and Mohan living in Sri Lanka. They are rich and searching servant from convent. Simon persuade Neela by saying that Mala’s mother has three other children to feed at home and so to help this good Catholic girl. Then Mala goes to Simon’s home and later on Simon takes her to Neela’s home through the recommendations of Sister Mercy. Neela comes to know about the story of Mala from Sister Mercy. Mala’s father, a no-good drunk has driven her out of the house. Mala’s father drinks toddy every morning. Now, Mala’s mother Asilin is forced to tend her unfortunate baby. Simon comes one day bringing Mala to Neela’s home as a servant. The novelist gives evidences that in a poor country like Sri Lanka it is very risky to trust servants. Their earlier young servant girl has stolen her dead kid’s
necklace. One day Simon and Mala come to Neela’s home. Mala is willing to work as
servant in the house. From the Church sister Mercy feels that Mala could make a new life
with a good family, like Neela and Mohan’s. She deserves a second chance. At Neela’s
house Mala feels happy, starts routine work, serving tea. She finds photo of dead girl of
Neela and Mohan’s whose name was Kumari. Kumari died at the age of seven.

It is true that one feels alien outside one’s home even in the same country. Mala
misses all the noise of her own home; the squabbles, the greed, the running around and
getting entangled in one another’s bodies. In this cast mansion, it is all so deadly silent.
Chandani Lokuge depicts how change occurs in the life of Mala. At Neela’s home
Monika, the old servant lady, guides Mala about routine. Mala dreams of her father’s
home and beach. She thinks about turtle. Mala feels comfortable at Neela’s home. She
remains busy throughout the day. But in the nights she feels pain in breasts because of
hardened milk. Mala dreams about her brother Priya and her orphaned son, fatherless,
motherless and foodless.

Neela says to her relatives that Mala’s singing has made the garden and trees in
the house fertile again. Mala dreams of Mohan, she imagines kissing him and love. She
remembers how the whitemen guided her for sex in the hotel rooms. When Mohan sleeps
in bed he comes close to Mala and kisses her and she surrenders. Mala becomes pregnant
for the second time. It is Mohan’s child. She informs Neela without mentioning name.
Neela and Mohan have suspicion on Banda, the gardener. But Mohan knows that he is
responsible for this. Mala, during pregnancy, leaves the house. Mala comes to her
parent’s home. Priya welcomes her. She is pregnant. She talks Asilin and Priya. Mala’s
twin sisters have gone to work as servants and Asilin visits them frequently. Mala’s
mother asks her to take the half-caste wherever she goes now. Asilin comes to notice the
protrusion of Mala’s stomach and says: “Mala again! Oh, you are crushed and so are we.
Holy mother of God, let the sea take us all and spare us the shame” (181). Mala says that
if the child that she is going to deliver is a girl, she will call her Kumari, a dead daughter
of the big house. Mala gives birth to a baby in the devale and she is alone at the time of
delivery and Simon comes to know first. Next day Simon comes with food and tea but
Mala has already the place with the infant. Neela finds sleeping baby on her doorstep.
She informs Mohan that Kumari is returned to them. Neela finds a letter written by Mala
and she drinks the poisoned truth. Aruni is Mala and Mohan’s daughter. Aruni grows up at Mohan’s home. Mohan remembers Mala’s song and when he sees Aruni, he finds Mala in her. Aruni has a note in which Neela has written addressed by Mala that “I am leaving my daughter here. Please look after her. Please think of her as your own daughter Kumari who has been reborn. She is Mohan hamu’s daughter too” (172-73).

Neela struggles to accept that Aruni is Kumari reborn. Mohan suggests her name to be Aruni. Neela tries to get affectionate with Aruni. Neela continuously thinks of mother Mala’s relation in the room. She thinks that Mohan might have enjoyed with Mala in this room. As a woman she feels very disturbed about the relations of Mala with her husband Mohan and thinks that Mala’s song might have lured Mohan to approach her. Neela thinks that Mohan could not forgive himself. He has violated both her and their dead daughter. Aruni longs for belonging to this new world of her parent’s home. Aruni feels Kumari’s ghost, psychic effect on her. She remains mute for weeks, and would stand around the house facing walls and trying to get as close as possible to them. All Kumari’s photos are removed. Priya’s parents die in suicide bombing at Kochichikade.

