

Cultural Confusion & Confrontation in Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*

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There is a considerable body of fiction in English written by immigrant writers based on their personal experiences. "The exiled writer usually benefits from his or her uprooting" (Cynthia Vanden Driesen, 'New Directions in Australian Studies' p.201). What is left behind is seen more clearly from a distance and the new abode is seen in a sharper the statement is very relevant in the case of Srilankan writer Yasmine Gooneratne who migrated to Australia twenty five years ago.

Gooneratne is most widely known today for the novels: *A Change of Skies* (1991) and *The Pleasures of Conquest* (1995). She takes on the new post colonial world of shifting cultures and migrant people with wit, sophistication and an analytical understanding. Both the novels have been short-listed for the common wealth writers prize and the first one received the Marjorie Barnard Literary Award in 1992. *The Pleasures of conquest* was shortlisted for the 1996 common wealth writers prize.

A Change of Skies juxtaposes two societies and two cultures Srilankan and Australian. The characters in both the novels are placed in familial, cultural and ideological positions that prevent them from stepping outside their fixed assumptions and attitudes. Yet both novels suggest that breaking away from one's ethnicity and absorbing the new culture is the only way for survival.

A Change of Skies centers around the life of a Sri Lanka couple – Bharat, a young Asian linguistics expert, and his wife Navaranjini. Bored by his life in Colombo, Bharat answers an advertisement for a visiting professorship at Southern Cross University in New South Wales and is invited to join for a five – year term. The novel includes many extracts from the journal maintained by Bharat's grandfather Edward and later published by Bharat as *Life line The Journal of an Asian Grandee* (1882-1887) Edited by his Grandson. The parallels in the experience of Edward with that of Bharat and Navaranjini suggest a continuity. Navaranjini perceives "a link, a firm (though hidden) connecting line between past events and future possibilities." (9) The novel thus attains a kind of universality.

Initially, Bharat and Navaranjini's decision to go to Australia for five years is not seen in any favorable light. There's nothing there but koalas and kangaroos, sheep and (I think they call them) wombats---. And what about the White Australia Policy?" (33). She derives some consolation from the fact that their exile will be only a temporary one: "Well, Bharat, it's only a short- term visit : just a five-years sentence, after all." (33)

Despite their ignorance of the country, both Bharat and Navaranjini are strongly determined to make a great success of their five- year stay in Australia. Navaranjini tries to equip herself for the stay by talking driving lessons and obtaining a driving licence. Marina, one of her former schoolmates, reminds her that Australians are fond of swimming. She therefore takes swimming lessons at the Colombo Swimming Club because it seemed to her that " *an ability to*

swim would be as important to us in Australia as an ability to play bridge or tennis had been to my parents in their outstation days: it was, obviously, a social necessity.” (64-65)

While editing the dairy maintained by her husband’s grandfather Edward thought out his journey to Australia and his stay there, Navaranjini discovers the common threads, that underlie all expatriate experience. As she says at the very outset, even before leaving for Australia: “A hundred years ago, I thought, this man made the same journey that we are making now. What can I learn from it? What can it teach me?” (64). Again, right in the middle of the novel, we come across another significant statement about the expatriate experience: “*He who crosses the ocean away change the skies above him but not the color of his soul.*” (167)

The first encounter with Australia leaves Navaranjini breathless. The fast traffic, the stickers on the rear windows of the vehicles, being winked at by the ginger-haired driver of a monster truck, the slogans “ASIANS OUT,” and “BASH A PAKI A DAY” make her feel “*that the welcoming smile on the face of that little girl in the poster at school had been meant for someone else. Whoever it was that she had held flowers out to so invitingly, it could not have been me.*” (69)

The first look at Sydney traffic makes her wonder if she would ever be able to drive there and exchange her Sri Lankan driving licence for an Australian one. She finds people driving very fast-with tense and grim faces, shoulders hunched eyes focused straight ahead and not glancing sideways, mouths unsmiling. Navaranjini reflects that the traffic in Colombo may be crazy but it is not death-oriented. There are no multiple traffic lanes, no purposeful forward movement of streams of vehicles. There it is merely swirl and muddle. People hang out of bus windows and stand on the footboards; nobody takes any notice whatever of zebra crossings.

