

Navigating Filiation/Affiliation: Re-visioning Diasporic Experience in Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*

Nidhi Singh¹
University of Rajasthan, India

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Abstract

Problematics of filiation and affiliation underscore the Janus-faced diasporic sensibility of Yasmine Gooneratne, equipoised between the esoteric pull of the ancestral allegiances and the allure of a promising future in the new land. Gooneratne's novel *A Change of Skies* (1991) explores the trajectory of journey and consequent experiences of two generations of diaspora. There is a constant negotiation of the emotional and the social, the cultural and the political.

Exposed to European influence during colonial era, independent South Asian nations have been progressively impacted by forces of modernisation and Globalisation. Technological advancement revolutionised communication and opened the floodgates of cross-border movement owing to the opportunities generated. The floating population of transnationals constantly navigate the porous boundaries of filiation and affiliation. The body of literature produced by the diaspora is haunted by these contradictory allegiances, as is evident in the novels of Gooneratne. The paper attempts to interrogate Yasmine Gooneratne's re-visioning of immigrant experiences from the vantage point of diasporic consciousness shaped by colonial/postcolonial island nation Sri Lanka and the settler colony of island continent Australia.

Keywords

Filiation, affiliation, diaspora, immigrant, colonial, postcolonial

Historical processes of colonisation, nation construction and globalisation have continually redefined the nature of South Asian diaspora. The erstwhile South Asian colonies have been progressively impacted by modernisation and technological advancement that revolutionised communication. Internationalism and corollary diasporic movements have gained momentum and cannot be seen in the same light as the labour-oriented migration initiated during the colonial era. The escalating border-crossings owing to the

¹ **Dr. Nidhi Singh** is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, India. An Australia-India Council Senior Fellow, her areas of interest include Australian literature, Postcolonial literature and immigrant writing. Her articles have appeared in national and international journals, as well as in edited books. Currently she is engaged in the study of narratives of indigenous communities. Email: nidhi.s.jpr@gmail.com.

proliferation of opportunities and personal compulsions make it imperative for diasporic consciousness to constantly navigate the grey waters of filiation and affiliation. The resultant trauma and alienation cannot be grasped solely in terms of spatio-temporal or geopolitical placement. The psychological and even spiritual connotations of “home” get tinged with ambivalence. Negotiation of conflicting loyalties arising from relocation underscores diaspora’s association with both the land of adoption and ancestral land. Consequently, the problematics of rootedness/rootlessness dominate the trajectory of the diaspora: be it the agony of torn roots and nostalgic retrospection, or the dialectics arising from the attempt to grow roots in the new land while clutching on to “imaginary homelands” (Rushdie 10) left behind. The journey from the migrant’s strong sense of filiation with the ancestral to its affiliation with the adopted present is traversed either in a lifetime or across generations. Attempts at a resolution of contradictory pulls of home and away, bridging the gap between outsider and insider, acceptance of the status of “Trishanku” (Parmeswaran 27) inhabiting the fecund “liminal space” (Bhabha 4) emerge as the impetus underlying the diasporic creative impulse embedded in immigrant experience.

Diasporic writers across the globe attempt to grapple with anomalies engendered by their location in the contact zone of cultures at variance with each other and yet mutually enriching. The body of literature produced by the diaspora has constantly explored ramifications of the sense of alienation engendered by filial ties with the homeland, and the possibility of affiliation-bred loyalty to the new. Paradoxically, the spatial, temporal as well as psychological distancing of the old is countered by forging bonds of affiliation through creative invocation of the past. Diasporic literature is haunted by competing allegiances and conflicting loyalties that get imaged in Yasmine Gooneratne’s work. Her novels deal with the re-visioning of migrant experience from the vantage point of diasporic consciousness shaped by colonial/postcolonial island-nation Sri Lanka and the settler colony of island-continent Australia. Problematics of filiation and affiliation underscore the Janus-faced diasporic sensibility of Gooneratne, equiposed between the esoteric pull of the ancestral allegiances and the allure of a promising future in the new land. The novel *A Change of Skies* (1991) explores the trajectory of journey and consequent experiences of two generations of migrants: the journey to colonial Australia undertaken by Edward from 19th century Ceylon is framed within of a corresponding journey of grandson Bharat and wife Navaranjini from 20th century postcolonial Sri Lanka to multicultural Australia. The counterpointing of journeys from different eras and consequent experiences converge and coalesce creating reverberations that establish continuities despite the disruptive narrative interspersed with minutes from the Journal, letters and multi-vocal narrative.