Paul has finished his work and is going back to Australia. Priya argues that ‘You bought favors from these beach people- a woman, a bit of hashish, a drink- but you didn’t make friends with them. And without Aruni, he is just a tourist on the beach.’

In part three, Aruni is led to see turtle laying eggs. Paul has gone there. Premasiri is there. When she says she would come on full moon to say turtle laying eggs. The beach boys made vulgar comment and seduce her. Premasiri has brought a present for Aruni- a beautiful coral ornament shaped like a woman. Aruni’s misreading of Premasiri eventually leads to the tragedy which ends the novel as she is lured out by the beach boys under the pretext of findings a nesting turtle and then violently gang-raped by them.

6.4. Critical study of parameters

The researcher has carried out extensive narrative analysis to study various parameters to understand the elements of diaspora in the novel. The same are elaborated as under.
I. Time and type of migration

Chandani Lokuge is a writer of Sri Lankan diaspora. She has mentioned about the migration of people from Sri Lanka to developed countries, here, to Australia. Aruni, the protagonist of the novel, migrates to Australia as a small child. Aruni has been adopted by Neela and Mohan. Mohan is her real father from his relationship with Mala, her real mother. But Mohan and Neela, as a couple, adopt her. In Sri Lanka people come to their place often and meet them. So, Neela tells Mohan, “I’m sick of this country where everyone knows everyone, and everyone must know everything. Let’s sign those migration papers and go away to Australia. Might be better there, where no one knows anything” (34). Thus, migration of Mohan and Neela is for getting rid from the relatives and to live a peaceful life in an unknown place without anyone’s intervention. Aruni is a small child of eight years when she migrates to Australia with her parents, so her migration is involuntary. She has been living in Melbourne for more than ten years. Their migration is permanent for settlement in a foreign land. Later on Aruni decides to come back to Sri Lanka to find the facts about her real mother. So this return is a voluntary back home to search the root. Her visit to Sri Lanka is temporary to know the whereabouts of her mother, but it becomes permanent as she finds her sense of belonging in Sri Lanka.

Paul has come from Australia to Sri Lanka on holidays and he writes about tourism. His is a temporary visit to a new land for a specific purpose for a specific time only. In the novel, Lokuge throws light on the visit of many foreign tourists who come to Sri Lanka for enjoyment. As Sri Lanka is a poor country, they come here for fun; enjoy sex with Sri Lankan girls and even boys.

II. Glimpses of homeland in the novels under study -its geography, polity, economy and locale

Lokuge narrates the history of Sri Lanka: “It happened in a deserted devale just beyond the village…Only the few Hindu Tamil fisher families worshipped in it, in the old days. But then, they were forced to migrate to the East when the war began. After that, except for an occasional devotee, no one visited the devale anymore” (193). Lokuge has vividly portrayed the geographical location of Sri Lanka, its economy and locale. She was 35 years old when she emigrated in 1987. Lokuge is one of very few South Asian
Australian writers to step outside of the middle and upper classes when writing about former homelands. There are boats of the fishermen, vendors selling coconut water on the seashore. Aruni enjoys at the beach. “But the water rushes in. It sucks away the sand around her feet and withdraws, leaving them uprooted, defenceless. She kicks at the sand aimlessly” (9). In Sri Lanka rain comes all of a sudden and it has disturbed the meal schedule of people gathered. “With no warning at all, the wind began to rise, blowing salt and sand into eyes, black clouds rushed across the sky, and the rain pelted down. The men ran drunkenly for shelter leaving the women to pick up the empty dishes and glasses” (24). At the sea beach the situation is narrated: “The waves sucked the coconuts into the sea, devoured their insides and then tossed out the husks. Sucked in, thrown out. Sucked in, thrown out” (41). As the village is near seashore, there are incidences of sudden thunder storm and heavy rain. Once, Aruni gets frightened to see such storm.

