

DIASPORIC SENSIBILITY IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF

M.G.VASSANJI

A Dissertation Submitted

To

SIKKIM UNIVERSITY



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Master of Philosophy

By

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“Diasporic Sensibility in the Selected Novels of M.G. Vassanji”

Submitted by **Dharma Chand Barai** under the supervision of Dr. Ram Bhawan Yadav of the Department of English, School of Languages and Literature, Sikkim University.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify the Dissertation titled '**Diasporic Sensibility in the Selected Novels of M.G.Vassanji**' submitted to Sikkim University for the fulfilment of the requirement of the award of the **Degree of Master of Philosophy** in the Department of English, embodies the result of bonafide research work carried out by **Dharma Chand Barai** under my guidance and supervision. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Association and fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.

We recommend this Dissertation to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

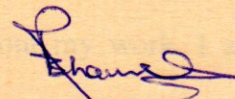
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Dharma Chand Barai

NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION

All reference and bibliographic details in this dissertation have been done in accordance with the MLA handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Seventh Edition. Secondary references have also been provided in accordance with the parenthetical specifications of the MLA handbook.

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Introduction

M.G. Vassanji has written eight novels, two collection of short stories and three non-fictions, tracing the migrations of peoples from South Asia to East Africa, and then from Africa to North America in the 1960s and 1970s. The Shamshi community of South Asian who came to East Africa before or at the time of British imperialism has given now rise to several other generations that in popular East African discourse are known simply as the “Asians”. However, these so called “Asians” are actually Asian Africans, offspring of a bicontinental heritage- East Africa and India. They are, like many of Vassanji’s characters, are hybrid and inhabit a transnational liminality like Vassnji. They belong everywhere and yet, nowhere; they live in no man’s land. His novels deal with the situation of East African Indians.

In East Africa, this community inhabits a middle area, both in colour and in status, between European Whites and African blacks in an interstitial space between the national consciousness and diasporic consciousness. The attempt to make sense out of inhabiting worlds “in-between” the Black and the White has in fact become a congenital theme and leitmotif in almost all genres of writings of Asian Africans from East Africa in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial writing and the colonial texts aim to ‘write back’ to the centre. This literary agenda persists in the oeuvre of the more contemporary Asian African writer, Vassanji, especially in the four novels, *The Gunny Sack*, *The Book of Secrets* and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* set in Kenya and *No New Land* in

Toronto. All these novels are taken into considerations as these novels deal with the themes of diaspora.

It is argued in the novels that Vassanji's community, historically and socio-politically, was strictly never a part of the Black/ White (post)coloniality but a community in-between the two, an interstitial community, Asian Africans. In the present work, an exegesis of the three novels takes the form of reading guided by postcolonial perspectives drawn from Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. This research work, generally, discusses the nature of exile, nostalgia, memory, alienation, in-betweenness and identity crisis in the selected works of M G Vassanji.

Problem(s) of Study

This study focuses on the selected works of M.G. Vassanji on the basis of post-coloniality and post-colonialism. This research will interrogate the migrant identity in Vassanji's novels and attempt to reveal how discourses of post-colonialism and narratology can help our reception of the themes of the selected works. The prose works bases on social realism are used as a mirror of the society in East Africa across several divides in order to explode questions of identity in a changing post-colonial and inter-cultural environment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

At the heart of the postcolonial discourse lies an enduring interest in post-colonial literary works, which have been taken up for discourse by many critics. In their essay, "Shifting Imaginaries: Decolonisation, Internal Colonisation, Post-coloniality", (1997) Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhiku Parekh point out that postcolonial discourse first focuses

on the question of representation. Their essay provides us with fresh insight into the cultural identity of the community Vaasanji belongs to. In his book, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, Madan Sarup, (1996) while writing on identity and narratives, views the quest for cultural identity in the post-colonial worlds as a deliberate and purposeful construction of life-stories. *Culture and imperialism*, (1993) offers a contrapuntal method of global cultural analysis, in which texts and contexts are seen as feeding each other. Post-colonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha, Bill Ashcroft, Partha Chatterjee, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, Ashis Nandy, and others are increasingly fascinated by the interstitial nature of diasporic or migrant identities- such as that of Asian Africans- in our post-colonial / postmodern world. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) mentions the ‘neologistic’ critical vocabulary such as “diasporic identities”, “unhomeliness”, “cultural ambivalence”, “remembering” and “interstitiality” that insistently remind us of the ambivalence that pervades colonial and post-colonial societies.

Vijay Mishra in his book *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorising the Indian Diaspora* (2007) points out that in their creative writings the diasporic writers reinvent motherlands in their imagination along with their adopted homelands. They psychically grapple between two cultures and this double marginalization by both negates their belonging to either location. Tension, pain, the sense of loss - of language, culture and history constitute the very essence of their post-colonial experience in their writings. Diasporic literature is invariably concerned with the individual’s or community’s attachment to the centrifugal homeland but includes a yearning for a sense of belonging to the current place of abode as well. It involves an idea of a homeland, a place from

where the displacement occurs and narratives of harsh journey undertaken on account of economic compulsions. MG Vassanji, V. S. Naipaul along with the likes of such writers are conjurers of such immigrant experiences.

OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

The main objective of the proposed research is interpreted in the dissertation from a post-colonial perspective. It takes up the themes of alienation, hybridization, rootlessness, nostalgia, in-betweenness, liminality and displacement. The dissertation focuses on the selected novels by M.G. Vassanji set in East Africa. These novels abound in locational cross-referencing which the reader comes to share with the worlds of the characters. The complex hybridization of certain spaces mentioned in the texts, reflect the post-colonial complexity of these regions. The post-colonial study of these texts open up the discursive space for further research on the subject and the idea (s) of “cosmopolitanism”. The present research would also inspire the scholars to explore the exciting field of diaspora.

RESEARCH METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

Method

This research is based on textual analysis along with archival material available on Vassanji and postcolonial discourse. I have visited the Canadian center in Delhi, J. U. Comparative Literature Library, National Library, Kolkata, the Ramesh Mohan Library, EFLU, Hyderabad and other libraries for my dissertation.

Methodology

This study employs a critical, qualitative methodology of post-colonial issues of “exile”, “marginalization”, “hybridity”, “alienation”, “nostalgia”, “in-betweenness”, “liminality” in Vassanji’s works. It would attempt to analyse the diasporic consciousness in the selected texts by using post-colonial theory and criticism.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. What is the purpose and effect of the narrative strategy employed by the writer in the selected novels?
- ii. What is the significance of the postcolonial diaspora studies to the formal and thematic aspects in relation to the Asian Africans?

Chapter Division

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter maps out the context of the study of diaspora from the perspectives of postcolonialism and postcoloniality. This chapter makes an attempt to define ‘diaspora’ as defined by various theorists and also explores the contextuality of the term in the present global scenario.

Chapter Two: The Diasporic Consciousness and Vassanji

This chapter provides a brief biography of M.G. Vassanji. This chapter makes an effort about how Vassanji comes to consciousness of his diasporic position as an Asian African

writer and articulations of the diasporic experiences and feelings through the novels, *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land*.

Chapter Three: The Question of Identity and Survival in *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land*

This chapter makes an effort to provide a brief view about the question of identity. The novels- *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land* are then analysed textually to explore various characteristics of diaspora studies and identities that build my argument. This chapter also explains how Vassanji portrays the Asian African community and also focuses on the situation of Indians in Africa and the Western countries and how the lives and the identities of his characters are affected.

Chapter Four: Multiplicities of Location and Subjectivities in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and *The Book of Secrets*

There is an attempt to assert the ethnic identity of Asian Africans as they redefine the hybrid identity of the nation, the community and their self. The novels, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and *The Book of Secrets* to explore the various themes that build my argument. The themes focused on this chapter are: space and location; community, and the relationships with the family. This chapter also focuses on how a postcolonial writer plays the dual roles of preserver of culture and tradition as well as the harbinger of modernity with new modes of thinking and expression.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This chapter concentrates on the integration of textual analysis and conclusions drawn about diaspora, postcolonialism and postcolonlity. This chapter presents that M.G. Vassanji is a diasporic writer revealed through his writings.

Chapter One

Postcolonialism and Diaspora

Introduction:

In this world of globalization and trans-nationalism, not only the commodities move, but also the human beings cross borders in search for the promise and prosperity that the metropolis makes them dream of, hence begins the process of trauma and tribulations of dislocations, broodings, identity quest, nostalgia, loss of selfhood, issues of diasporic sensibility or notions of exilic self and so on. Through his/ her writings or discourses the diasporic writer/s not only exhibits his own and his fellow diasporic being's sensibilities but also opens up new paradigms in which the lives of his/ her people can be understood and revisited. The literature produced by the diaspora has been a focal area of post-colonial theory and criticism.