Having read about the stoning of the *Devonshire* in the journal, Navaranjini mistakes a hail storm on the first night of their arrival in Australia to be a similar attack on them. This is how she describes the situation to her husband. “*It’s the Australians! the Australians have come. They’re throwing stones on the roof, and breaking all the windows.*” (81) Later, this is how she narrates the incident to Mrs. Koyaka:

The stones struck the roof of our new house with a tremendous clatter. Then they hit all the front windows. The panes were shattered into great big jagged places, the carpet was covered with splinters of broken glass. (81)

With the loud banging on the door Navaranjini grabs a kitchen knife in her hand, in case somebody attacked her husband. They are dumbstruck when their neighbour Bruce Trevally informs them that it was a hail storm, which had caused all that devastation.

As a linguist, Bharat becomes aware very early in his sojourn that the Australians are lazy in their speaking habits and they find the long Sri Lanka names almost impossible to pronounce. He becomes very self-conscious about it when TV sports commentator reporting a one-day cricket match between Australia and Sri Lanka refuses to pronounce the Sri Lankan captain’s name:

“It’s written up on the SCG scoreboard, mate,” he told his co-commentator. “Have a look – there it is – and as you can see its taking up all the available space and more. You want me to give it air – time too?” (96)

In his letter to his mother, Bharat voices his concern about preserving their ancient culture and traditional ways of life: “*The Asian community here, though it is not as large as the one in Melbourne, is very much aware of the cultural hazards, amidst which we live*”(87) He writes about the children of Sri Lanka families who have become infected with Australian values. In a tragicomic manner, he describes Mr.Koyako’s

efforts to preserve his national identity. As Mrs. Koyako tells Navaranjini: “*My husband ... is very keen that our children who are growing up overseas should not lose touch with the traditions of their forefathers.*” (92)

Earlier, Barry had published the biography of his grandfather Edward in book form entitled *Lifeline*. By writing *The Guide* now, Barry feels he will be carrying his family’s traditional pursuit of translation and interpretation into new country.

In *The Guide for the Asian Migrants to Australia*, Barry writes that one question which haunts him still, even after spending so many years in an alien country is : “*When is it exactly that the immigrant throws overboard every other idea, every other possible destination and decides that here, and in no other place, he will make his home?*”(151). In every expatriate’s experience, he feels, “*There must surely have been a moment a small space in time for all of us who are now here, when the anchor was let down, the sails folded, the landing made.*”(151) Barry goes on to ruminate about his own case and that of his grandfather Edward and comes to the conclusion that “*We do not choose the moment of departure of settlement, we are chosen by them. And also that those moments, once they have touched us, make us different persons from the persons we were before, and place ceases to matter*”. (152)

The change started when Bharat and Navaranjini stepped out of the exit door of the plane at Sydney Airport. As Barry writes in his *Guide*: “*One conclusion I have reached that is sadly, but I think incontestably, true is that people, like all material things, undergo change.*” (154)

Jean also considers the question of immigration in the course of her narrative. She talks of the various reasons given by her acquaintances from India and Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Barry and Jean had none of the above reasons to migrate: they had no children to educate; nor was there any racial or religious discrimination against them which made them flee to Australia: ‘They were leading a comfortable, even a luxurious life in Colombo. Occasionally Barry did grumble about the university not funding his research properly or about the social and political life in Sri Lanka – about the photography of the prime minister greeting. His Holiness Sri Bhansi Ram the guru from the south India. Splashed in full colour on the front page of the Daily News.

Gooneratne uses the technique of Robert Drewe *The Savage Crows* and Brain Castro *Birds of Passage* as well as others. Of alternating a contemporary story with a past one with which it has considerable parallels in order to suggest the continuity of the experience of displacement, as well as providing an ironic commentary on both the forms that contemporary exile can take and the fact that people taken as *arrivistes* are in fact as much settlers as the white people.

