



## Expatriate Trauma And Identity In Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change Of Skies

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### Abstract:

Dislocations, hardships, and changes that take place when people relocate across boundaries are frequently portrayed in migration narratives. An insightful account of Sri Lankan expats adjusting to life in Australia may be found in Yasmine Gooneratne's 1991 book *A Change of Skies*. Cultural negotiation, identity, and trauma are all seriously explored. This article uses the dual frameworks of transnational theory (Vertovec; Basch, Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc) and trauma theory (Cathy Caruth) to analyze the novel. As a result of international flows of culture, memory, and belonging, it contends that the novel depicts trauma as a place of reconfiguration of identity rather than just loss or alienation. The difficulties of exile are embodied by Bharat and Navaranjini, who develop hybrid identities that go beyond the distinctions between homeland and hostland.

Key words: Trauma, identity crises, assimilation, displacement, transnational exile.

**Introduction:**

Exile and migration, whether forced or voluntary, have significant psychological and emotional repercussions. The loss of home and the difficulty of fitting in in a distant place are two burdens that are commonly depicted in South Asian diasporic literature. Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* is a wonderful example of the trauma and transformation that come with living abroad. The book satirically depicts Bharat and Navaranjini's mishaps upon arriving in Australia, but underneath the humor are issues of racial prejudice, language estrangement, cultural displacement, and professional marginalization.

According to Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, trauma is a profound event that "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known" (Caruth 4). Trauma in migratory situations frequently results from a series of daily humiliations, exclusions, and losses rather than from a single tragic occurrence. This fractured mental state is exemplified in *A Change of Skies* through social isolation, professional qualifications being dismissed, and accent mockery.

At the same time, the novel invites a transnational reading. Steven Vertovec defines transnationalism as "multiple ties and interactions linking people across the borders of nation-states" (447). Similarly, Basch, Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc observe that migrants "develop subjectivities embedded in networks that connect them simultaneously to two or more societies" (7). Navaranjini's culinary practices, Bharat's diary writing, and their oscillation between nostalgia for Sri Lanka and adaptation to Australian society exemplify these transnational negotiations.

This article examines *A Change of Skies* as a work in which transnational belonging is inextricably linked to trauma and identity. It illustrates how Gooneratne reimagines expatriation as the creation of "in-between selves" that are both robust and wounded, rather than just as displacement, by fusing trauma theory with transnational theory.

**Objectives:**

1. To examine the representation of expatriate trauma resulting from migration in *A Change of Skies*.
2. To analyze how cultural displacement and identity crises are portrayed in the book.
3. To comprehend the psychological aspects of expatriate living by applying trauma theory.
4. Using transnational theory to examine how the actors balance their sense of belonging between their home and host countries.
5. To illustrate how humor and satire are used in diasporic writing as coping strategies for trauma.

## Literature Review:

1. Mukesh Yadav, in his article Exploring Exile and Crosscultural Complexities in Yasmine Gooneratne's "A Change of Skies" (2024), highlights the impact of the past on the future. The experiences of Asian immigrants and their adaptation to life in Australia's new environment are highlighted in the study. In Australia, the main characters, Jean and Barry, are under a lot of stress. The couple thrives in the atmosphere and enjoys the challenge. But after being made to view themselves as generic subjects in the eyes of the "Other," the couples were disillusioned.

2. Debasis Samaddar in the article **Immigrant Sentiments, Expressed Through the**

### **Indian Sub-continental Female Diasporic Voices (2021)**

Through the writings of three Indian subcontinental diasporic women authors, this essay aims to illustrate the many immigrant attitudes. *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* is the debut book of Indian diasporic author Uma Parmeswaran. It focuses on two families of Indian immigrants living in Canada. Yasmine Gooneratne, a female writer from the Sri Lankan diaspora, explores a Sri Lankan family's relocation to Australia in her book *A Change of Skies*. She discusses immigration and acculturation to the new country here. In her book *Brick Lane*, Bangladeshi diasporic author Monika Ali details how Nazneen, a Bangladeshi immigrant lady living in London, endures social and psychological exclusion for a while until breaking free from the limitations at the book's conclusion.

3. Sravanthi, G., in her thesis "Identity And Cultural Conflict In Selected Novels Of Yasmine Gooneratne Chandani Lokuge Jhumpa Lahiri And Chitra Banerjee A Study Of South Asian Diaspora (2023) states that people have migrated in order to trade. Following globalization and industrialization, individuals began to go abroad. In addition to trade, migration is brought on by poverty, conflict, the growth of technological networks, and the desire for better possibilities.

Cultural conflict arises when people begin working in cross-cultural environments and compare their home customs with the new culture of the foreign country if they do not fit into the new framework. The environment, the political structure, religion, education, etc., could all be factors in the cultural conflict. because every nation has its own traditions, values, and customs. Cultural conflict starts when immigrants find it difficult to preserve both cultures. In Commonwealth nations, it all comes down to diaspora identity. It addresses both personal and multicultural difficulties.

## Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative approach, using close reading of *A Change of Skies* by using trauma and transnational theory.

**Discussion:****The Trauma of Cultural Displacement:**

Yasmine Gooneratne relates her own personal experience as an immigrant in the novel. Bharat is a young Asian English professor who moves to Australia. He and his wife, Navaranjini, accept a five-year position as visiting professors at Southern Cross University in New South Wales. The inconveniences that the new nation will bring with it are obviously known to Bharat. They are initially less interested in Australia: "There's nothing there but koalas and kangaroos..." (Gooneratne, 33)

In order to comfort her husband, Navaranjini says, "Well, Bharat, it's only a short-term visit: just a five-year sentence, after all." (Gooneratne 33) ... Bharat and Navaranjini already 'know' what to expect in Australia, and their first encounter with Australia leaves Navaranjini breathless. Navaranjini believes they are being attacked by a hailstorm on their first night in Australia. The Australians are the ones, she tells her husband, that "It's the Australians! ...the Australians have come. They're throwing stones on the roof and breaking all the windows." (Gooneratne 81)

In an attempt to save her spouse, she even snatches a kitchen knife. However, they eventually get used to the foreign society and culture.