The poor people on the beach of Sri Lanka shows turtle to the foreigner and earn money. Premasiri, a young boy pleads Paul and Aruni, “We can show you turtles, black and white and brown turtles, turtles laying eggs, and beautiful corals at the bottom of the sea. We take missy and sir in glass-bottom boat?” (12) People like Premasiri are engaged in collecting turtles from the beach, selling them to the tourists and even cutting them for meat. In the novel Lokuge mentions about the likings of people to catch turtles. It is narrated thus:

Mala and her father sat by for hours, silently, waiting for the turtle to move away. Then they picked up the eggs and laid them in the basket. The dream switched. They’d got to the beach too late. The eggs had already hatched under the sand and they could only look on as dozens of tiny turtles crawled out and headed clumsily towards the moonlit sea. They watched the lonely eagles swoop down from the crags. They searched for the mother turtle that always returned to the nest at the time of hatching. But they could not find her. (150-51)

The poor people in Sri Lanka are involved in selling of narcotic substances to the white people. Priya invites some white people at his home. “Sometimes he takes a white man into the house. Then the younger boys squat outside, gossiping and peeping between
the slats in the walls until the man emerges, and then they trail him, trying to sell him some ganja or hashish” (27-28).

Lokuge narrates a past incidence when fishermen went up East during monsoons. At that time there was no terrorism started up in the country. They could send extra money at home and get prospered and could get electricity line at home. The poor economy of people living near beach is narrated thus:

Then woman stood for hours on the beach in the dense darkness before dawn, muttering about the hardships of their lives, terror in every word. The poorest families had just one meal a day, and that was rice and coconut or a bit of dried fish. There was no money even for the cheap keera that Asilin tempered in onion and leftover sprats. Then Mala would run off behind the neighbouring houses and steal their fish drying in the sun. (66-67)

Sometimes the poor family of Mala has to wait for the vegetables that Asilin bring after selling fish in the village. The mudalali is a person who provides boat on hire to the fishermen and he comes to collect rent. Asilin warns her kids, “Beware of your father when he’s after toddy. He runs into a wild animal” (67).

There is a mention of physical exploitation of young boys at the beach by the foreigners. Priya has been tortured physically by a whiteman. He tempts him for cigarette and chocolate. He says to Priya, “Want to come with me? I have chocolates and cigarettes” (110). He takes Priya into his room in a hotel and then attempts to rape him. The children born through rapes and molestation of poor girls are a burden for family. Sometimes Christian missionary helps them but majority of them are sent to beggar colony. There, they cut the organs of the poor children so that they may be considered more deserving for charity. The novelist brings very harsh reality about the poor people in Sri Lanka.

After Mala’s disappearance, Asilin and Jamis visit Kochichikade church on every Sunday to make a vow for Mala. One day when they go there, they die in a suicide bombing. Lokuge narrates how their dead bodies have been identified and cremated.

They identified the bodies by the silver cross still hanging from Asilin’s neck, and a piece of sarong sodden with blood. The coffins could not be
opened because no one knew how much of the corpses had been recovered, and in what stage of putrefaction they were. Father Lucien and the sisters from the convent brought a wreath of white flowers, said their prayers, and led the funeral procession. (118)

Mala’s father informs her about the lihiniya birds and their importance to fishermen. “This was also the time when the stilt-fishing thieves would zoom in to steal the lihiniya eggs. Her father had taught her never to disturb the eggs of the lihiniya birds. The eggs were full of nutrition, and tasted deliciously of fish, but they were sacred because the lihiniya birds were the faithful guides of the fishermen” (187).

Mala mentions about her visit to St. Anthony’s Kochichikade in Colombo with her parents. She narrates the busy streets and life in Colombo. “But that day we went to Colombo is like a dream to me. Everything was so crowded, everyone rushed everywhere. Cars and lorries and bicycles, one on top of the other. My head spun. I got so frightened when I lost my father’s hand” (155).

The novelist has made an attempt to depict the society of Sri Lanka, its geography, culture, and poverty.