The novel alternates the voices of Bharata Mangala Davasinha and his wife Navaranjini, whom he calls Baba. He is Sinhalese : she is Tamil. Bharat is an academic in linguistics who is bored by his life in Colombo and answers an advertisement from the Southern Cross University in NSW for a visiting professor in linguistics, a five year appointment, beginning in 1964. He had known almost nothing about Australia before seeing the advertisement. He comments only that he had seen the country on a map: “*To the east of India and the Island of Ceylon (also print), South of Borneo and Sarawak, there Australia had been, a blank pink space shaped like the head of a scotch terrier with its ears pricked up and its square nose permanently pointed westwards, towards Britain*”(11). Not surprisingly, such images of cartography abound in post colonial literature.

He speaks ironically of the country's 'doggy devotion' to Britain. Their friend Mr. Doraisamy warns them before they leave of "*that ancient legend of Asia, according to which a sage warned seafarers questing in lower latitudes for a Great South Land to beware lest they be sucked into a great emptiness, and have their spirits drained away*". (57) The point is often made in these novels that Australia is lacking in myth and oral story telling. This alleged thinness manifests itself even in the manner and the structure of these novels. For instance, as several reviewers pointed out, Abid Khan's *Solitude of Illusions* starts almost in a mode of Rushdie-like magic realism but particularly in the scenes set in Australia resorts to a kind of social realism that fits the limited rationality of his protagonist. We are told of the protagonist that 'His reward for spending time with Munir was a privileged insight into a secret world populated with invisible beings- *buraoks* and *nagas*. *Djinns and Pories* (SI : 87) but it is an insight from which he is unable to profit, he cannot see with his heart, as Munir accuses him.

On the other hand, Australia is noteworthy for its egalitarianism. To return to *Gooneratne*, we are given a quotation from Edward's diary : '*Every man here is, or expects one day to be, his own master, a way of thinking which gives rise in the majority of men to a spirit of marked Independence*'. (103)

This seems to be meant straight forwardly even if in general the mode of the novel is satirical, built around the mutual misunderstandings inherent in the clash of eastern and western cultures. That satire in the novel is broad and even-handed, to the point of being almost promiscuous. Sometimes it is conventional academic comedy, of the kind we get in Australia in novels like *Busy in the Fog* and *The Wild Life Reserve*. For instance, the university display is successful because Bharat's wife Navaranjini, who has now become Jean, puts some Indian erotic in it, thus giving her husband Bharat, who has now become Barry, an undeserved reputation as an expert lover. 'There were rows of Japanese students', we are told at one point, queuing up to learn English, and rows of Australian students '*queuing up to learn Japanese*'. (120) At one point the novel even, in a post-modern display of self-referentiality, turns in upon itself.

Nations are defined by their boundaries, but these boundaries join as well as separated. Continental nations contend with each other to establish geographical boundaries that will separate them from other states, only to find that acts of contention over their borders join them in common histories. Island nations are separated in space and linked in commerce and intercourse by the oceans that surround them. Australia, a nation inhabiting a continent that is also an island, shares some characteristics of both. As an island, it has provided a destination for migrants who have made it a meeting place for diverse cultures. As a nation state it has tended to turn its back on its surrounding oceans and ignoring its actual commerce with neighbouring and source cultures, erect boundaries of difference.

Each succeeding wave of migrants has given a distinct shape to this difference. The Aboriginal inhabitants, for whom the sea was more a barrier than a link turned their differences inward, producing distinct cultures shaped according to different geographic zones, but sharing a common apprehension of the relations of people to land. Lines of trade and song joined the cultures in a comprehensive network and later, links, developed in the north with Melanesia, the Malaccas and even China. This pattern was dislocated by the eruption of the British settlers who from the end of the eighteenth century incorporated the continent in the British Empire, and thus joined it irrevocably with the processes by which industrial capital unified the globe. These processes in turn produced the waves of British and other migrants who came to dig gold and stayed to develop agriculture, deep mining and manufacturing; of refugees from religious and

political oppression in nineteenth century Europe, and of later refugees from the chaos of northern and central Europe and the poverty of the Mediterranean after the second world war and most recently of refugees and others from the nations that have succeeded the old empires in Asia.

The migrants in Henry Handel Richardson's trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (London : Heinemann, 1917) and Yasmine Gooneratne's *A change of skies* (Sydney : Pan Macmillan, 1991) are displaced from island colonies, Ireland and Sri Lanka respectively, yet carry with them a wider sense of nationality based on imperial loyalties to an idealized island of Great Britain. While this sense preserves their self-esteem in their new country, it also alienates them from the emergent continental nation of Australia where they find themselves.