They are startled and made more uneasy by the fast traffic, the stickers on the back windows of the cars, the "ginger-haired driver of a monster truck" winking at them, and the phrases "ASIANS OUT" and "BASH A PAKI A DAY." She questions whether she will ever be able to drive to Sydney and convert her Sri Lankan driver's license into an Australian one after seeing the gridlock there. She sees people driving at high speeds with grim, strained expressions, stooped shoulders, eyes fixed on the road without sideways glances, and an unsmiling mouth. People stand on the footboards and hang out of bus windows, and no one pays any attention to the zebra crossing.

The discrepancy between their intellectual history and their current marginalization in Australian society fosters a growing sense of inadequacy and loss. Their trauma is not openly violent but rather the result of alienation and the loss of cultural identity.

As Cathy Caruth notes, trauma often returns as an "unclaimed experience," lingering in memory and behavior (Caruth 4).

## 2. Renaming and the Fragmentation of Self:

One of the novel's most striking themes is Bharat and Navaranjini's decision to anglicize their names. This renaming, Barry and Jean, represents their desperate struggle to fit in a culture that quietly rejects individuality. As Navaranjini says, "If Jean is easier to pronounce, then let it be so. It's only a name, isn't it?" (Gooneratne 102). With "barri" meaning "weak" and "mundi" meaning "leftovers" or "residue," "Barry Mundy" assumes a negative meaning. Even if he changed his name, he is now viewed as "leftovers" in Sri Lanka, which is a sharp decline for someone whose class was once regarded as the "cream of the crop." His wife is saddened by the name change because she is aware of the cultural and personal significance of his old name. She understands that their new "nice Aussie" name isn't a true indicator of their identity or self-worth but rather a practical way to get by in day-to-day encounters.

Cultural alienation is a problem for Navaranjini. She states at one point that "you could be invisible; no one cared who you were" in Australia (Gooneratne 141). Her sense of belonging in Sri Lanka is in stark contrast to her invisibility, which causes psychological upheaval. Such alienation is consistent with Caruth's assertion that trauma leaves the self fragmented and uneasy by resisting integration into a cohesive identity.

Additionally, language can become a location of trauma. Bharat feels devalued in social situations as a result of people making fun of his affected English: "His words seemed to fall flat, provoking laughter he had not intended" (Gooneratne 118). The trauma of accent discrimination serves as an example of how immigrants are made to feel inferior and have their identities discredited by mockery.

## 3. Coping, Humor, and Satire:

The novel's sardonic tone serves as a coping technique in spite of these difficulties. Bharat converts sorrow into comedy by writing out his frustrations in a journal. His use of comedy to cope with humiliation is made possible by this literary act, which turns trauma into narrative control. According to Gooneratne, satire both conceals and controls the more profound psychological scars of expatriate life, making literature a resilient art form.

## 4. Transnational Belonging:

Although pain plays a major role, Gooneratne does not only portray migration as a loss. The narrative emphasizes transnational belonging, in which migrants maintain cross-border cultural connections. Cooking traditional curries is a symbol of cultural survival for Navaranjini: "A curry cooked without the right leaves was no curry at all" (Gooneratne 134). By connecting Australian reality with Sri Lankan memory, the kitchen transforms into a transnational space.

Similarly, transnational writing is enacted in Bharat's diary. His thoughts are directed to a hypothetical Sri Lankan audience despite being physically in Australia, placing his identity in two cultural contexts at once. It is in line with the finding of Basch, Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc (7) that the subjectivities of migrants are formed "in networks that connect them simultaneously to two or more societies."

### **5. Identity and In-Between Selves:**

Identity is finally shown in the book as flexible and hybrid. Rather than being wholly Australian or Sri Lankan, Bharat and Navaranjini occupy what Homi Bhabha refers to as a "third space" of negotiation. Their identity arises from the interplay between memory and change, between trauma and adaptation. Gooneratne's satire highlights the paradox of migration: Despite their alienation, migrants undergo transformation, developing in-between personas that mirror the transnational reality.

### **Finding:**

1. Professional marginalization, racial hostility, cultural invisibility, and language alienation are the main causes of expatriate distress in *A Change of Skies*.
2. As psychological coping mechanisms, humor and satire allow migrants to partially master their suffering by narrativizing it.
3. The protagonists turn pain into a hybrid sense of belonging by adjusting to the host country while retaining ties to their homeland, as revealed by transnational theory.
4. Instead of being solitary or unchanging, identity is shown as being "in-between," influenced by migration, culture, and memory processes.
5. Gooneratne's book thus reinterprets the experience of expatriates as a negotiation between resilience and loss in cross-border contexts.

### **Conclusion:**

The intricate relationship between trauma, identity, and transnational belonging in migrant life is highlighted in Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies*. The novel's deeper engagement is in exposing the psychological scars of displacement and the coping mechanisms migrants use, even as it playfully recounts the pitfalls of expatriation. While transnational theory emphasizes the concurrent development of hybrid, cross-border identities, trauma theory aids in recognizing the rifts in selfhood brought on by cultural exclusion and alienation. Gooneratne redefines expatriation as a site of negotiation where trauma and transformation coexist, rather than only as displacement, by fusing comedy with seriousness. As a result, the book deepens our comprehension of both the larger processes of transnational exile and South Asian diasporic writing.

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