Post colonialism Defined:

Post-colonialism as a term is generally used to describe the phase after British colonialism. The term is political and gestures towards the process of decolonization across liminal spaces of history. As an intellectual discourse it is inextricably related to the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism. Meenakshi Mukherjee opines in her article "Interrogating Post-Colonialism" in the book *Interrogating Post-colonialism: Theory, Text and Context* (2006) ed. Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee, "Postcolonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the collapse of empires. It is ideology, an emancipator concept particularly for the students of literature outside western world." (1) Postcolonial writing and the colonial texts aim to

‘write back’ to the centre. As we are aware, European colonialism not only perpetuated epistemic violence on the colonized people but also facilitated or forced large-scale migration within the colonies of Britain. The term ‘Postcolonialism’ as such implies the freedom and political emancipation of the colonized from the colonizers starting from the 1940s but the cultural colonization is still going on as it is a never ending process. It also examines the cultural activities used by the imperial powers to overpower the body and mind of the colonized people. This colonial mind otherizes the colonized natives from their societies and has strangled over the years their voice as inferior. The history of colonialism is itself associated with imperialism and exploitation of the marginalized so as to impose their dominant cultural hegemony and to make the colonized people feeble and voiceless. As a result of the politics of colonization, the natives were not only exploited socially, economically, politically and culturally, but also lost their land to satisfy the thirst of the dominant for aggressive aggrandizement. In this connection Denis Walder reflects in his book *Postcolonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory* (2005) that postcolonial consciousness entails and rather demands a double awareness of the political inheritance working within a specific culture, community and country and the changing relations existing between these communities, cultures and countries (2).

Ashis Nandy, a famous postcolonial critic, in his famous book *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (2011) - the texts deal with the cultural psychology of colonialism- echoes Denis Walder about the effect of colonization in the colonized country while commenting on the colonial continuity and its perpetuity. In the words of Ashis Nandy colonialism not only suppressed the colonized countries

economically, but also affected the psyche of the colonized people. He aptly argues the hegemonizing outlook of the colonial mind through his observation that “West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structure and mind” (*The Intimate Enemy*, 1983: 11). Ashis Nandy in his book *The Intimate Enemy* (1983) writes that the psychological impact on the oppressor and the oppressed is enormous:

Colonialism as a psychological process cannot but endorse the principle of isomorphic oppressions which restates for the era of the psychological man the ancient wisdom implied in the New Testament and also perhaps in the Sauptik Parva of the Mahabharata: ‘do not do unto others what you would that they do not do unto you, lest you do unto yourself what you do unto others’. (31)

Ashis Nandy in his book *The Intimate Enemy* (1983) calls this in “psychological resistance to colonialism”. Therefore, the imposition of an overarching colonial structure in the colonized society enforces certain ways of thinking about and perceiving the colonized society, forming new cultural, social and political rules for the colonized rules that translate into new criteria “of being” in the postcolonial society.

It is now admittedly evident that Europeans imposed their superiority on the inferior colonized societies and that they were well known for imposing western culture on the colonized people so as to establish their cultural hegemony upon the colonized. In this connection, Edward Said in his worldly recognized and acclaimed book *Orientalism* (1978) cogently argues that for the “local masters of the West, East is nothing but a place of ignorance”(27). This attitude reveals the fact that the superiority of the West

suppresses the ability of the people of the East. He argues that the idea of the orient has been a powerful construct and the non-west has been viewed as 'the other' of the West. In colonial world this construct inspires the colonialists, and postcolonialism makes an attempt to study the significance of the processes that lead to the formation of the 'other'. Said emphasizes the power-knowledge binary relationship which is essential to identify and understand colonialism. Robert Young, another postcolonial critic and theorist, mentions in his article "What is Postcolonial?" that, "Postcolonialism is about negotiating the most difficult and challenging aporias of cultural translation, translating and transforming the world, a world that has been changed by struggle and which its practitioners intend to change further." (24-25)

In his book *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (2003), Robert Young, another Postcolonial critics and theorist, views Postcolonialism "a body of writing that attempts to shift the dominant ways in which the relations between western and non-western people and their worlds are viewed" (7). Young further maintains that Postcolonialism appropriates the right of all people on the globe equally. Here it is pertinent to mention that European colonization and appropriation of power brings divisions between the West/ and the other, and therefore, postcolonialism seeks to intervene, to force its alternative knowledge into the power structures of the west as well as the non-west. It seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave. It refuses, as Young mentions, "to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures" (7). Robert Young also mentions in the book "Postcolonialism: A very Short Introduction" that it is about a changing world, a world that has been changed by struggle which its practitioners intend to change further. (7)

Postcolonialism has been influenced by the Marxist thought of Michel Foucault who saw history in terms of power and also destruction, which has challenged binary oppositions such as East/ West and the notion of superiority that associated with each other. Frantz Fanon, the earliest decolonist theorist, holds in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) that “colonialism is a source of destruction and trauma for colonized people who are taught to look negatively upon their people, their culture and themselves” (227). He strongly felt that definite step for colonial people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past (227).

The tragic burden of colonialism still persists, and the indigenous people are still treated with discrimination and amidst economic exploitation of the people on the basis of caste, community, colour, religion and language. It brings to memory the question of exploitation and revolt again and again and reinvents the modes of cultural perception by recording human relation among the colonial nations and marginalized people who were exploited by recording human relation among the colonial rule. In the General Introduction of their edited book *The Po-Colonial Studies Reader*, (1995) Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin affirm, “post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction” (2). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin write in their seminal book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (2002) that postcolonial covers all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. In the same book Bill Ashcroft et al says that the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Malta, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific countries, Srilanka including America are all postcolonial literatures.

The experience of colonization plays a major role to the studies such as Subaltern Studies, Dalit Studies and Gender Studies that are fore-grounded upon the tension between the dominated and the dominant, the West and the colonized. One of the prime objectives of postcolonial studies is the appropriation of the place, rights and freedom of the people irrespective of the creed, color and gender of the postcolonial countries. The study of postcolonialism is then a process of “self-apprehension” in the words of Wole Soyinka. Postcolonial theorists like, Homi K. Bhabha, John McLeod, Ania Loomba and Elleke Boehmer highlight the necessity of contesting postcolonialism through the Eurocentric hegemony and cultural imperialism in favor of the people living in the margin. Postcolonial theory establishes intellectual spaces for these marginalised people who raise their voices for themselves and produce cultural discourses by resisting colonial hegemony and cultural imperialism. Said interrogates Eurocentric discourse in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), by addressing the question of resistance by the natives. He argues that as it is one of the unhappiest characteristics of the age in history and most of them as an accompaniment to great postcolonial and imperial conflicts. Here, Said articulated the movements and migration of the people from their homelands, particularly from the colony, as a central historical fact of colonization which introduced dramatic changes in the formation of ‘Third World’. The question of identity constitutes another subject of Third World nation that pinpoints the way the colonized people identify themselves and also know the postcolonial authors claim that identity. Post colonialism is the intermittent shedding of the old covering of Western notion and colloquy as well as the advent of avant-garde self-awareness, celebration and critique. This self-awareness leads forth self-expression. As Ania Loomba in her book *Postcolonial Studies and*

Beyond, (2007), states “Perhaps the connection between postcolonial writing and the nation can be better comprehended by better understanding that the nation itself is a ground of dispute and debate, site for competing imaginings of different ideological and political interest.” (207) The discourse of the post-colonial is the literature produced ‘under imperial license’ by nations or outcasts, as Bill Ashcroft *et al* writes in the book *The Empires Writes Back* (2003).

The colonized people develop a postcolonial identity which has been articulated and celebrated by the postcolonial writers by maintaining the independent nation’s pragmatic connection with the Mother Country. In establishment of postcolonial identity, the writers explain and analyse the personal and social experiences of imperial social subjugation of having endured the imposed identity of ‘a colonial subject’. For instance, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) describes the Nigerian experience of being part of the British Empire. Through the varieties of colonial language, the anti-conquest narrative addresses the mother country’s cultural hegemony and by writing the centre, the natives create their own national histories to form and establish a national identity of decolonization. Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) indicates that postcolonial world establishes the value of hybrid intellectual spaces where truth and authenticity move aside for ambiguity and challenges the ideological validity of colonialism. He continues that members of a postcolonial society have an identity which has been carved conjoining their own unique cultural and history of community, entwined with that of the colonial power.

Postcolonial writing and the colonial texts aim to 'write back' to the Centre. As we are aware, European colonialism not only perpetuated epistemic violence on the colonized people but also facilitated or forced large- scale migration within the colonies of Britain.

A set of people moved to other parts of the world, particularly to USA, UK and other European countries as tradesmen and explorers, and another set of people were taken as indentured labourers to work in the sugarcane fields and plantations in other parts of the colony. With the dismantling of colonialism the displaced people of the colonies continued to move and live in their adopted homelands. These are the people of the old diaspora. Aftermath of British colonialism witnessed an urge in individuals to search for better economic opportunities. So there was self-willed migration of many to the western countries and adoption of these countries as their homelands. Writers like Anita Rau Badami, Lakshmi Gill, Surjeet Kalsey, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherjee, Suniti Namjoshi, Uma Parameswaran, Balachandra Rajan and others moved to Canada directly for better opportunities. Writers like Seepersad Naipaul and later Shiva Naipaul, V. S. Naipaul, Cyril Dabydeen, David Dabydeen, Sam Selvon, MG Vassanji, Subramani, Marina Budhos, Neil Bissonnath and others are the descendents of the Indian indentured labourers in the so called 'girmit colonies' of Britain. These writers write from their experiences of living in the host country keeping in mind the culture of their origins. In his essay, "Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" in *The Location of Culture* (1994), while talking of diaspora, Homi K Bhabha states that diaspora is an interstitial psychic space between the national consciousness and diasporic consciousness as it is in the case of M.G. Vassanji.

