

The shaping of triton's life



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the novel Reef, there are a series of events that mark Triton's (the protagonist's) coming of age. To understand Gunesequera's novel, a reader should heed these events and consider how these occurrences have shaped and affected the protagonist's life. In the novel Triton holds an insider/outsider status in the Salgado household, which is instrumental in many of the events that leads up to the awakening of his maturity.

Mr Salgado's fast-developing relationship with Ms. Nilli becomes a catalyst for change in the Salgado household. At this juncture, Ms. Nilli has already moved into the house and resides in Mr Salgado's bedroom. The beginning of the chapter ("A Thousand Fingers") which is where the given extract is from begins with Triton saying "A few days later Ms Nilli moved in. For us it was a beginning of a new era." (Gunesequera 103) With Ms Nilli presence comes a world of change. A female presence in the house alters Mr Salgado attitude immensely, he becomes more relaxed and smiles a lot more than he usually does. "He was smiling. He leaned back and his face seemed to relax into something much bigger than before." (Gunesequera 105). "His shirt was twisted on one side as if he had been fingering it. I didn't do anything about it." (Gunesequera 105) Triton allows Ms Nilli to take the lead with certain aspects of caring for Mr Salgado, he very eloquently says that she can take care of things of that nature. Ms Nilli's influence allowed Mr Salgado to become a lot more outgoing and sociable. He became a socialite of sorts, hosting parties and gatherings at his home. It becomes evident in this chapter that the couple is very comfortable with each other and aren't afraid to show affection in the comfort of their home. Ms Nilli's arrival brings about a shift in the dynamics of the Salgado household, it is no longer "our world".

Triton manages to maintain an insider/outsider status in the Salgado household. He possess an "insider" status because he lives and works in the house, allowing him to become privy to information he wouldn't usually be privy to. Triton unfortunately becomes an "outsider" in the household as well because he isn't a social equal to Salgado or any of the other people that attend Mr Salgado social gatherings. He is a servant in the house, not Mr Salgado's friend. Triton is always "inside" the house but his presence is sometimes overlooked, which is a constant reminder that he isn't one of "them". In this chapter we notice a pattern in terms of Triton's insider/outsider status. He no longer wants to be a part of the activities in the household, he prefers being an "outsider" and this happens constantly in this chapter. A clear example of this is when Triton goes outside, away from everyone and ignores Tippy's calls for another beer. He doesn't want to engage with these people and wishes for their departure.

Triton becomes disillusioned, realizing that all is not well in the Salgado household. The question of Triton's demotion in the household is posed. Tippy goes back to calling him "Kolla" instead of by his first name. This is an indication of Triton's shift in status he becomes an "outsider" again. Tippy asked "Where the hell is that bugger, Triton?" (Gunesekera 123) once again Triton is being disrespected. We now view Triton as inferior and Salgado and his friends as superior although we knew this was always the case it was never so blatantly pointed out. Triton's uneasiness is constantly shown in his actions. He ignoring Tippy goes against every rule he has taught himself, that alone is an indication of how unhappy and how wrong things are for Triton. He is frustrated about how the household has changed, he prefers the

quitter days that lacked the noises of drunken men gambling. Triton incurs a flurry of emotions and is unsure of what to do about it. His mind jumped to the past and he starts questioning some of the decisions that have played key roles in making him the man he is today.

The uneasiness Triton feels causes him to recall all the unwanted, negative memories and experiences, with Joseph being the source of all evil emerged in Triton's memory. He remembers Joseph as he represents negativity and he is also responsible for the first negative encounter Triton faced in the Salgado household. The fact that he recalls Joseph emphasises how uncomfortable and uneasy Triton is actually feeling. Triton recalls Witjetunga as well because he starts regretting his decision of not completing school. " I wish I had completed my school certificate." Witjetunga speaks to Triton as an equal a comrade of sorts since they are both employed by Mr Salgado there are no inferior/ superior traits. Witjetunga had also advised Triton about school and believed it was very important for the boy to attend. Triton starts reprimanding himself and calls himself a " stupid, stupid boy. Stupid Kolla." (Gunsekera) He is upset with himself for not completing school and for believing that all he would ever need to learn could be learned from Salgado. He is frustrated that he is illiterate and wants to change that fact, he no longer wants to be just a " kolla".

Mr Salgado is no longer a demigod in Triton's eyes. Instead, Mr Salgado is now human to Triton, filled with flaws and imperfections just like every other human being. Triton has realised that all cannot be learned from Mr Salgado and wishes to branch out on his own and become his own person; he no longer wishes to remain in Mr Salgado's shadow. The fact that Triton

mentions that he wished he had completed school is a clear indication that he has realised the importance of school and that he has knocked Salgado off the metaphoric pedestal. Triton nevertheless follows Mr Salgado into exile which could be a sign of his loyalty and devotion to his boss. Triton perhaps believes that a journey to a new land could hold new possibilities for him as well and a chance to reach his full potential. Moving to a new place without so much social and political strife could help Triton reach his ultimate goal of success.