In Richardson's trilogy, this alienation is resolved in tragedy. Mahony, finding no state to give him a home on this earth, retreats into the solitude of Madness. Gooneratne's novel by contrast, is a comedy in which the displaced characters, by entering into the lives of others produce a community which is located within their new state but represents a nation that goes beyond any boundaries. This conception of a nation as a place of meeting rather than an enclosure provides the basis for a new conception of nationhood appropriate to contemporary interdependent internationalism.

The Fortunes of Richard Mahony provides us with only two alternatives to materialism. One, represented by Richard, seeks a civilized ideal that goes beyond any single nation but ignores the economic reality that supports it. Its image, the sea, where alone Richard feels at peace, symbolizes constant change, but is also the vital medium without which the wealth of the Australian soil could not have been transported to world markets, and so provided the basis of Mahony's fortunes. The other represented by Mary Mahony, is the land itself, or rather the society that has grown on it. Mary's practical strength and courage, and her emotional sympathy with others, enable her to control circumstance but this control is equivalent to the greed of the miners plundering the earth, or the way entrepreneurs like her brother, John Turner, bend their energies into remaking the old world in the new country. While this new world has an energy and a largeness, a freedom from the customary bounds of the old world, it is, unlike Richard, tied to its immediate time and blind to the violence it does to the land that support it.

It is thus unable to comprehend the vengeance the land harbours for its despoilers, which is realized in the novel in the devastation of the depression that destroys the burgeoning confidence of Ballarat and Melbourne, and in the insolvency and descent into madness that destroys Mahony.

The Britain that provided both the model and the enemy for the citizens of goldrush Ballarat remained dominant in Australian consciousness at least until the middle of this century. The erosion of the bases of this dominance had, however, begun much earlier, not only internationally but within Australia. It was eventually destroyed not only by a developing national confidence and by new waves of immigration, but also by economic changes which integrated Australian industry first nationally and then globally.

First casualties were such pockets of provincial independence as Ballarat, most of whose local enterprises were swallowed up by national companies during the first post-war decade with this independence went the confidence that had sustained their attempts maintain British culture. Just as Mahony left first Ballarat and then Melbourne, only to find that his native Britain now rejected him, so first Ballarat and now Melbourne have come adrift, lacking a past that can sustain an economic function or a cultural role in global future. The economic and cultural energies of Australia gave shifted from the interior and the provinces to the cities of the coastal

north-east. These are the energies that encompass the characters in Yasmine Gooneratne's novel as they change the skies of Sri Lanka for those of Australia.

Nevertheless, despite the distance in time, Bharat and Navaranjini Mangala- Davasinha bring to Australia the same cultural attachments that Mahony brought a century earlier. Unlike Mahony, however, their sense of cultural superiority is in conflict with their anticipation of a racial hostility that will prevent them taking their proper place in the new country.

Both the hostility and the superiority provide themes for the extracts from the diaries of Edward Mangala- dava Sinha, the grandfather of Bharat who, in the last century, ran away from his family home in Matara, Ceylon and enlisted himself with a Cargo of Sinhalese labourers being recruited to work in the Queensland Cane fields. Through the novel these diaries provide a counter point to the lives of Bharat and Navaranjini in their new land. Edward, described in the volume of his journals edited by his grandson as an 'Asian Grandee', is thoroughly Anglicized, and like Richard Mahony, finds the Australian settlers uncouth. He gives this difference some historical content by contrasting the styles of the British governors of Ceylon and those of the Australian colonies. The former had been from the landed gentry and had viewed their dominion "much as they would have viewed a well-stocked game reserve". As "*Land owners who value their stock. They had recognized the wisdom of taking into their and are already resident on the land*" (162). By contrast, the Australian governors were plain men like Macquarie, who although they may have "*worked tirelessly for the improvement of the rough settlement he had been sent out to rule*", was "*misunderstood and even disliked by the settlers*". (163) These men lacked the aristocratic qualified needed to transplant the hierarchical British order which, Edward believes, the settlers would have welcomed.