Elleke Boehmer has tended to bring into focus the postcolonial migrant writers in her work *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* (2006) and recorded the significant contributions of migrant writers in the field of postcolonial migrant writing is the writing of 'in-between' and their 'cultural creolization'. Thus, the migrant writers have become members of the 21st century condition of energized migrancy. In the words of Boehmer, postcolonial writer in the 21st century is a 'cultural traveler' (227). But Ian Chamber says in her book *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (1994) that the movement of the traveler is between fixed positions, "a site of departure, a point of arrival that intimates an eventual return, a potential homecoming" (5). On the other hand, Salman Rushdie considers migration as a universal phenomenon that not only means displacement of people in history, but also refers to a state of displacement that falls on the path of all mankind. In his *Imaginary Homelands*, (1991) Rushdie states: "We all cross frontiers; in that sense, we are all migrant peoples" (279).

Postcolonialism and Diaspora:

According to the development of postcolonial theories, the term 'diaspora' has been used in its modern sense. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their seminal book *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* (2006) consider it as the central historical fact that and define it as a "voluntary or forcible movement of people from their homeland into new regions. They consider colonialism as the diasporic movement, dispersion and settlement of Europeans all over the world" (68). The term 'diaspora' means now the scattering of people and their culture across the world. The term now addresses the understanding of migration, people's various sense of belonging and loyalties beyond the national boundaries.

Historically diasporas are the results of migration of people because they don't have to be bounded by the economic, political and historical limits of any state. They are always on the move seeking better gains as entrepreneurs outside of their homeland. And it is this historical mobility and the ability to surpass the institutional operatives of capitalism that made them economically successful diasporic entrepreneurial networks in the host country and this made them to stick together and form the articulate image of social- ethnic cohesion. The diasporic communities cannot be viewed as traces of a national community but rather as results of their own dispersal of mobility under specific historical conditions-political, economic, sociological, psychological and cultural. Conceptually, diaspora highlights the existence of transnational networks of people and their sense of belonging in communities. Stuart Hall in his article "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in the book *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (1990) edited by Jonathan Rutherford emphasizes, "The diasporic experience is defined, not by essence or purity but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity or diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through hybridity" (235). It can be said that the world has now passed from the age of the nation-state to the age of diaspora.

The discussion on the term 'diaspora' and diasporic condition indicate a widespread interest in phenomena associated with it, but also brings realization of the potential of the concept to serve a theoretical tool for the advancement of different perspectives in the study of human migration. As Clifford in his article "Diaspora" mentions, "diasporic language seems to replacing, or at last supplementing, minority discourse. Transnational connections break the binary relation of 'minority' communities with 'majority' societies (255).

Theorists like Robin Cohen, William Safran, Steven Vertovec and Tololyan have characterized diaspora in many ways. According to William Safran, 'diasporic community' seems to be increasingly used as metaphoric designation for several categories of expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities tout court (83). William Safran in his article "Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" (1991) argues that the concept of diaspora is linked to those communities that share six characteristics on the basis of two variables-homeland and exile. These characteristics are:

- 1) Their own or their ancestors' dispersion from a specific homeland to another country or place.
- 2) Retention of a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland.
- 3) Experience of a feeling of alienation and antagonism from the host society, and the feeling that they can never fit in.
- 4) Regarding the ancestral homeland as their true home and their sojourn as temporary, with the hope that they or their descendants would someday return.
- 5) Treasuring the collective past.
- 6) Commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland. (83-84)

His definition of diaspora provides basic assumption for the analysis of the term. Amitabh Ghosh in "The Diaspora in Indian Culture" published in his own book *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces* (2002) puts forward an opposite view by arguing that the Indian diaspora is not predisposed to an attachment to and desire for a literal or symbolic return to the homeland as much it is to recreate distinct culture in other

locations (6). Robin Cohen uses the same perspectives of Safran that constitute an ideal type of diaspora by adding some other elements to it. He says that diaspora consists of that groups that scatter voluntarily or as a result of fleeing aggression, persecution or extreme hardship; take into account the necessity for a sufficient time period before any community can be described as a diaspora; recognize more positive aspects of diasporic communities. Cohen acknowledges that diasporic communities not only form a collective identity in the place of settlement or with their homeland, but also share common identity with members of the same ethnic communities in other countries.

The constitutive of diaspora can be understood through three elements that are 'dispersion in space'; 'orientation to a homeland' and 'the boundary maintenance'. Dispersion is the most widely accepted criteria of diaspora which can be interpreted strictly as forced or traumatic dispersion. The second constitutive criterion of diaspora is orientation to a real or imagined homeland as a source of value, identity and loyalty and the third constitutive of diaspora is the preservation and maintenance of a distinctive identity. The mobilized diaspora for centuries has constituted a separate society.

Robin Cohen distinguishes diaspora into five categories – victim (Jews), labour (the Indian labourer), trade (the Chinese), imperial (the British) and cultural (the Caribbean abroad). The first one becomes the victim of dispossession, the second type of diaspora moves in search of works, the third emigrates for commercial purpose, the intention of the fourth category is to motivate the colonial expansion and the last one experiences multiple displacement. Sudesh Mishra has classified it as 'sugar' and 'masala' diapsora in *From Sugar to Masala: Writing by the Indian Diaspora* (2003). He distinguishes between the old and the new diasporas by indicating that old diaspora

experiences the semi-voluntary flight of indentured peasants to the non-metropolitan plantation colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Surinam and Guyana; on the other hand late capital or postmodern dispersal of new migrants thrive for metropolitan centres such as Australia, the United States, Canada and Britain.

Diaspora continues to be in critical scholarship to address the phenomena of movement, and the concept of homeland becomes increasingly prevalent to understand it. Homeland involves the imaginary boundaries of nation-state which is grounded on the ideas of nation, state, and identity. Thus, homeland can be imagined beyond its material parts. Diasporas exists only as an extension from a distinct geographic locale that is nation/state which is the original home of the dispersed people. James Clifford argues in her article “Further Inflections: Towards Ethnographies of the Future”, in book *The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Ed. George Marcus (1986) that the idea of a bounded territory being necessary to the diasporic experience is not always true. “Diasporas connect multiple communities of a dispersal population. Systematic border crossings may be part of this interconnection, but multi-local Diasporas cultures are not necessarily defined by a specific geopolitical boundary”.(304) The diasporic writer expresses the desire to create connection with the lost homeland that transcends traditional boundaries. Roza Tsagarousianon maintains in the article “Rethinking the Concept of Diaspora: Mobility, Connectivity and Communication in a globalized world” that “Diasporas should be seen as given communities, a logical, albeit deterritorialized, extension of an ethnic or national group, but as imagined communities, continuously reconstructed and reinvented” (52). *Westminster Paper in Communication and Culture*, Vol. 1(1), London: University of Westminster, 2004. Web.

In Beginnings: Intention and Method (1985), Said exposes his feelings of loss, alienations and nostalgia for the homeland of his 'beginnings' to establish a new relationship with his adopted homeland of America. Said invokes in his hyphenated identity as a Palestinian-American that in-between space, which allows for the existence of more than one homeland and celebration of a heterogeneous cultural identity. (77)

The Concept of Home in the Context of Diaspora:

In this context, Steven Vertovec in his book *Transnationalism* (2009) puts forward the view that the first generation of diaspora longs for the homeland, exhibiting their diasporic consciousness. She observes that while concerning global Diasporas, there is considerable discussion surrounding a kind of diaspora consciousness marked by dual or multiple identifications. Hence, there are depictions of individuals' awareness of decentered attachments, of being simultaneously 'home away from home', 'here and there' (450). The second generation exhibits 'transnational consciousness' because the characters of second generation did not undergo a major dispersion and they are not fixated on a lost homeland. Khaichig Tololyan observes, in Editorial preface to the founding issue of the journal, *Diaspora* (1991) that 'diaspora are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment which interrogate the privileged homogeneity of the nation/state. Diaspora essentially means the worst experience of dislocated peoples who live in a sense of loss and with a nostalgic feeling. (05)

Diasporic space is not national but one has to negotiate it painfully between the various contradictions of ethnicity, religion, and nationalism. In this context, Avtar Brah puts forward her idea that diasporic space is the intersectionality of Diaspora, border and

dislocation as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic process. To Brah, 'diasporic space' is a highly contested site. (208)

Diasporas search a new space for cross-cultural negotiation and to articulate their identity, they dislocate a various ways. They constantly try to establish themselves in-between 'homeness' and 'homelessness' and learn how to relocate themselves in-between the 'homes'.

An immigrant is caught between identity crisis and cross-cultural communication. Constructing multiple identities and developing a hybrid vision, eventually becomes an ongoing process of adaptation for an immigrant. In his book *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie has further reflected on this issue: Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, we fall between two stools... But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles" (1991: 15).