The novel opens with a warning to the readers not to be hasty in their judgement of the work, lest they be judged in turn. The subtle humour of the opening lines is in contrast with the pathos evident in the prayer cited in the "Prologue" that introduces the theme of journey, departure and failure to fulfil filial duty. *A Change of Skies* recreates the history of Sri Lankan migration reaching back to the era of indentured labour being exported from 19th century Colombo in a ship named "Devonshire" for the "cane-fields" (3) of Queensland. The journey is narrated in sophisticated English with a vocabulary that sets the narrator apart. He is referred to as "*Asian Grandee*" establishing his genteel lineage and at the same time bracketing him as an immigrant on lines of region and not nation; the divide between the orient and the occident, Asian and European, between East and West gets highlighted. In the first leg of the month long journey, Grandfather Edward writes, "I miss my home and my dear mother and her sisters, but I have no regrets. May God forgive my father. I too forgive, but I will not forget" (4). Home gets conflated and subsumes women of the family, but the patriarchal figure of father is excluded. The image of unrepentant prodigal son torn by conflicting emotions is reinforced. The novel then leaps forward to the period where intellectual pursuit becomes the spring board for the Sri Lankans to go to Australia. The time zones get intertwined pointing at the continuities and contiguity. The narrative moves to the present where grandson Bharat muses over the "neat copperplate writing" (4) of his grandfather. The inscription neatly fitting the pages of the journal is perceived by him as mirroring the fitting in to the life available to a diaspora in 19th century Australia: "... filling the centres of his days with new things seen and taken note of, the corners with reflections on things remembered" (4). Meditations and memories of old world are countered by accumulation of information about the new. Narrator points at the relegation of filial connections to the "corners" of consciousness with the wilful accretion of affiliation generating novel experiences.

Edward Said in *The World, the Text and the Critic* holds that diasporic sensibility placed in "nodal time" is aware of the context or situation it is in. Conscious of being acted upon by the dominant culture, it produces "a worldly self-situating, a sensitive response" (15). Hence, an individual is not merely a product of, but a critical respondent to the historical and social ethos he/she is situated in. Said refers to Auerbach's critical recovery of Europe due to the specific circumstances of his absence as instance of "filiation with [his] natal culture, and because of his exile, *affiliation* with it through critical consciousness and scholarly work" (Said 16). The collaborative conjunction of filiation and affiliation is marked by activation of diasporic creative impulse. The friction issuing from the culture of the empowered validating itself at the cost of diminution of the "other," problematises the identity construction of the diaspora in the new milieu. South Asian diaspora too faced marginalisation

ranging from expulsion to exclusion and to secondary citizenship. Gooneratne's narrative in *A Change of Skies* straddles the colonial as well as the postcolonial giving rise to epistemological questions related to the creative process and the freedom from pre-established hegemonic structures of expression. It focusses on the unresolved issues and contradictions engendered by the forces of "push" and "pull," as referred to by B.C. Upreti (5), that get activated in immigrant situations. The diasporic dilemma gets highlighted when Bharat, placed in similar situation as his grandfather Edward, succumbs to the pressure to conform. Susan Koshy points out that "the homeland-diaspora nexus has been formative for some but not for all and has waxed and waned over the time..." (06). A "strong myth of return" coexists with a "weak myth of return" opening up the issue to continuous renegotiation. While Edward returns to his homeland after a five year sojourn in Australia, Bharat, after his initial attempt at return, decides on diasporic existence and makes Australia his home.

The contested site of socio-cultural and geo-political face-off between the host nation and the new entrants in the polity shapes the diasporic response and identity. The dialectics of the centre and the margin as well as compulsion to assimilate are articulated through narration that repetitively attempts to negotiate the links of natal filiation and the affiliative impulse. Literary representation of Gooneratne attempts to interrogate the frames aiming at covert conservation of filiation through deliberate affiliation that reproduces the structures reminiscent of filiative modes of existence. The writer distances herself by allowing the narrators to speak from the space of geographical and historical emplantment. Reconstitution of the life of a migrant from 19th century is based on Grandfather Edward's journal, a subjective and structured response to personal experience of journeying to an unknown land and back. A collage of remembrances from the past and hopes of future progress sustain migrant existence. The physical journey takes on the colour of an allegory. The experiences of migrants across different eras bridge the past and the present: the connection between the place named *Badagimi* (164) and Sinhalese workers who died of hunger crying *badagni* which meant "fire in the belly" in the drought-hit Australian terrain, transports the narrative from individual history to racial history hinting at the universality of human endeavour and struggles in an alien, hostile land. Edward learns of the fate of the Sinhalese workers who had preceded him by thirty years and declares, "He who crosses the ocean may change the skies above him, but not the colour of his soul" (167). Filial pull of the ancestral cultural moorings are given relevance over the claims of new geo-political positioning.

