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Yasmine Gooneratne's *Sweet and Simple Kind*

A brief analysis of the novel

Yasmine Gooneratne is a Sri Lankan writer of poetry, short stories and essays. She has won several awards for her contribution to the English literature in Sri Lanka. The novel *Sweet and Simple Kind* revolves around the story of two young women. The novel depicts an engrossing and dramatic family drama against the backdrop of Ceylon's evolution into Sri Lanka.

The novel opens with Gooneratne's exposure of the society that considered 'silence, sweetness and simplicity that were most highly valued in women and girls'. The two cousins Tsunami and Latha become firm friends and as their lives evolve a wonderful picture of Sri Lankan society and politics is painted during that time. Latha and Tsunami Wijesinha are of the same age, with just three months between them.

Tsunami Wijesinha's family is more affluent, more westernized and her mother is Indian Tamil. Latha's family is not as affluent as Tsunami's family. Latha's mother is extremely strong in her views about Sinhalese values. As Latha grows up she finds freedom in Tsunami's house that she never finds in her own house. Towards the end all that she has felt is reversed. Her once rigid family becomes a sanctuary for both her and her cousin.

The account of their continuing friendship in the quest for personal freedom and emancipation in the newly independent Sri Lanka of the 1950s and 60s is subtly interwoven with Gooneratne's humorous sarcasm and irony which attack the prevalent social discrimination on the basis of race, class, caste, religion and the greed for money and power.

Gooneratne questions the efficacy of 1948 and the imposition of Sinhala as the only official language in a land peopled by Tamils, Muslims and Burghers that led to the violent riots of 1958. The novelist also presents the sad state of a caste ridden society.

Beneath the apparently unsophisticated title the *Sweet and Simple Kind* the novel embraces the large and complex canvas to offer an in depth analysis of Sri Lankan society during the period 1935 to 1964. The novel transcends the limited perspective of love, politics and family turmoil to give a broad perspective highlighting basic human values.