The search for cultural identity tends to establish themselves not only as types but also as what Stuart Hall calls his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 'individuals, at once anchorless, colourless, rootless and stateless" (P. Mongia, *Contemporary Literary theory: A Reader* (2006) p. 113). Professor Hall intends to appropriate these rootless individuals as a 'race of angels' (113) constantly put in a state of 'being' and 'becoming' strutting between 'what they really are/were' and 'what they have/should have become in the foreign land.' Out of this oscillation is born the diasporic person of the new world,

and to Stuart Hall, the new person marks the beginning of diversity, hybridity and difference (120).

Globalization and Diaspora:

The South Asian Diaspora includes millions of people living scatteredly in East Africa, South Africa, Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica, Mauritius, Fiji, Singapore, Malaysia and other countries for better opportunities or being transported during the colonial period to plant railways or labourers to work in the sugarcane field. The changing world with its overwhelming global economy, politics, communication etc. has affected human life greatly and promoted the citizens to embark on voluntary migration for better prospects of living in the developed countries like Australia, England, America, Canada and New Zealand for better opportunities. The different diasporas of the world with their distinguished cultural inheritance have produced a cross-cultural hybrid existence and hyphenated identity that are quite unique. Diaspora literature is now a useful resource to study the challenges of diaspora and the strategies of negotiation. The emergence and popularity of the diasporic study highlight the growing impact of immigrant communities in the twentieth century especially in the spheres of economics, politics, cultural studies, sociology, literature, etc.

The third type of migration willingly migrates and joins the Diasporas to seek better life and adopts an established social pattern. The most significant development of voluntary migration is the selective migration of people such as physician, engineers and scientists to the developed countries in search of job and to develop a better standard of living, many people have migrated from Asian and African countries to the western

countries like U.S.A., Canada, Australia and England. They have the feeling of being marginalized in the adopted society and there is a crisis of identity generated by a fractured consciousness.

Globalization in the twenty-first century has brought out different types of migration by achieving various responses worldwide, and the homogenous effect of globalization has reached various regions within its reach. The 21st century observes the extraordinary movement of people all over the world. In this context the word diaspora searches for a new meaning of relocation of people who are away from their homeland. In this connection Hall emphasizes in an interview that “in the era of globalization, we are all becoming diasporic” (402).

The migrant writers or the expatriates writers travel from one place to another along with their imagination, culture and psyche that cause a sort of conflict of fluid identity and they find themselves in a dilemma of nothingness and dream of an alternative world by unchanging tradition, culture and home. Their tension helps them to recall the memories which become most significant factor for them to reconstitute the past to create their discourse.

Living in diaspora means forced or voluntary exile that leads to the identity confusion and problems of identification and alienation. Therefore, the issue of identity forms the core diasporic consciousness, and the moment becomes an expatriate, she needs to define himself/ herself in the new environment. In this attempt of self-definition, one may either assimilate identity with the host country thereby severing all ties with the native country, or may see the people around him/ her as the ‘other’. Within in cultural

assimilation and cultural alienation, an expatriate tries to adjust and depict such confusions of life and living, declining values, loss of compassion and trust, and submits to the new environment by adopting the strategy of 'excessive belonging'. The diasporic person is neither in West nor in India but at home and thus, becomes what Homi K. Bhabha called in *The Location of Culture*(1994) 'unhomed'(114). Thus the concept home becomes important segment in all diasporic writing. For instance, Naipaul portrays the character of Ralph Singh in "The Mimic Men" who finds 'home' nowhere after shifting between the West Indies and London.

Sudesh Mishra in *From Sugar to Masala: Writing by the Indian Diaspora* (2003) says, "The movement from Seephersad Naipaul to Meera Syal suggests an important rethinking of the concept 'home' with the diaspora, especially this occurs against the backdrop of the global shift from the centering or centripetal logic or monopoly capitalism to the decentering or centrifugal logic of transnational capitalism" (294). When diasporic writing tries to reflect the real and imagined worlds, as Salman Rushdie puts it in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991) "it is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some whose fragments have lost" (198).

Diasporic communities are emblematic of the times because they are constantly negotiating their identities within the borders of their adopted home as well as across borders with their homeland. Robin Cohen says: "Diasporas are positioned somewhere between nation-states and 'travelling cultures' in that they involve dwelling in a nation-state physical sense, but travelling in an astral or spiritual sense that falls outside that nation-state's space/ time zone" (1997:55).

Identity crisis, East-West encounter, living in-between spaces and cultures, homelessness, rootlessness are the common themes of postcolonial literatures through which the diasporic sensibility of a person/ writer set and the diasporic sensibility constitutes the core concerned of for most of the Indian diasporic writers like Uma Parameswaran, M.G.Vassanji, Suniti Namjoshi, V.S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Nita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Jhuma Lahiri, Salman Rushdie, Rohinto Mistry, and Bharati Mukherji. They have successfully presented the diasporic consciousness of immigrants who have been physically as well as culturally alienated from their roots. They have tasted the bitter experience of expatriation and immigration by straddling between the culture of their origin and the culture of their adoption. The feeling of nostalgia, a sense of loss and anxiety to reinvent home obsess them, which find an expression in their writings.

As Avtar Brah puts it in *Cartographies of Diaspora; Contesting Identities* (1996) distinct diaspora communities are created out of the 'confluence of narratives' of different journeys from the 'old country' to the new which create the sense of a shared history. (183)

Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homeland* (1991) exclusively explores the migrant writers as endowed with a double/ plural, insider/ outsider perspectives, whose hybrid predicament can be universalized into art with globally accepted theme. (9)

The very idea of diasporic literature has its relationship with the motherland that provides feelings and adopted land and its people which give rise to the conflicts and double consciousness. And this the basis of all diaspora writings which reflects through sense of alienation, exile, loneliness, cultural disorder, rejection and the effort of

assimilation with expression of home again which become outpouring of nostalgia and longing. For immigrants the sense of dislocation and separation become the common factors as they live between two worlds from where they look at the past and future with the feelings of rootlessness. Immigration is a process that involves uprooting and re-rooting. Thus, the major quest for the immigrant is to search the roots and the notion of in-betweens which brings a desire for them to have a home of their own and consequently it becomes the root factor for diasporic imagination. John McLeod in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2009) says “a mythic place of desire... a place of no return” (9). The power of colonialism has the capacity to make people displaced who live in-between two cultures. In this connection, Bhabha (1994) observes that these displaced people moved from home culture to an alien culture (407).

The present study is grounded upon Vassanji’s depiction or treatment of the different conditions of diasporic Asian African communities, particularly Shamshi community that influence identity formation and negotiation in the back drop of the postcolonial societies in Tanzania, Africa. Vassanji’s urge to articulate fluid, multiple and unstable identities are critically examined so as to ascertain whether he envisages the concept of a confident diaspora or otherwise. Further, it would be profitable to examine how his search for identity, roots and home in various communities/ places makes him a layered/ fractured exile, because identity is not fixed, but created. The Asian Africans in Tanzania live among the heterogeneous group formed by the Africans, natives, and other displaced groups are still under the domain of colonialization. This separation from native culture and living in-between two cultures have a great impact on their psyche that allows them to search constantly their home and identity. This continuous sense

brings suffering in both original home and adopted home as is evident in the novels of M.G. Vassanji.

Chapter Two

Diasporic Consciousness and M G Vassanji

M.G. Vassanji: A Brief Biography

M. G. Vassanji is the pen name of Moyez Ghulam Hussein Vassanji, a Canada-based novelist born in Nairobi, Kenya, on May 30, 1950 to parents of Gujarati *Khoja* community and raised up in a devotional religious environment in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. He left for higher studies in the United States and studied Physics in Massachusetts Institute of Technology at the University of Pennsylvania, USA on a scholarship and earned a Ph.D. in theoretical Nuclear Physics from the University of Pennsylvania. He worked as a scientist and a research associate and later ventured into teaching physics. From there he migrated to Canada to teach at the University of Toronto where he presently lives. During his days spent in Toronto he read a lot on medieval Indian literature and history, which sparked up the desire in him to take up writing as a career. His family lineage narrated accounts of his immigrant forefathers, and his journey from Tanzania to America and Toronto acted as a backdrop for all his novels and travelogue. He, as of his origins, is of mixed identity- Indian, African and Canadian and his works can be included under Indian Diaspora or Asian African Literature or Canadian Literature. He is an African of Indian ancestry, or an Asian-African by birth. He has won the prestigious Giller Prize twice: the inaugural prize itself in 1994 with his novel based in Tanzania, *The Book of Secrets* (1994) and again in 2004 with his novel based in Kenya, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2004). He also won the 1989 Commonwealth Prize for the Best Book with his inaugural novel, *The Gunny Sack* (1989)

set in Tanzania and Kenya. In June 2015, he was awarded the Canada Council Molson Prize for the Arts. He is the author of several other novels, a memoir of Africa and a memoir of India, and two collections of short stories as well as biography of the late novelist, Mordecai Richler. His work has been translated into Dutch, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Portuguese, Spanish, Turkish and Swahili. He has given lectures worldwide and written many essays including introductions to the works of Robertson Davies, Anita Desai and Mordecai Richler.