III. Glimpses of hostland in the novels under study -its geography, polity, economy and locale

Lokuge has mentioned in brief about visit of Aruni with her father Mohan in Melbourne. “In Melbourne, a recent memory. The shine of lights. Waves lolling against St Kilda pier. And boats resting on their waterbeds, making music, haunting pipe music as the wind flowed through. Aruni’s father … reveals to her… the secret of her birth, gives her a note and a photograph. And unfolds the adoption papers” (35).

Aruni talks with Paul regarding her comfortable stay in Sri Lanka and she does not want to go back to Australia. She mentions the harsh reality that after migrating to Oz, her father could not get a good job. She says that she shifted with her parents in Australia, “from Brisbane to Sydney to Adelaide to Melbourne, all in ten years. Her father could not get a job to match his qualifications. So they migrated from state to state, hoping to strike gold somewhere” (73).

At the interview at the Sydney writers festival, Lokuge responds thus: “Perhaps I’m still not comfortable enough in Australia to get it right … if you are writing about a
place you have to know it like the palm of your hand otherwise you’re doing an injustice to yourself as a writer, being false to yourself and being false to the reader... with Sri Lanka. I write about what I know and love and understand” (Athique).

IV. Attitude of the diaspora group towards other migrants and the homeland

In the novel, the people of Sri Lanka find more interest for the people of white race coming from Australia rather than the immigrants of Sri Lanka coming from Australia. Simon introduces Aruni to the women of Sri Lanka. Their attitude is narrated thus, “But they are mostly interested to know about the rich country. Could she help someone’s son apply for a visa in Australia? Was it true that a carpenter there gets more salary in a month than a lawyer gets in a year in this country?”(15)

In Sri Lanka, Simon says to Aruni on the debate regarding belonging that she is a foreigner and safe where she belongs i.e. Australia. She is from a different world. Aruni thinks that she is from Sri Lanka. As the novel progresses, Aruni feels more comfortable in Sri Lanka in spite of poverty, corruption and other issues.

As the novel focuses more on the quest of Aruni to search her roots, there is a little mention about the other immigrants and their attitude towards homeland.

V. Attitude of the diaspora group towards the hostland and citizens of hostland

In Sri Lanka the visitors from developed countries come and they enjoy with the poor girls. It is mentioned that they stay in a hotel, tempts young boys and girls for T-shirts, chocolates and meagre amount of money. They exploit them physically. The scene when Aruni reaches on beach near the hotel is described thus: “She spots a sliver of white skin on a balcony, a leg stretched out. A bare-chested man bends over the rails, so he can observe her better”(10). In Sri Lanka because of socio-economic reasons, foreign tourists are coming and gradually, the native people feel change in their life style, influenced by the foreigners. The painful awareness of the humiliating treatment meted by the colonizer and erasure of one’s cultural heritage are narrated in several writings by writers of Caribbean descent. V.S. Naipaul writes about transformation of a society of slaves and labours to a hybrid society in his novel A house for Mr Biswas.
Paul is just a visitor in Sri Lanka. He misses his wife and daughter. He finds the poverty stricken people on the beach but his attitude is not like the other foreign tourists to harass the local people physically or mentally by giving them bribe. He is quiet mature in that sense. He helps Aruni whenever she comes to the hotel and even provides help to her and threatens her not indulge in the matters of these beach boys. Paul misses his wife in Sri Lanka. Regarding Aruni’s response to her father’s letters from Australia, Lokuge narrates:

She sticks up against the wall each postcard he sends her, of those places she loved in Melbourne. But she does not reply. Nor does she tell him much when he telephones her. He wants to come over—he’s concerned for her safety. But no, she says, I have to do this alone. She is happy here, in a way. I have made friends. She smiles thinking of Paul, and of Premasiri. Two homes right there, she thinks whimsically. I will write to you, she says, one day, soon. She does not inquire about Neela. (124)

Thus, Aruni’s attitude towards Australia changes gradually as she lives in Sri Lanka.