Yet while Edward resembles Mahony in his belief in British order, he shows an adaptability more characteristic of Mahony's wife Mary. Just as he is prepared to disguise himself as a labourer to travel to Australia, so in the new country he is willing to accept any employment available. He thus discovers the bleak side of the Australian dream, going as a stockman to Badagiri in Western Australia, a "dry and desolate place" where he discovers that a score more of his countrymen had died of heat and thirst only a generation earlier. Although the Sinhalese had taken pains to learn of the country from the Aborigines before embarking on their attempt at settlement, they suffered the consequences of attempting to impose a foreign culture of husbandry on an alien land. This episode directly echoes The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, where the land constantly thwarts the hopes of the settlers, and Mahony, by the physical vengeance it breaks on their best endeavours.

Like Mahony Edward finds the habits of his new associates distasteful. In words that would apply equally to the suburban culture that Bharat and Navarajini encounter as to the lives of the stockmen with whom he mixes, he describe their cuisine : "*The crude cooking of raw unseasoned meat over burning coals (which passes for the culinary act in these barbarous places) is, for example, something I would find hard to bear during a longer sojourn than I intend to make. The result is often charred, and where it is not so, it is generally raw, the blood still running from it. The smell of it, not to put too fine a point on the matter, is vile*". (166)

Previously, he had been able to avoid this crudity because his companion, David had brought with him from Ceylon a "Portion of curry leaves, spices and pepper" with which he was able to make the meat "Palatable". Yet now, despite his hardships, Edward enjoys the companionship of the stockmen and describes one in particular, Joe, as a "friend" who he hopes "will think of me often with his customary goodhearted kindness". These sentiments bely the truth of the translation he offers of Horace's apothegm : "He who crosses the ocean may change

the skies above him but not the colour of his soul". Edward has already changed, and although he returns to Ceylon, the liberal breadth he conquires from his colonial experience is, as Bharat acknowledges, (145) the foundation of a family tradition that enables them to explain one culture to another.

While Grandfather Edward's travels are important as precedent and counter point, the experience of Bharat and Navaranjini provides the main substance of the book. Bharat, like Richard Mahony, is the intellectual who reflect on his experience, recognizing his alienation but, again like Richard, he depends on his wife's clarity of understanding to cope with his daily vicissitudes. He recognizes (153) that he lacks the easy acceptance of another culture that characterizes both Navaranjini and Edward. Quite unlike Mahony, he responds to his alienation by strenuous endeavours to become an insider. Central to these is his decision to change his name, so that he and Navaranjini become Barry and Jean Mundy. Yet it is Jean, the more adaptable, who resist this acculturation most violently and effectively, accepting her new name while asserting her native identity.

The issue of identity is central to the fourth section of the novel, entitled 'The conduct of Travellers'. Previously, Bharat and Navanrjini have been involved in the clash of cultures as newcomers in a strange land. In this section, which looks back on the first five years of their residence, they confront the consequences of their choice. Barry decides that the real moment of his decision to leave Ceylon was when he decided he could no longer endure its confusion. Already largely westernized, he finds an opportunity to make his own choices and adopts the role of cultural communicator. Jean, on the other hand, both remains deeply rooted in her native culture and moves with great practicality into the life of her new country.

At the beginning of the fourth section, Jean, still Navaranjini decides that Australians, deep down, are really Asians. Their appearance of insensitivity merely conceals their true nature. By acting on this assumption, she breaks through the superficial conviviality of her husband's colleagues to reveal their deeper prejudices and in doing so discloses her own. The admiration she earns for discomfiting the complacent unrighteous is compounded by her triumph at the university open day, where her exhibition of rare books and manuscripts not only earns a profit for the English Department but confirms her opinion that a common humanity unites Asians and Australians. The mark of his common humanity unites Asians and Australians. The mark of this common humanity is the similar and salacious curiosity shown by both parties in a particularly detailed illustrated edition of the Kamasutra. Encouraged by these successes, Jean accepts the role of supporting her husband while recognizing that she is the one who brings into the new land the old stories that can make sense of the common experience of people of different origins.

Similarly, at the end of the novel, when Barry chooses to set up a school to teach English to other newcomers, Jean provides the true meeting point of cultures by establishing a restaurant and school of cuisine. The change of her own skies has change her soul, and she is now ready to change the skies, or at least the horizons, of her new compatriots.