Vassanji is a prolific novelist who quits his flourishing career in Nuclear Physics to become a full-time writer; he writes of his Shamshi community settled in East Africa. This community was taken to East Africa during colonial rule to implant railway there. His work is situated in Africa, India, the United States and Canada, Swahili and Hindi, and has also studied Sanskrit, but writes solely in English. He speaks Gujarati, Kutchhi and Swahili. One of the finest African writers today, he has written eight novels in just over a decades. Besides he has also written a collection of short stories entitled, *Uhuru Street* (1992) and *When She Was Queen* published in India as *Elvis, Raja* (2005). Vassanji has also edited and co-edited a number of works on South Asian diasporic communities around the world, such as *A Meeting of Streams: South Asian Canadian Literature* (1985) published from India. He owns a publishing house that issues the Toronto-based quarterly, *The Toronto South Asian Review* (1981) previously. Now it is published as *The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad* that he edits and has done much to promote the works by authors of South Asian origin, in Canada and elsewhere. In his editorial to this journal, Vassanji mentions that this journal would allow the diversity in backgrounds and experiences of the writers to be reflected in “a dynamic

and vital way” (Vassanji, *The Toronto South Asian Review* “Editorial” 1). Arun Mukherjee (1998) describes Vassanji as the author who has played, “his triple role as editor, theorist and writer” (Postcolonialism: My Living, p. 30) in the development of South Asian Canadian Literature. He has lived in double diaspora and is smeared among three places – Africa, Canada and India.

Diaspora and M G Vassanji:

In Vassanji’s fiction, the multiple streams of fact and fiction, history and myth meet in harmony representing the story of a community, Shamsis of East Africa and the people who have endured through rough times and trying situations, overcoming obstacles and emerging triumphant. His novels deal with the lives of East African Indians in East Africa. Vassanji, since his early writing days, has been a strong supporter of the Canadian South Asian literary community as evident in *The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad*, and has done much to promote the works of South Asian writers globally. Vassanji explains how the lives of his characters are affected by the migrations like himself to Europe, Canada or the United States. He says in an interview with Chelva Kanaganayakam:

The Indian diaspora is very important... Once I went to the US, suddenly the Indian connection became very important: the sense of origins, trying to understand the roots of India that we had inside us.” *World Literature Written in English* 31.2 (1991): 19-35.

His characters live in different places such as Dar es Salaam, Kenya, Toronto, and Tanzaniya. This reflects the complex and elusive identity of someone who has lived in

the countries like East Africa, America and Canada amidst a diversity of cultures. He was brought up in a syncretistic Indian tradition in the family. His writing remains inspired by history and memory, but his novels are not historical per se; indeed history is represented as character, and its troubles quest the plot in all his works. Of his days in Africa and his childhood, Vassanji in “Canada and Me: Finding Ourselves” writes:

I remain strongly attached to Africa, the continent of my birth; its music, the sight of its grasslands, its red earth, or its mighty Kilimanjaro, stir me to the core. I have happy memories of my childhood there”. *Passages: Welcome to Canada* 3.1(2002):20-21.

He consciously writes of his roots, and his “relative affluence” makes him aware that the land he left behind “lives in such anguish of war, crime, corruption, deprivation.” (Vassanji, ‘Canada and Me’, *Passages: Welcome Home to Canada* 3.1(2002):23.

It is interesting to note that Vassanji, in all his works, reflects the position of South Asian expatriates living in East Africa. Vassanji’s novels deal with the Asian Africans doubly migrated to East Africa and then to Canada. He focuses on the situation of Asian Africans in Africa and the Western countries and how the lives and the identities of his characters are affected by migration. In his book, *The Location of Culture* (1994), one of his essay entitled, “Dissemination: Time Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation”, Bhabha talks of Diaspora as an interstitial psychic space between the national consciousness and diasporic consciousness. (139-170)

The Shamshi community is a minority ethnic group of migrant origin in East Africa, which maintains sentimental or material links with its land of origin India. Books set in Kenya written by the Kenyans as the Whites, hardly mention the presence of

Indians who played an important role in the growth of Nairobi, the building of the railway and the politics of the country; their position was that they were both Asian and African, known as Asian Africans. Having been removed from a place of supposed origin and without emotional, political and cultural affiliations, to territorially bound, static localities Asian Africans move on to find themselves on the earth, as indeed their homes do. Mandeville, therefore, comments that “identity and place” of diasporic communities “travel together” and these communities practice “the complex politics of here and there. Vassanji lives in Toronto. He is caught between the homes ‘there and here,’ as his characters are seen. East Africa has continued to haunt his novel; a complex place he circles again and again, seeking understanding, seeking re-entry. One of the major concerns of Vassanji is how history affects the present and how personal and public history overlap. Exile, dislocation and displacement have been inevitable motives in Vassanji’s novels. They encompass Indians living in East Africa. Vassanji shows in his novels how these migrations affect the lives and identities of his characters.

There is confessional sketching in the works of M.G.Vassanji. All his narratives like his life itself are syncretically sketched. The sphere of personal has been described objectively and subjectively as well in the novel. He uses historical Shamsi community from Gujarat, India to present the Khoja Ismaili community to which he belongs. From in-between many worlds that Vassanji occupies and writes about have made him “one of the finest younger African writers”, says Peter Brooker (*Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, and Spaces*, 2005: 50). Vassanji acquaints the worlds with pre-colonial and postcolonial Africa with the help of narratives involving quests and experiences of several individuals. His novels are the most authentic and detailed

elaboration on African life. His novels are a vehicle of self-discovery of East African identity and make the Indians re-discover their cultural roots. He has created and employed African words with English. As a postcolonial writer, he writes thematically about the personal, communal and national histories of their people in most of his novels. His narratives are actually the constructions of life histories. Vassanji lives between the two cultures and seeks to establish his own identity. The Asian Africans settled in the East African coast, one of the liminal spaces characterized by the cultural syncretism between the Bantu and Arab cultures that produced the Swahili culture. Like Vassanji himself, his characters are also hybrids that migrated from one country to another. He has in novels how migrations affect the identity of an individual. The history of Asians in East Africa has been a peculiar one, says C.P. Sarvan in his article “The Asians in African Literature” (2008). In the words of Mehrotra, one part archival historian, two parts family genealogist, three parts amateur sleuth and four parts self-conscious theorist with each adding to the intermeshing web of chronicle and conjecture, coincidence and connotation that drives his stories to the ultimate disclosure. His novels deal with the history- the history of individual, the history of his community. His narratives consciously contemplate on the very process of memory itself. Govinden observes in his article ‘Memory is a Weapon: Reading under Apartheid’, ‘Memory is indeed the weapon not just to reconstruct the past, but to interpret it’ (26). *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 27:1, January 1996:216. His characters inhabit in-betweenness and a transnational liminality and are hybrid. His novels deal with transnational issues and his preoccupation with history and politics, and concerns of home, migration, exile, loss, belonging, dislocation, violence, trauma and identity as central to his writing.

Post colonialism and M. G. Vassanji:

The postcolonial writer or the diasporic writer, in the words of M.G. Vassanji in his article, “The Postcolonial Writer: Myth Maker and Folk Historian” published in his edited book *A Meeting of Streams: South Asian Canadian Literature* (1985) is “... preserver of the collective tradition, a folk historian and myth maker. He gives himself a history; he recreates the past, which exists only in memory and is otherwise obliterated, so fast has his world transformed. He emerges from the oral, preliterate, and unrecorded, to the literate. In many instances this reclamation of the past is the first serious act of writing.” (63)

Vassanji as a postcolonial writer plays the dual roles of preserver of culture and tradition as well as the harbinger of modernity with new modes of thinking and expression in writing about the diasporic South Asian community. In their attempt to assert their ethnic identity they redefine the hybrid identity of the nation, the community and their self. In these works can be seen the writer’s need for self expression, nostalgia, interrogation of history and alternative perspective of history and reality.

Vassanji’s novels are obsessed with history and tries to unearth the perspectives, hitherto ignored or hidden underneath layers of colonial consciousness. In his novels Vassanji represents history through the altered spectrum of the postcolonial consciousness and undertakes the job of a historian and a myth maker. If history is the details and facts of incidents that happened in the past, then myths are the collective unconscious of a race, community or group of people, having shared history that represent and carry forward their ancestral wisdom, tradition, culture and experience

from generation to another. When history seeps into fiction it does not merely remain a collection of facts and figures but becomes a human history. Unlike a historian who filters down facts and figures from the past in a dry form, the writer creates characters who relive history in front of our eyes, in the present. They are as much influenced by history as they themselves exert an influence on it.

Postcolonial writing is not merely an account of resistance but it is a response to the western representations of the colonies, through stereotypes, exoticism, magic, darkness, smallness and powerlessness as it is evident in the writings of M.G. Vassanji, Rohinton Mistry, Uma Paramaswaran, Shyam Selvadurai, V.S. Naipaul, and others. It is a questioning of history, of perceptions of reality as seen by one side and presents the other, not merely as a response but as an understanding of one's own position. It is accordingly a questioning as well as a re-making and un-making but the journey is always difficult and arduous as one has to wade through layers of records, histories and hybrid formations in order to find out the truth about oneself. Vassanji's novels compel us to work through literary traditions of the home country, where somewhere or the other, lie the roots of our difference.