Language proficiency emerges as both an empowering and a disempowering tool in the hands of the user. Acquisition of language skills is a trope that recurs consistently in Gooneratne's novel. Using language other than mother-tongue for creative expression engenders socio-cultural implications that

surface as one of the major concerns in the work. Politics of language further intensifies when adopted language is of the colonisers or the empowered host, as in the case of diasporic and immigrant writers. Edward's companion Davith rescues a mynah with injured wing on the way to Queensland, reinforcing the imagery of migrants landing on unknown soil, bewildered and crippled by the trauma of crossing over (63). He is confident that the mynah will learn to fly again but expresses his doubt about whether the bird will learn the foreign language or not. His observation is a marker of diasporic resilience as well as reservations. The irony and racial implication cannot be overlooked when Maureen Trevally, herself a European immigrant, is harshly dismissive of mynah and crow as "foreign marauders" (86). Navaranjini can relate to them and decides that she would rather be the resilient mynah than a mournful crow (87). The mynah in the narrative serves as a thread that runs through the familial as well as racial past to the present and hints at continuity with naturalisation of the bird in Australia. The microcosm of Bharat's familial history of diasporic experiences reflects the macrocosm of a race, and by extension of all diasporic communities. The work points at the challenges and rewards that await migrants as a subtle indicator of the diasporic experience inherent to human condition.

Grandfather Edward with his schooling and education knows English. He realises that most of his co-travellers have a working knowledge of the language. However, for the Australian Captain of the ship, the passengers are an undifferentiated mass of labourers who spelled inconvenience because of their long-drawn names. The captain in his invective ridden speech says, "Why, in the name of G-d, cannot the ___s call themselves ___ Pumpkin or ___ Potato-head" (52). This is reminiscent of European settlers changing tribal names of aborigines to "articles of daily consumption on the Settlers' table" (53). The diminution of and control over the naming of the indigenes by colonisers is reflective of the existent hegemonic relationship. "Australian" is taken as a synonym for white population, with passing reference to the exploitation of aborigines. The lack of presence of aborigines in the narrative is most obvious in its absence. There is a dawning of realisation of inequities based on race, caste and class divisions.

Names and naming is one of the intermittent motifs in the novel. Mr. Koyako who epitomises and upholds Sri Lankan moral values and tradition, warns Bharat against changing his name as "names are all-important to culture and identity" (96). Despite initial reservations, Bharat and Navaranjini decide to change their names as a step towards assimilation: "in spite of the long and glorious history of his name, we looked for a user-friendly model to replace it" (123). The matter-of-fact tone of Navaranjini highlights the irony underlying the act. It also points at a weakening of filial bonds and loosening hold of family history as it gets replaced by affiliation based on utilitarian demands.

Navaranjini becomes Jenny and Bharat becomes Barry, a process their daughter refers to as “mutation” (316). The bowing down to the assimilationist pressure aggravates the identity crisis giving rise to “fractured” consciousness that immigrants grapple with. Navaranjini says, “There are problems attached to waking up with Barry when you’ve gone to bed with Bharat” (124). Both Edward and Bharat learn that immigrant experiences turn seemingly immutable boundaries fluid and porous. Gooneratne uses the conflicting claims of filial duty and affiliative adjustments adroitly to convey their relevance in identity construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. Bharat decides to give up his name in an attempt to blend in, but this does not stop him from tracing his intellectual genealogy back to grandfather Edward, the first person in the family to travel to Australia. Though Bharat is of the view that an Asian mind is held back due to undue emphasis on “status” and “family,” yet “the idea of an intellectual continuity that should withstand the erosion of time and distance” (145) by carrying forward grandfather’s legacy pleases him. While Bharat successfully gets his Grandfather’s journal published as *Lifeline*, when he is asked to write *A Guide* for Asian migrants in Australia, he is unable to complete it due to his inability to remain objective (146). Edward’s experiences are used by Bharat to peg his own understanding of immigrants who are powerless to choose “the moments of departure or settlement” (152) that once experienced transforms them. Gooneratne contends that the experience of exile frees an immigrant from the hold of home land, a place with clearly demarcated private sphere of domesticity comprising of women and children, and the public life of profession and socialisation. Andrew Smith too in his article emphasises the inherent hybridity of all cultures and that the migrant writer opens up the “locked histories and self-centered stories.... By becoming mobile and by making narratives out of this mobility, people escape the control of states and national borders *and* the limited, linear ways of understanding themselves which states promote in their citizens” (245).