VI. Search for identity and feelings of alienation

In Sri Lanka Aruni feels alien. On the beach of Sri Lanka she feels that she belongs to this place. Her visit to beach is narrated thus:

The waves spread lacy white fronds at her feet. She bends down, scoops a handful of froth. Tiny rainbows shimmer in her palm. She breaths in the warming air. She presses her palms to her breasts to curb the rush of hope. She’d cup the moment and lock it in her heart if only she knew how... These my people, she thinks, digging her feet into the sand as far as they will go, her arms closing around herself in embrace-this my land, my home. (8-9)

Initially, Aruni feels alien as she could not trace the facts of her real mother in Sri Lanka and she says to Simon, “Lost lonely things”(41). Simon in conversation with her replies, “But Why? Why must you always belong to someone or to someplace? Why can’t you find a home right inside yourself? A restfulness so private that no thief may enter it, where you can withdraw when you want to? It is enough for me, if I have that, I am free, to roam the seas if I want to”(41). When Simon calls Aruni as missy, she says,
“Why can’t you call me Aruni? Why do you say missy missy all the time and treat me like a stranger? I am not a stranger. I belong here, I belong to him, to Priya. He is my uncle” (41-42). When Aruni sings a song about the sea that she believes to have inherited from her mother, she attempts to construct a line of kinship that links her to Simon, Priya and the people of the beach.

Lokuge narrates the acute sense of belonging and search for identity that prevail in Aruni. Though she lives in the vicinity of Paul and other foreign tourists she adheres to her roots in Sri Lanka with Priya. In contrast to the character of Aruni, Yasmin Gooneratne’s A Change of Skies portrays issue of identity of Sri Lankan migrant in Australia. The protagonist Bharat, although from the Third World, is like a confident ‘mimic men’ of the First World, in the expatriate category.

VII. Nostalgia, memory and their role in the present

Aruni, though settled in Australia, feels something missing there. Lokuge narrates her predicament, she tells Paul, “I don’t know who was reborn in the husk of my body … But I knew I belonged somewhere else” (35). On the other side, Paul misses his wife and daughter. Paul sits by the window. There is nothing outside that he can relate to. Sand and sea and sky have merged into one endless void. Paul remembers the life that he spent with his family in Australia. He thinks, “Were they missing him? It’s Saturday. Sue is probably out partying. And Jo? Curled up in the couch in the family room. Was she thinking about him?” (135)

Lokuge also mentions the role of memory in the life of Mala, who goes to Mohan’s home. Mala feels alien and remembers her past that she spent with her parents and with the Sister. Mala’s nostalgia is expressed thus: “Mala missed all the noise of her own home; the squabbles, the greed, the running around and getting entangled in one another’s bodies. In this vast mansion, it was all so deadly silent” (148). Further, Mala feels that in the big house only a dead child Kumari is alive through her photographs and memory of the owners. Maya misses Priya and her mother and sisters. She wonders whether Priya would look after the half-caste as he said he would.

Lokuge has depicted the role of memory in the lives of different characters. Though it is at different time and at different place for different characters, it plays the common role of longing.
VIII. Issues related to alien language, social mobility and politics of struggle for survival in the hostland

Lokuge mentions about the predicament of Aruni for her adaptation in an alien land. After arriving in Sri Lanka she feels that she belongs to this land. “Unwillingly, Aruni begins a fragment of her own life, lived away from home, in the adopted world” (25). She has come from Australia to find more about her mother.

For Aruni belonging to a place is very important. Lokuge narrates an incident where Paul and Simon insist Aruni to be a foreigner. But Aruni does not agree. The beach boys say her kalu suddhi- means black-white woman. But she convinces Paul that, “I’m a local, see? This is my Country. I belong here. Belonging, so important to her. And she has belonged nowhere so far, she says. No mother, no home, no country”(73).

At the end Aruni thinks, “All her life she had demanded impossibilities- from her mother, from her father, girls at school. But they all had their private lives that excluded her. Now, at eighteen, she should know better. And she does. But there is hurt in her thoughts, and it draws tears. She watches Paul out of sight and goes to sit on the ledge”(226-27). At last Aruni feels the sea beach belongs to her like her mother and she flirts with the beach boys. She has been raped by these boys.