The emergence of the multicultural space is one of the most complex formations of space in human history and under this scenario; a writer has to accept it, as M. G. Vassanji tells J.C. Ball in an interview:

“We lived through a period of transitions and big change moments across continents, from India to Africa and within Africa and go on plus the personal changes within your lives the political changes, colonialism, wars, independence revolution- and

you had to find out why you were, what you were, what happened to you' it's like coming out of a state of shock, trying to remember what happened during the last hundred years. In this horrible new crisis a writer can afford to do or discard mark."

Paragraph 15.3-4 (193-94):3-8

Post-colonialism is used by the scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences to look into the ways, both salient and silent, in which colonialism is affected and affects the colonized society. All postcolonial theorists and theory admit that colonialism continues to affect the former colonies, most importantly economically, after the nominal political independence of post-1945 global dispensation. By addressing a culture's colonial history and its after effects, postcolonial theory empowers a society with the ability to value itself.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies Reader* (2002) point out that Postcolonialism deal with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies (186). The twentieth-century imperial age was experienced as an intense crisis for the colonized people who had erstwhile been attached to established ways of life and modes of thoughts as the Asian African community in East Africa.

Phil Cohen in his article, "Rethinking the Diaspora" writes that: "diaspora is one of the buzz words of the postmodern age; it has the virtue of sounding exotic while rolling sibilantly off the English tongue; it whispers the promise of hidden depths of meaning yet assimilates them to the shape of a wave breaking gently on native shores... It offers a desirable feminine ending and much verse-atility". *Patterns of Prejudice*, 3:1, 3-22. December 7, 2010 (3)

Diaspora, apparently being in a state of perpetual wandering, is as old as human history. The Diasporic imaginary is crucially connected to the idea of “homing desire”. The idea of homeland is the quintessence of Diaspora writing. It involves a displacement from the original homeland, nostalgic for it, a curious attachment to its tradition, religion and language, an inability to return, making of a new home and a crisis of double identification with the original homeland and the new home. This is especially evident in the writings of Moyez Gulamhussein Vassanji, an African-Asian novelist living in Toronto Canada. Vassanji is an impressive explorer of human consciousness and of the convulsions of intimate interpersonal relationship caught in the whirlpool of disparate and divergent cultures. Vassanji in all his works portrays the South Asian expatriates living in East Africa. His diasporic consciousness longs to harmonize the past and the present and move towards progress. As an immigrant, he is caught by divided loyalties to his present home in Canada, and memories of his former home in East Africa. This ambivalent nature of immigrant experience in Canada remains a constant preoccupation throughout his works. He is concerned with how this ‘double diasporization’ affects the lives and the identities of his character. In an interview with Zahid Rajan in “Two Worlds In-Between: In Interview with M.G.Vassanji,” Vassanji opines:

I do not like academic conference; and I find that most of these are organized by Europeans and Americans; to them (this is my feeling) an Asian just does not belong to the Africa they have conjured up; they have their money and positions and their coterie of Africans. On the other hand, I go to my Dar or Nairobi, identify with the landscape, be it dry grass or a hut, enjoy speaking Kiswahili or simply drinking chai in a banda and listening to banter; and no one there, especially in Dar, even asks me where I come from.

And when I speak Kiswahili, the manner of my speech identifies me immediately as someone of the land. What need do we have of a conference? *Awaaz: The Authoritative Journal of Kenyan South Asian History*. 3.

Nobody would claim that M.G. Vassanji is not a diasporic writer. His grandparents were part of the huge dispersal of Indians to provide and implant railway tracks in Kenya for the British Empire after the abolition of slavery, and he himself is himself is self-imposed exile from his Trinidad birthplace, living in England but claiming never to feel at home anywhere. His consciousness is at the root of his whole oeuvre, and he is always one of the writers mentioned in any general discussion of the Indian Diaspora. In the twenty-first century, a century marked by political upheaval, mass migration (forced and otherwise), colonization, revolution, it is inevitable that much modern literature should be a literature of exile. Most poignant within this category is the literature of exile *pur sung*, of the displaced or disposed who do not have, never have had, and, by the nature of things, never could have a home against which their condition of exile can be assessed. The writings of M.G. Vassanji draw upon an experience so totally based on layered levels of alienation and exile that his works become paradigmatic of the whole genre, and hence of a major current in twentieth-century life, thought, and art.

Cross-culturalism is at the heart of all diaspora and Vassanji is no exception to that. In the essay “Displaced Relations: Diasporas, Empires, Homelands” in the book *In Diaspora: Histories, Theories, Texts* (2001) edited by himself, Makarand Paranjape points out that ‘considering that no human community has ever remained entirely static, we can argue that there are no pure natives anywhere- that, to some extent, we are all

diasporic.’ In this sense we can argue that M G Vassanji is a diasporic writer in a literal sense. Paranjape states in the essay *In Diaspora: Histories, Theories, Texts* (2000), that:

The diaspora...must involve a cross-cultural or cross-civilization passage. It is only such a crossing that results in the unique consciousness of the diasporic. ... [E]ven if Voluntary, the passage must involve some significant tension between the source and the Target cultures. It is through this displacement and ambivalence that what we consider the Diasporic is engendered. (67)

The independence brought the colonizers and the colonized, at par but not economically. The colonial masters have been decentered as the colonizers saw themselves at the center of the world, while the colonized were seen at the margins. The writers intellectually and politically exiled to metropolitan cities, mostly to the Europe, the UK and the North America. Most of the postcolonial writers like V.S. Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie and many others underwent a kind of cultural and linguistic translation. This ‘translational’ and ‘translation’ characteristic features and identity have placed them in the position of ‘not quite’ or ‘in-between’. This statement leads us to Bhabhi’s notion, as he says *The Location of Culture* (1994), whereby the postcolonial migrant writing is the writing of “not quite” or “in-between” (122).

Vassanji lives in a multilingual postcolonial society in Toronto. Being no dominant language there, English functions as a bridge language. He has his own distinctive style of using language. He mostly uses functional form of the language to speak of place and identity. His English is glossed with Gujarati and Swahili words and phrases that depict the multiracial, multiethnic communities in East Africa in colonial

times and also power relationship that operates between different races: the Europeans, the Asians and the native Africans. Vassanji has always been fascinated by the nature and origin of the languages that have surrounded him throughout his life. In Vassanji's Interview with Kanaganayakam, the writer says:

...Even in Africa, although we were Africans, we were also Indians... We grew up speaking two Indian languages-Cutchi and Gujarati-and we also understood Hindi from the movies we watched. And then we were also brought up speaking Swahili and English. We had all of this within us. In my generation the schooling was entirely in English....

World Literature Written in English 31.2 (1991), p. 20

Vassanji is a diasporic writer, and his works incorporates the expressions of alienation, powerlessness, longing for the homeland, loss of identity and subjugation. Vijay Mishra points out in his book *The Literature of the Indian Diapora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (2007) that Diasporic epistemology locates itself squarely in the realm of the hybrid, in the domain of cross cultural and contaminated social and cultural regimes. Vassanji himself being a migrant always tries to depict the system of hybridized cultures, beliefs, the colonizer and colonized. The conflict is a part and parcel in Edward Said's discourse on Orientalism. Mishra also mentions in *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (2007) that in the imaginary of diasporas "both mourning and melancholia persist, sometimes in intensely contradictory ways at the level of the social" (9).

Vassanji's 'in-between' position, indeed, reflects his continuously negated sense of belonging. Double consciousness and homeliness are the two features of his writings. In the diaspora this feeling of being caught between two cultures, of belonging to neither,

rather than to both of finding oneself arrested in a psychological limbo that results not merely from some individual psychological order, but from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which one lives. To be ‘unhomed’ is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home at even in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak in the case of the Shamshi community. Louis Tyson argues in his book *Critical theory Today: A User friendly Guide* (2006), “Literary criticism is the application of critical theory to a literary text.”(30) In this respect, the application of the concept of interstitiality as formulated in the critical discourse of Homi Bhabha to the study of Vassanji’s novel is an exercise in postcolonial literary criticism. Tyson goes on to posit, “[w]hen approaching a literary text, postcolonial literary theory focuses on the experience and literary production of peoples whose history is characterized by extreme political, social and psychological oppression.

It is indeed vital to recognize contextual influences that inform Vassanji’s literary practice. Vassanji utilizes the history and experiences of his community to create his textual worlds. Upon the publication of his first novel *The Gunny Sack* Vassanji did a homecoming tour of Nairobi and Dar in 1991. In a subsequent interview with the late Wahome Mutahi, he said:

I have tried to define a certain kind of East Africa Asian, to create a mythology which applies not to a nation as in Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s case, but to a minority which does not know where it belongs as in Wahome Mutahi’s article “Memories of Yesterday’s Home,” in the magazine *Lifestyle Sunday Nation* [Nairobi] 27 oct.1991:13.