The convergences and divergences at times highlight, and at others throw into relief, the paradoxes and ambiguities that attend immigrant experiences and diasporic existence. In *A Change of Skies* simultaneity of past, present and even future makes the narrative turn on itself and serves to juxtapose the colonial and the postcolonial ethos of not only Sri Lanka but also Australia. The imperial immigrant background of Australians in settler colony overlaps the claims of nationhood through citizenship. Australians in Sri Lanka, despite their professed appreciation of the indigenous, are themselves diaspora attempting to recreate home away from home. In an attempt to overcome “fixation on the mother-country” (29) and resultant “cultural cringe,” they distance themselves from the British, by emphasising the proximity with Asia. This also points at wilful hybridisation as evident in the easy informality of the Australian High Commissioner that surprised Navaranjini who had been warned about the

boorishness of Australians. Notwithstanding their conscious distancing from British influence and claims of being “Asianists” (29), they too recreate the Raj ethos. Andrew Smith holds that migrancy emerges as the central trope in postcolonial literature. It straddles the colonised and colonising nations and is generally written in “European languages which adopts, adapts, and often subverts the established European models” (244). It interrogates how aspects of life and experiences in one social context impact worlds that are geographically and culturally distant.

The narrative alternates between Edward’s observations, Bharat’s reflections and Navaranjini’s appraisals. While the former’s narrative is by and large linear, there are constant shifts in the temporal and spatial reference points of the latter two. Like the master of ceremony dictating terms and conditions of storytelling, Bharat juxtaposes the story of the invisible prince narrated by his great grandmother to that of his grandfather Edward: “His departure became, in time, part of our family’s history, part real and part as fantastical as the tale of the invisible prince. His return – but that is another part of that history, to be told in the proper place, and at the proper time: not now, when we are speaking of departures” (6). The constructed and structured aspect of tales get highlighted with the emphasis on departures, and yet departure encompasses within it the possibility of return. It is used to frame the narratives of Edward, Bharat, Navaranjini as well as the mythical ones of the vanishing Prince and the merchant’s daughter.

The writer adroitly distinguishes linearity of “history” from the circuitous and spiral narrative of tales rooted in folk culture. The voice of grandson echoes that of grandfather that reaches back to family, and even racial history. As Bharat recreates Edward’s experiences, he is conscious of the constant play of myth and reality that constitutes the Sri Lankan subjectivity: “... a country where the line between fact and fiction, history and legend – if such a line exists – tends to blur until it fades to nothing” (4). The self-reflexive narrative is interspersed with stories within stories that highlight its hybrid form. Yasmin Gooneratne skilfully traces the growth of narrative from its folk roots to excerpts from autobiographical journal, and to the novel, interweaving them with tales of fantastic journey interspersed with letters. The story of Edward is a touchstone for the diasporic experiences of Bharat and Navaranjini. Edward’s immigrant experience and Bharat’s childhood coalesce in the act of re-creation. The narrator posits his interpretation of hearsay on to Edward’s and says, “I have pieced together this story of Edward’s adventures from family legend... and (to a very limited extent) from his own words” (44). The diaspora time and again “memorialise” the ancestors through reconstitution based on narrations, archival materials and photograph. Edward’s journal aids the reconstruction of the past yet proves to be inadequate, requiring creative interventions of the narrator whose perceptions impinge upon the gaps in the material in hand. As

characters delve into the ancestral past they refigure the present and inscribe themselves in it as well. The author brings together the genre of diary, autobiography, biography and fiction successfully, pointing at the hybridity inherent in the very act of writing.