Aruni feels comfortable in her mother’s country following her mother. As Mala represents complex sign for home and belonging, Aruni allows herself to be raped, she submits to rape in the name of belonging to beach, its people and their nation- Sri Lanka. The novelist narrates, “Her rigid body began to melt, turning soft and pliant in the arms that held her down. Did she begin to relax? Did she begin to feel protected at last by those to whom she wanted so much to belong? (238-239)

In response to a question on representation of many cultures in her novel, she responds, “Yes. My girl, Aruni, she says that in Sri Lanka her parents are a little of everything else. In my own family, my mother is Christian Catholic. My father is a Buddhist. He is from the up-country, my mother is from the coast. So she is very westernised, he is very conservative nationalist Buddhist Sinhalese. So I grew up in that cross cultural atmosphere.”(Athique)

In Imaginary Homelands Rushdie echoes, “Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures, at other time we fall between
two stools. But however, ambiguous and shifting this ground may be it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy” (15). Lokuge mentions that sense of belonging has become so important for Aruni that she decides to stay in Sri Lanka, her motherland only, though she has to sacrifice a lot for it. Those migrants who cannot escape their homelands, whose pasts or imaginary homelands continue to haunt them, are “mutated” as Rushdie would say, “into pillars of salt”(10).

**IX. Issues related to religion, racism in homeland and hostland**

The novel mentions about the positive role of religion. Aruni is a hybrid, as her parents follow different religions viz., Buddhism and Christianity. However, the novel does not mention about any religious controversy or fundamentalism as it is portrayed in some other novels. Lokuge mentions about the sun rising in Sri Lanka from the top of Adam’s Peak. It is believed that Lord Buddha first set His feet in the country and that is why the sun worships it before rising. Paul reads from the book on Buddhism. “There are three spheres of consciousness: the sensuous sphere, the form sphere, and the formless sphere. Desire plays a major part in the movement from one sphere to another. The formless sphere is the highest consciousness. It liberates you even from desire” (137). In the novel Lokuge mentions about people of different religions staying in Sri Lanka. Aruni’s family is hybrid, comprises of Buddhist and Catholic. Maya participates in Christmas concert. She performs the role of mother Mary. Further, as Mala commits sin of keeping relations with the males and when she becomes pregnant, she gets shelter of a church where Sister and Father help her and guide her to live a new life again. They help her twice. It has been mentioned by Lokuge that the religious activities of Christianity are very much active in Sri Lanka. They help poor children, provide them cloths and help in education. Most of the tourists coming there are Christians from Australia. Father Lucifer asks Mala, “Tell your mother that the Federation students have brought in some clothes that might fit you all”(62). He also concerns about the drop out of Mala and his brother Priya from school. The family approaches father for confession of sin when anyone in the family commits. Lokuge also mentions that the Church is making very positive activities in Sri Lanka for the poor beach people. The people visit Church and confess their sin and the Father and Sister at the Church help them to follow the true path.
Lokuge has mentioned how poor economy of the nation leads to various ethnic issues. Setting Mala’s story within the larger political context of Sri Lanka, Simon suggests that the fragile economies of the fisher folk are directly influenced by the rising tide of ethnic violence that causes the collapse of the community due to socio-economic reasons. Lokuge narrates the global issue of terrorism that has affected the tourists in Sri Lanka. Simon informs Aruni about impact of terrorism on the tourist in Sri Lanka and how does it affect its economy.

But then the tigers started attacking the Sinhalese fisher colonies in the East. Village after village was destroyed. Then Mala’s father stopped migrating that way. As the war went on and on, the rich tourists stopped coming over, so all those others in the fishing village who lived off the tourists went empty handed. See, even these days, missy, how the hotels are almost empty, with only the poorer tourists coming in on cheap deals.

Lokuge also mentions about the global issue of competition in any business, Here it is mentioned that when the fishermen from Sri Lanka go into mid sea for fishing, the Japanese trapped the fish in the high seas, leaving little for the poor fishermen from Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, because of poverty, young boys learn about drugs, prostitution, pimping etc. at the age of fourteen.

X. Issues of subaltern, especially condition of women in homeland and hostland

Lokuge, being a woman writer, has highlighted many issues of women in Sri Lanka. The poor ladies have to borne the burden of many kids at home when their husbands go for fishing in the sea. They get pregnant frequently as their husbands return from the sea and stay for a long time in monsoon. These women have to sell fish and get her day-to-day livelihood. Their struggle is accentuated by the addiction of their husbands and kids on drugs. The foreign tourists tempt these women for money and exploit them physically.