According to Bhabha, a “location is a micro point of intersecting simultaneities, containing traces of wider issues.”(Reference) The locating of culture is a process dependent on representation and enunciation in the postcolonial context. East African writers interested in colonial discourse analysis suggest that a postcolonial community complement each other. For instance Ngugi posits in the book, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom* (1993):

[F]or a full comprehension of the dynamics, dimensions and workings of a society, the cultural aspects cannot be seen in a total isolation from the economic and political ones. The quantity and quality of wealth in a community, the manner of its organization from production to sharing out, affect and are affected by the way in which power is organized disturbed. These in turn affect and affected by the values of that society. The wealth and power and self-image of a community are inseparable. (Xiv-xv)

The idea of land is crucial to all the East Africa peoples as Ngugi wa Thiong’o points out. By these idea we assert that most of the settings of Vassanji’s novels are interstitial locations. Both Ngugi and Vassanji hail from Kenya; were born during the colonial times and had first hand experiences of British colonialism. However, whereas Ngugi’s works speak of the experiences of the dominant black/ Indigenous masses, Vassanji’s social commitment is mainly to the marginal Asiatic cultural community.

It is evident that while acknowledging that the Asian African writers, especially Vassanji, has been shaped by the specific cultural heritage of their great-grandfathers who came from Gujarat, India, we should also acknowledge that the Asian African is also an offspring of the historical (colonial) antecedents that have affected all the East African

peoples. They are simultaneously South Asian and East African as the Chairman of the Asian Africans Heritage Trust, at the National Museums of Kenya, Pheroze Nowrojee points out, “[t]his is our home [Africa]. Our social identity rests on our bi-continental tradition. We are both Asian and African. We are Asian African.” Nowrojee, Pheroze. (Interview with Shashi Tharoor, We’re All Kenyans Here, 21th august, 2005 from <http://www.shashitharoor.com/articles/hindu/kenyans.php>)

M.G. Vassanji is a writer, whose social consciousness stimulated ideas related to his fictional Shamshi community projected against colonial history. He has been very successful in juxtaposing the historical realities with imaginary intricacies. He rummages through the social, political and economic contours of the Asians in East Africa supplying a descriptive invoice of events influencing the affairs of nonages. In reply to the question by Sayantan Dasgupta in an interview, published in *The Statesman Review* on 30 May, 2000, about whether Vassanji felt as an exile or a global citizen in Canada after his migration there, he replied:

I am more comfortable defining myself in terms of my locale and city. That way Dar es Salaam would be probably the first place that figures as home. Every writer, I think, belongs to his city, to the street and his urban landscape, *assuming* (my Italics for emphasis) he is part of an urban ethos. Another place I could call home in that sense would be Toronto in Canada (ts).

In another interview (first published in *India Currents Magazine* in March, 1995), he talks about his own “dense social background” in Tanzania and insisted that his characters “must be seen in the context of their community”. In a review of *Amriika*,

Gene Carey (1999) writes about Vassanji as saying to him that he felt a sense of psychological belonging to East Africa and particularly Tanzania after crossing the oceans, and he needed “something to hold on”. In “Broadening the Substrata’: An Interview with M.G. Vassanji”, Vassanji tells to Chelva Kanaganayakam : “Once I came to the United States I had fear of losing my link with Tanzania. Then I feared going back because if I went back I feared losing the new world and one had discovered.” *World Literature Written in English* 31.2 (1991), p. 21.

Vassanji’s novels are fixated with history of nations as much as with the history of undocumented individuals. He, in an interview for Tanzania news, says:

I am an obsessive writer. I am obsessed because I have stories to tell; these stories, the people and places I write about have not been written about. I write about Uhuru Street, Dar es Salaam, the shopkeepers, and the fund is and the thieves and the mwendauzaimus.” *World Literature Written in English* 31.2 (1991), p. 21

Sudha P. Pandhya in *Voyage of Self Discovery: Some Immigrants in Canada*, attempts to scrutinize the fictional works of three South Asian Canadian writers – Moyez Gulamhussein Vassanji, Rohinton Mistry and Neil Bissoondth who are Toronto bases and whose roots can be traced in India. Pandhya enunciates, “As immigrant writers they are often concerned with giving a voice to the displaced and dislocated, by showing, through their work what it is like to belong nowhere” (84). *Indian Journal of Canadian Studies*. Vol.2.No. 1. 1993: 83-90.

She also observes, “All these writers are preoccupied with their pasts and their efforts is to recreate the life of the community native to them (89). *Indian Journal of Canadian Studies*. Vol.2.No. 1. 1993: 83-90.

Pandhya considers Vassanji’s concerted interest in the history of the Asians Muslims in East Africa and equates him with Rohinto Mistry who demarcates the Parsi’s community Mumbai. M. F. Salat in “The Need to Discover: M. G. Vassanji’s Writing,” ascertains that M.G.Vassanji has put his best efforts to preserve and transmit his cultural heritage through the writings. He mulls over Vassanji’s opening three fictional works. Salat also states in the same essay “The Need to Discover: M. G. Vassanji’s Writing” in the journal *South Asian Canadian* (1996), “M.G.Vassanji, in his writings, endeavors to provide a similar map for his people, the African Indians, who have been twice transplanted on alien soils and who therefore need such a map to know who they really are” (70).

As a postcolonial or diasporic writer, in all his works Vassanji examines the motifs of loss identity, cultural conflict, psychological crises, alienation and rootlessness of Diasporas. At the same time, while depicting a particular society, he not only examines his search for selfhood and nation, but also insists on the need of tradition, myth, and history as the external starting points for the ‘self’ to become real. Edward Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) “The history that the settler writes is not the history of the country which he plundered, but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skins off, all that she violates and starves” (327). He also feels the necessity of defining a personal identity in one’s own life as his characters are, and,

therefore, creates determined characters in his fiction to expose their loss of identity in various ways.

The setting of his novels is that of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, America, Canada and India. His works are diasporic in nature as it reveals and recalls the events of exile, nostalgia, memory, nihilism and diasporic consciousness. Most of his novels are based upon the migration of South Asians especially from Kutch regions of Gujarat to East Africa in the nineteenth century. The fictional characters are used by him in the historical time frame to re-present counter histories and narratives. The postcolonial and immigrant writer take up the subjective unheard accounts to read history retrogressively to give voice to. Vassanji uses the fictional characters such as Salim Juma, Vikram Lall, Nurdin Lalani and Pius Fernandes in the historical time-frame to re-present counter histories and narratives. He injects imaginary tales, free play of stories, through which he retrospectively recalls the time forgone through imaginary eyes of the present.

M.G.Vassanji's works are decidedly relevant in the present situation in which the diasporic person feels the state of being an exile- the pain of homelessness and loss of roots. His queer combination of circumstances relating to Indian, British and African identities shows that his search for identity is not within a particular country and culture, but goes beyond geography and history. He has an urge to articulate his fluid, multiple and unstable identities in terms of his unique postcolonial cultural perspective and makes his works the record of his exiled life and explores through subjectivity, geography, and language a learning towards multicultural and fluid identity. His works like *The Gunny Sack* (1989), *The Book of Secrets* (1994), *The In-Between world of Vikram Lall* (2003) and *No New Land* (1991), have been selected for an in depth analysis of M.G.Vassanji's

search for roots and his formulation of identity in the backdrop of the postcolonial concepts of culture and diaspora. The almost natural phenomenon of East African society is its multiraciality and multiculturalism of the nation-states that is well dealt with in his writings.

The novels under study represent Vassanji's works that are set and developed against East African historical happenings, events and sometimes, locations. Scholarly commentaries by critics in different illuminating ways are taken into consideration to analyze Vassanji's treatment of East African postcolonial history, Asian African history and his own subjective history. In this chapter, we outline the historical contexts from which Vassanji, his community and texts under study emerge and to be discussed contextually and theoretically.

The selected novels would be studied as creative response to certain historical realities and experiences of the Asian African community, Shamsis, living in East Africa and Canada that have led to the identification of interstitially or *in-betweenness* as the *volkgeist* or cultural logic of his people. The novels are studied with third world setting involving postcolonial social and political background. The novelists like Vassanji, Shyam Selvadurai, Rohinton Mistry or Neil Bissoondath live between two worlds, in many cases within themselves the "transposition of social memory" in the words of Itwaru in his book *The Invention of Canada: Literary Text and the Immigrant Imagination* (1990). (25)

Chapter Three

The Question of Identity and Survival in *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land*

Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two Cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. (Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 1991:15)

The crucial concern of diasporic identity is not subjectivity but subject position, and then the diasporic writer provides the prospect of fluidity of identity, a constantly changing subject position, both geographically and ontologically. More importantly perhaps, diasporic writing, in its crossing of borders, opens up the horizon of place. Since diaspora is also often the pre-condition for a particular class of ex- colonized people and often involves access to greater educational and economic opportunities, ‘class’ becomes an important issue in diaspora studies. (Bill Ashcroft et al, *The Empire Writes Back*, 2002: 218-219)

Introduction:

This chapter explores the concept of diasporic identity/sensibility that the authors of post-colonial literature are constantly preoccupied with and to present Vassanji’s belongingness to the diapsora of exclusivism and his treatment of the questions of belonging, home and career as symbol of both heritage and values. The question of diaspora arises from the relationship between place and identity, tension between

internationalism and nationalism, and the way the interaction between culture and literature takes place. The terms ‘host’ and ‘immigrant culture’ raise the question as to how the overlapping condition of voluntary and forced migration tries to remap cultural identity politics, literariness and literary text. There are various responses to migration, political persecution, ethnicity that are articulated in literature and produce places where the diasporic communities do exist.