This ending leaves us with the question of why although these two novels have a similar structure, the one reaches a comic resolution while the other works inexorably to tragedy. In part, this difference reflects the difference in authors. Gooneratne is an ironist whose principal characters are observers as well as actors in their own stories. This enables them to pressure a distance from events, and so obtain a certain control over them. Those who lack this quality, like the racist professor Blackstone and the earnest Sri Lankan Australian Community leader, Mr. Koyako, are caught in the circumstances they try to manage.

By contrast, Richardson is a naturalist whose characters are gripped by a destiny outside their own will. Her novel traces the dramatic irony of circumstance that dooms Mohany to suffer the same fate that he observes destroying others in the early years of his career, and which he foolishly believes he can escape by giving himself to spiritual rather than material concerns.

The personal difference between these two authors however reflects also the historical differences between the times in which they wrote. In the nineteenth century, the fictitious Richard Mahony could no more question the cultural and material supremacy of Britain than could the novelist who, writing in England in the 1920s, through him reproduced the life of her own father. Gooneratne on the other hand, writes in a time when the imperial certainties of her characters can only appear absurd. Her irony is as much a historical reality as a personal stance. Her achievement is to convert this inevitability of perspective into a declaration of human possibility. Her awareness of the contradictions of culture and individual ambition is contemporary, but her discovery of potential within the contradiction is post colonial. In recognizing the complex sources of the present, she realizes the hope that these can generate a future, free of the limitations of the past, but not free of the universal absurdities of the human condition. People do, she suggests, change their souls when they change their skies. More importantly, when they change their skies, they do not abandon the past, but produce a new future and new possibilities. These possibilities will determine the shape of the coming Australian republic.

Gooneratne's multi-layered historical novel, *A change of skies*, moves further towards fiction, interweaving invented late nineteenth century diaries which record the circumstances of migration from Sri Lanka to Australia, with the story of the present day family descendants. By regarding the diaries, the descendants piece together a story which becomes an important part of their own Australian history in the process. In this way the novel shows how contemporary Australians identities, both national and personal are formed and reformed by an ongoing process of connection and negotiation with various histories, most of them, unlike the stories unfolded from the treasure-trove of letters, unknown and unreachable.

My last examples, from the many that are available are from Greek Australian writing. Vasso Kalamaris is an immigrant writer who, in her book, *The sane light* (1989), draws together stories of Greek immigrant life in Australia, based on the experiences of her family, with stories of return to Greece to visit the family village. She has written a number of books, plays and volumes of poetry, most of them on the same theme of migration, displacement and the double world of the immigrant in Australia. In her case, the stories are all written in Greek and self-translated into English with the help of various translators. Because her work is published in Greek and English, she has a large readership in Greece as well as Australia and it would be interesting to see how such stories of Australian Greek Diaspora life are now filtering into and influencing contemporary understanding in Greece of their diasporan history.

The women writers belonging to different hemispheres describe the immigrant experience to arrive at different conclusions. While Susanna Moodie's account was to educate the aspirants to not to risk the journey to Canada, Yasmine Gooneratne tries to drive away such apprehensions by asserting that Australia is a place that would not permit one to return home.

It seeks to study human predicament in two different hemispheres of people caught in adverse circumstances. Sketched by Susanna Moodie *Roughing it in the Bush* (1987) was to discourage the ambitious adventures by narrating the tales of her suffering for seven long years. Moodie's account is a first-hand account of settlers who brave rough weather and pestilence to reach the shore to find their hopes belied. It becomes an authentic document as the family had

spent nineteen years in Canada. The modern text has been considerably edited for a number of reasons that Carl.F.Klinck explains in his introduction. Her novel served (at that time) different purposes for the British, Americans and Canadians. For the Americans it was “a substitute for chivalric romances”, for the British it was a source of information on Canada, while for the Canadians it was an account of the country’s emergence from black wood into a land of opportunities, though some Canadians did resent so dismal a portrayal of their country.