Prostitution is very common in Sri Lanka. Lokuge says in an interview that when she wrote the novel, at that time Sri Lanka is the second highest in little boy prostitution in the world. The poor girl like Mala has to compromise her chastity just for the sake of
livelihood of the family. Even at a young age she has to take care of her younger siblings. Mala says that she gets tea from a foreigner when she meets him at the hotel room. She also mentions about variety of cosmetic and soaps that she gets from the foreign tourists. Mala sells her body just to get rid of poverty. Her parents know about this fact but they ignore it and when Mala becomes pregnant, they curse her. Lokuge has mentioned a very touchy dialogue between Mala and her parents. She says to her father, “You dare accuse me of smearing our name? ... I’ve seen you, you filthy pig. I’ve seen you with Seela and Maggie and all those other women, drunk, fiddling with them in the huts…Don’t think I’ve not heard the gossip”(101). She says to her mother, “And how many times have you taken the money that I brought home from the suddhas? It was good enough to keep all the family from starving, wasn’t it? Everyone in the house knows where the money comes from” (101). The twin sisters of Mala have been sent for a work but they run away from there and no one from the family bothers about them.

Lokuge focuses on the issue of the male gaze and its consequent consumption and commodification of the female body. The men in the novel, whether they are fishermen, merchants, educated elite or even the stray tourist, are constructed as weak, predatory or effete. When Mala delivers and abandons her second illegitimate child, Aruni, she disappears, and one is led to believe that she commits suicide by drowning in the sea.

6.5. Conclusion

In the novel, Aruni is a young diasporic woman character who returns to Sri Lanka in search of her roots due to emotional dislocation that she experiences at the house of her adopted family in Australia. Her search for the roots sketches the touchered history of a poor fishing family which interrogates failed nationhood in contemporary Sri Lanka. Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* and Ramesh Gunesekera’s *Heaven’s Edge* portrays similar quest narratives of a diasporic protagonists. In an interview regarding theories on diasporic writing Lokuge said: “Yes I do. Migrants’ ‘double vision’ is one of the most energetic areas of the creative process because you have two cultures or there cultures from which to draw, and cultures from which to draw, and you know each are quite well.”
In the novel both Mala and Aruni are fated to tragic end. Halpe writes, “In Turtle Nest, narrating the diasporic woman becomes a means by which to demonstrate the difficulty of reclaiming particular notions of the local. Lokuge sets the naïveté of Aruni’s search for kinship with the fisher folk in stark contrast to Mala’s desire to transcend the pettiness of her circumstances by seeking sexual liaisons with the privileged other” (181).

Lokuge mentions public events like wars, bomb blasts and economic shifts in post-independence Sri Lanka and rise of terrorism that traffic in the commodification of the local. Like in other postcolonial novels, the tragedy in *Turtle Nest* is perception of the post-independence nation-state as post-lapsarian. The collapse of socio-cultural values and collapse of the environment in which peoples depend on small industries like fishing has affected a lot. Aruni is locked within her figurative vision of home and sense of belonging. Halpe opines:

> When we situate the voices of the Sri Lankan diaspora within the larger corpus of literature in English from Sri Lanka, one is forced to reckon with an image of the nation as beyond redemption while Lokuge’s vision is separate and distinct from Michael Ondaatje’s or Ramesh Gunesekera’s, it nevertheless gives voice to a particular diasporic sensibility that uses the figure of the woman as a trope that invokes discourses on purity and nationhood. (191)

The sea provides livelihood to the fisher folk, but in the era of economic decline and growth of neo-colonial industries such as tourism, the sea gives birth to oscillating cycle of the predatory currencies. Turtle is a metaphor for the mutually beneficial cycles of fascination and violence that describe the lives of the fisher folk. Mala and her brother Priya become victims of the growing sex trade and sell their bodies in a desperate bid to better their economic circumstances.

Lokuge has given ample space to highlight the issues of diaspora, especially women from the developing countries like settlement, poverty and search for the self.
Works Cited