Several established stereotypes are deconstructed: the stereotype of 19th century diaspora is challenged when much to the surprise of condescending Bharat's preconceived notion that Grandfather Edward must have gone to England, he is informed that he chose to travel to Australia. Interestingly, reverse stereotypes emerge where Australia is visualised in terms of cricket, tennis courts, kangaroos, marsupials and Australians as uncivilised meat-pie eaters who are "drunken, foul-mouthed, and crude" (18). The racial discrimination in terms of White Australia policy is referred to and yet the anomaly of Yen winning the Japanese the status of 'honorary whites' (19) points at the hypocrisy of the white society. Despite Bharat's disavowal of what he refers to as "doggy devotion to Britain" (11), he informs the reader that he had visited Britain imaginatively through the canonised works of writers like Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Keats. As opposed to the settler colony Australia, Sri Lanka gained independence and yet the geo-political decolonisation was not accompanied by an intellectual freedom from Eurocentric inundation that left no scope for appreciation of indigenous creative constructs. Navaranjini recalls the poster in the Geography class of a fair-haired pink-cheeked little girl with wild flower in one hand and a woolly lamb tucked under the other with the caption "*Come... To Sunny Australia*" (18). Postcolonial Sri Lanka too has its own stereotypes to contend with: the visitor from Australia comes armed with a copy of "*The Tourist's Sri Lanka*" so that she does not miss the "Real Sri Lanka" (11). It is through the European gaze that postcolonial Sri Lanka is still constructed and the contemporary is seen as NOT representative of the authentic. Marketing not only regulates the popularity of a place but also governs the production of images that define it. Postcolonial nations get implicated for collaborating with neo-colonising powers in a capital-driven market.

The locus of diasporic movement shifted from England to America and Canada with the dismantling of British colonies. Bharat decides to move to Australia in 1964, concurrently the roots of family history get exposed through his grandfather's writings. Though a Sinhala, he was a scholar of repute with command over Tamil. In a divided society of the period, this information serves to point at co-existence of different communities based on mutual respect (37). The racial dynamics are further revealed when Doraisamy from the Archives informs Navaranjani that "a good Tamil poem is valuable in itself. But when it is written, and even translated, by Sinhalese, then it becomes a treasure. Because it is rare" (38). Despite the syncretic milieu of Sri Lankan past, the cultural dominance of Sinhala is palpable. According to Camilla and Dhananjayan, due

to the nationalist struggle and politicisation of identity, the Sri Lankan diaspora “were not [a] homogenous group but divided along the lines of caste, class, gender, education and even process of migration” (330). Bharat’s Sinhala lineage and Navaranjini’s Tamil one too contribute to Bharat’s decision to go to Australia and finally settle down there.

The day-to-day challenges faced by the newcomers are cultural, physical as well as psychological as it is brought home to them that they are not welcome. While Bharat and Navaranjini had certain notions about the land to be visited through inputs from media and people, Edward and his co-voyagers were buoyed by the promise of prospect of happiness and success in the new land. The songs sung by fellow travellers after the death of a woman, conjure and “superimpose upon the empty sea around [us] another and a happier picture, of the green fields of waving paddy & the near village houses that the singers call ‘home’” (70). There is a bonding that develops with the shared sense of loss of all that was known, loved and now treasured through remembrance. The nostalgic backward glance of 19th century migrants is countered by Navaranjini whose notes inspired by Edward’s Journal present a different perspective than Bharat’s. Her strong filial faith keeps her rooted and the lessons of the past culled from Edward’s Journal help her face the uncertain future. Her antecedents in Hindu philosophy make it easier for her to accept Australia and associated inconsistencies. In her mind, the picture of the surfer from the back cover of a magazine and “Arjuna, the archer” merge and “surfer turned into warrior, surfboard into chariot, sultanas into Gandiva” (68). The overlaying of one image by another points to the inherent hybridity in the construction of images which serve as an anchor for migrants headed to unknown lands. For a diaspora, more than the physical entity it is the imaginative construct, a product of memory, fantasy and myth that becomes the locus of filiation.

Despite the tension between the newcomers and the older residents, Navaranjini is open to the life and experience that her migrant status offers. Bharat’s condescending attitude cannot undermine her discerning faculty which enables her to understand the variegated ethos of the continent that is at variance with the image projected by the media. Bharat, an academic, is dismissive of his wife and her achievements despite her resilience and capacity to be true to herself. The patriarchal mindset is not transcended even in a new land with an opportunity for the reconstitution of the self. There is an overt patriarchal claim to family history when Bharat acknowledges that though his wife discovers the “connecting link between past events and future possibilities” (9) in his Grandfather’s travel diaries, it is he, “of course, who edited and published them some years later, under the title *Lifeline*” (9). The symbolic reverberations of the chosen title signify familial support system and creative impulse that prove to be a lifeline for diaspora, irrespective of the caste and class divide. Interestingly, Bharat refers to the similarity between Edward