Susanna Moodie was not pleading a case for the colonists trying to depend them by arguing that the wealth/ power they gathered in course of time was hard-earned as a result of constant struggle, perseverance and having undergone risks of several kinds. One should neither envy their gains nor should one accuse them of exploiting the natives. Vassanji’s *Gunny Sack* also describes the predicament of those who struggle and earn to be a victim of enterprising people who rob them off the fruits of hard-earned money. To call these people who reach from rags to riches “colonists” is an insult to their patience, perseverance.

In contrast to Susanna Moodie’s account of life in the bush, Yasmine Gooneratne’s account differs in several respects. First, it is an account moving in time and space. The past century juxtaposed with the present period. Secondly, it also takes cognizance of events occurring at home (i.e., Ceylon) that cast their shadow on the life of people living in Australia- while Moodie had no dispute on the life of people living in Australia- while Moodie had no dispute on any issue, ethnic clashes in Ceylon embittered the lives of Bharat and Baba though removed by a distance of a few thousand kilometers from home. Thirdly there is only one narrator in Moodie’s novel; in Yasmine Gooneratne’s there are five narrators- Edward, Bharat (Barry), Navaranjini (Baba alias Jean), Edwina and Moude Crabbe- her canvas is wider, covering several areas.

The common features of the two novels are that both deal with adventures that were catalytic to immigration. They portray the natives in bright colours, never trying to colour their vision with racial prejudices. Though Bharat went to Australia with a kind of ethnic anxiety because of their brown skins and possibility of “Asians out” “Basha Paki a Day” kind of reception. Their misgivings caused them a lot of embarrassment when they considered Mr. Bruce Trivally’s advances as hostility where as they were courteous and kind to the new emigrants. Their real feelings for the ‘brownies’ were much camouflaged- something they shared among themselves but tactfully managed to subdue it.

Compared to Susanna Moodie’s work who does not describe what was happening in England mean while, Yasmine Gooneratne is all the time aware of the conflicts and chaos prevailing in Sri Lanka (and unfortunately even today in more violent outburst). Hence the disenchantment in *A change of skies* is total. While Susanna Moodie’s book was meant to be a guide to prospective immigrant to Canada to discourage him and stay home, Yasmine Gooneratne’s book develops a nausea for home thus encouraging him to return as early to Australia as possible. The contrast in Kandy described on page 26 is quite sharp to one on page 265: “*Kandy is just so wonderful – It’s the real Sri Lanka*” (265) in order to conceal the real Sri Lanka. “*The history of colonial occupation and international bullying. Picturesque as it is, I find it quite easy to live without it*”. (270)

Asia that Yasmine Gooneratne wants to de-construct / de-colonise must not be “depicted as disease..... The leperous Pale Patches” (238). Hence Edward succeeds in having a memorable “Return”. Strangely, like Edward, Edwina too is trying to shake herself clearly off the colonial burden. While Bharat and Navaranjini had to get their names swapped and get recognized as Barry and Jean, Edwina redeems her past by turning the clock back and from Edwina she

becomes Veena because while Edward smacked of colonialism with the name of king Edward the seventh, Edwina was after the last Vicerine of India. (318) In this way the Empire strikes back.

Another common feature of the two texts is their bright and kindly humour. Both Susanna Moodie and Yasmie Gooneratne can laugh at feminine frailties. If Susanna Moodie could portray eccentric characters like Tom Wilson we have in yasmine Gooneratne Mr. Koyako described with immaculate precision an extremely odd person (89-90).

These books can also be studied in terms of synchronic linguistics – English in the nineteenth century in Canada vis-à-vis in Australia. While English in Canada was quite close to the Victorian excellence, in Australia it was struggling to find a proper Pidgin. Shortening as shd, wd, cd, we have a taste of Australian English (of 1999) when we are told that “bastard” is a term of endearment (121). “*Make all your chooks turn into emus- and kick you flaming dunny down*”. (129)

Yasmine Gooneratne follows the techniques and jargons of deconstruction/ post-modernism. Journey/ voyage motives along with field notes are mentioned. The narrators are writers- writing becoming a spring board for narration- Edward wrote a diary, Bharat a Guide, Baba a book on cookery, Edwina her field notes. The past and present, similarly Australia and Sri Lanka, are juxtaposed. There is shuttle cock like movements of narrators. The two novels, when read together, afford an excellent understanding of the different lands, people, cultures and predicaments.

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