and Navaranjini though they are not related and do not share gender, race, religion or mother tongue. The affiliation that Navaranjini has for Bharat and his family is due to the matrimonial bond. The writer problematises the concept of filiation vis-à-vis affiliation with competing emphasis on bonds of blood and socially forged bonds. She points at the shift in woman's status and loyalties pre and post marriage, approximating it to immigrant experience. Edward Said holds that history supports institutions that perpetuate human presence: "These same institutions e.g. marriage or community protect filiation by instituting affiliation. While filiation is genealogical, affiliation is social" (Said 118).

The journey from one continent to the other becomes a rite of passage, geographical as well as cultural. Bharat provides an alternative viewpoint to Navaranjini's voice and Edward's narrative. He thinks of his stay in Australia as temporary (98) and positions himself as a curious observer rather than a participant. The letter to his mother voices the dilemma of walking the tight-rope of diasporic existence while trying to balance affiliative adaptation and acculturation in new land apropos filial preservation of cultural and ethnic identity. The sense of alienation and the resultant need for community draw the Asian diaspora together transcending differences that sharply etch their identities in homeland: nationality, race, class, caste, political affiliations and linguistic divides. The culture of education for advancement in life is considered as important as safeguarding the next generation from the national culture of Australia. The policy of multiculturalism adopted by Australia points at an acknowledgement of amalgamation of immigrant cultures, but the hegemony of European influence remains.

Bharat develops sensitivity for the diasporic sensibility at large and disapproves of derogatory form of expression used for Far Eastern people. His attempt to fit in by "name-swapping" (122) points to the need to be accepted as naturalised Australian, is ultimately self-defeating. As opposed to Bharat's desperate attempts to belong, Davith, Edward's resourceful and experienced companion, carries plants with mud clinging to their roots with plans to plant them at his father's newly acquired property in Bundaberg. The diasporic imagery of transplantation, creation of new home through efforts at approximation to the one left behind, and the conscious acts that lead to hybridisation converge in the act of transportation of plants (62). Trevallys, the friendly neighbours of Navaranjani, like Davith, had surreptitiously brought blue bell bulbs from England that bloomed to die immediately, but by fifth season started flowering (85). The attempt to familiarize the unfamiliar through tokens from the past gets conveyed. A parallel is drawn between the plants and the migrants who eventually throw roots in an alien land despite initial setback. There is an undercurrent of serious interrogation of filial loyalty and the bid to develop bonds of affiliation as the work attempts to decode the socio-cultural

ethos of Australia acted upon by immigrants from across the globe, as perceived by the diasporic imaginary.

The diaspora occupies a fluid position between two cultures and are able to harbour both filiation for the ethnic centre they continue to acknowledge and at the same time develop ties of affiliation to the new world. Hence, they engender multiple discourses tinged with hybridity. Pnina Werbner opines "Diasporas, it seems, are both ethniparochial *and* cosmopolitan. The challenge remains, however, to disclose how the tension between these two tendencies is played out in actual situation" (644). Ethniparochial reflects the filial while the cosmopolitan is largely affiliative. The discourse of the new diaspora reflects the preponderance of transnational and cosmopolitan consciousness as opposed to the old diaspora that was imaginatively oriented towards homeland. In Gooneratne's novel, the two diasporas from two eras face each other across time and space, at times reflecting, at others distorting and sometimes embellishing the perception of the observers/readers. The extents and limits of belonging of the colonisers as well as the colonised, be it imperial or colonial or postcolonial, are revealed. The work deals with narratives of arrival and departure problematising concepts like citizenship, nationhood, home and identity. There is an exploration of ways of being in competing socio-cultural milieu within politico-economic frames. Perera holds, "These unhistorical and intractable stories, belonging neither to one nation nor another, serve as instances of the counternational, translocal, and multiethnic that reopen projects of national consolidation, assimilation and recuperation" (272). The immigrant experiences form the crux of the novel where the writer collocates imperial space and multicultural space within the colonial and the postcolonial time-frames. Gooneratne's work creatively enacts the assertion of Foucault about 20th century that "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are the epoch of simultaneity: we are the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side by side, of the dispersed" (22). Social concerns and cultural fallback get intricately implicated in the psyche of the diaspora as they attempt to deal with the ramifications of the historical and geopolitical interstices they inhabit.

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