The Quest for Identity:

Vassanji’s novels pursue post national reading of the colonial encounter by focusing on the global amalgam of cultures and identities. The exploration of the themes of identity of origin and identity in M.G. Vassanji’s works is always ironic and playful ambiguities. He represents the migratory nature of his community, their adaptability, eccentricity, ethnic customs, rituals and religious beliefs. Survival is the most basic instinct of every living being and it is this very instinct that makes the Shamshis adapt and assimilate into their immediate environment making the most of the situation they are in; not only surviving but also triumphing over it.

Postcolonialism is a kind of theoretical creole related to the identity. Vassanji’s urge to articulate fluid, multiple and unstable identities would be critically examined in the selected novels. It would also examine how his search for identity, roots and home in various communities/ places makes him a layered/fractured exile, as identity being not fixed, but created. In the book *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (2006), Amartya Sen writes, there are a great variety of categories which an individual simultaneously belongs. Sen writes, “an American citizen, of Caribbean origin, with

African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a vegetarian, a long-distance runner, a historian, a school teacher, a novelist, a feminist, a heterosexual.... to all of which this person simultaneously belongs gives her a particular identity.”(13)The term ‘identity’ itself very problematic and has carrying degrees of scopes and meanings such as search for identity, loss of identity or the widely used term identity crisis, so on and so forth. Stuart Hall examines the identity and cultural representation in his brilliant essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” Perhaps of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, with the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production”, which is new complete, always in the process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Padmini Mongia, *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*, 2006:110). The indigenous society and the new settlers exposed to dominant cultures absorbs the White Master’s rules, both consciously and unconsciously. Instead of adapting to the dominant culture, they adopt to the ‘new culture’. Vassanji’s novels are examples of understanding the colonial history of the migrated *Shamshi* community. In crossing over borders, the Diasporic Asian Africans carries their identity transnationally and translated it into new cultural terrains in the host country.

The prose works based on social realism mirrors the society of East Africa across several divides in order to explore questions of identity in a changing post-colonial and intercultural environment. As it is believed that the writer’s individual talent should be rooted in the tradition of a particular society and culture but the fact remains that the real strength of the modern literary imagination lies in its evocation of the individual’s predicament in terms of alienation, immigration, expatriation, exile and his quest for identity. Thus, the feeling of culturally and even linguistically estrangement as the

individual feels about himself is reflected in the immigrant writers. The questions of Vassanji's social, emotional, ethnic or cultural identity assume mystic proportions in the works. The novels *The Gunny Sack* (1989) and *No New Land* (1991) would be analysed on the basis of the above arguments in this chapter.

The Gunny Sack: A Narrative of Constructing an Authentic Post-colonial Identity

Vassanji, as a diasporic writer, are concerned with exile, memory, consciousness, longing for return, alienation and search for identity. All these characteristics find unique articulation in the novels of M. G. Vassanji. The novel *The Gunny Sack* (1989) deals with the story of four generations of Asians in Tanzania. Here the author examines the theme of identity, displacement and race-relations. He also endeavors to retain and re-create oral histories and mythologies that have long been silenced.

The gunny sack in the novel is a repository of family history, a Pandora's box of memories and mementoes and operates as the organizing metaphor of the novel. The memorabilia that Salim takes from the gunny sack refresh his memories of the oral history of the family of Dhanji Govindji and cause him to dig further into the cause and effects of events associated with the contents of the gunny. Vassanji portrays in the novel the community he belongs to. His novelistic reclamations of the narratives of a smaller community, shamshi, marginalised by the authority in main community present an authentic picture of their lives in his novels with a focus on how they tried to maintain their identity. Vassanji writes the history of a people.

The novel traces the history of Ismaili community in Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam. Vassanji presents in the novel the saga of migrations from Gujarat to East Africa in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The novel describes a small Asian community abandoning imaginary Mahatma as the Germans withdraw in the face of their impending defeat in World War I. The novel represents the condition of the East Asian community. They are the community who lived in-between the blacks and the whites.

The novel is the story of an old gunny sack that is a repository of memories, family history, struggle, slavery, colonialism, migration and a ceaseless echolalia of African politics. Vassanji writes in the novel of the past contained in the gunny sack. The novelist provides an insightful look also in to the culture of Shamshi community who were born and grew up in East Africa during the mid-20th century. The story starts with Dhanji Govindji in Zanzibar in East Africa. The three sections of the novel is labeled with the names of three ladies namely Ji Bai, Kulsum and Amina. The East Africans during the colonial rule and after the end of colonialism were living in a position of in-betweenness, the in-between worlds of the authoritative White and the suppressed African Black. The Asian Africans are seen with an eye of suspicion by the colonized African black. The struggle for identity and the dilemma of being in the no man's land makes them vulnerable. The interstitiality of East Africans and their instincts of survival by making East Africa a home away from home are true in Kulsum's theory of God's creation mentioned in *TGS*:

When God was well and ready after all his exertions finally to create mankind, he sat himself beside a red-hot oven with a plate of dough. From this fashion hood three identical dolls. He put the first doll into the oven to

finish it, but, alas, brought it too soon: it came out white and undone. In this was borne the white race. With this lesson learnt, the Almighty put the second doll into the oven, but this time he kept it for too long. It came out burnt and black. Thus, the black race. Finally the One and Only put the last doll inside the oven, and brought it out at just the right time. It came out as golden brown, the Asian, simply perfect. (73)

In this fantastic piece of work the writer focuses on the problematic union of East Africa and South Asia. In the novel most of the Asian African characters such as Dhanji Govindji and the descendent Salim Jhuma quest for new home and identity. In the novel Vassanji tracks the lineage of small Cutchi speaking *Shamshi* community. The novel is the repository of the collective consciousness of Shamshi community such as Dhanji Govindji, Ji Bai, Kulsum and others. The novel is a collective memory of Shamshi community in Canada, the Shamshis, who are originally the Gujarati followers of Shamas Pir says in *TGS*:

Now it seemed to some that he had come, not a pir, but a Pierre, Trudeau of Canada, promising a cold El Dorado in the earth. He will take us, they said, as he took the Ugandas, leave it to Pierre True-do. (248-49)

Ji Bai holds together his collective memory of the central Shamshi community. Salim Juma, the son of a dukawalla, is the narrator who narrates the story. The novel begins with, "Memory, Ji Bai would say, is that old sack here, this poor dear that nobody has any use for anymore." (3) Salim looks for and discovers the past of his own family history and the story of the Asian experience in East African countries such

as Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Salim is bequeathed a gunnysack by his mystical grandaunt named Ji Bai. The gunny sack contains everything Salim Juma needs to trigger off his imagination. Inside the sack, he discovers his own family history and the story of the Asian experience in East Africa. In Zanzibar novel *TGS* depicts:

Indians had lived and traded for centuries. There had been others before Amarsi Makan... there was Babu goss the cutchi pirate, after whom boys had fashioned games and legends dreams Who plied the seas between Mandavi and Mombasa, the cosmos and Zanzibar. (10)

G.D. Killam says in his book *The Literature of Africa*(2004), “It is a moot point as to whether the device assists the novel or not: certainly it does not impede its narrative”. (85) The collective memory recalls the narrator’s family history in India, Africa, England and finally North America. The gunny is nicknamed ‘Sheheru’, which unravels a gallery of characters whose unwritten stories reflect the Asian experiences in East Africa over four generations. The novel tells both the story of one extended family’s arrival and existence in East Africa as well as a repository for the collective memory and oral history of many other Asian Africans. He comes to the land of Zanzibar across the Arabian Sea aspiring for wealth and success. Vassanji writes of him:

Dhanji Govindji. How much lies burned in a name....Dhan, wealth, Govind, the Cowherd. Butter thief gopi – seducer, dark Krishna. A name as Banya in its inspiration for wealth as Hindu; yet gloriously, unabashedly, Muslim. For the esoteric sect of the Shamshis there was no difference. (11)

Sona, the scholarly brother of Kala (Salim Juma) discovers among other things in Ji Bai's sack, three pad-locked books in Devnagari. The novel deals with the African experience confined to the East-African coastal regions like Zanzibar, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. Along with the real life locations looms the dark and mysterious presence of the vast continent. Salim Juma who is a school going boy at Dar-es-Salaam perceives the subtle changes that come in the sleeping continent. The Shamshi community was taken to East Africa to plant the railway. Together with the railway 'coolies', the institutions of the British Raj was transplanted along the Ugandan Railway. Dhanji Govindji, the patriarch of Vassnaji's *The Gunny Sack* (1989), tells his daughter-in-law, Ji Bai says:

The railway goes from Mombasa all the way to the lake in the interior, and everywhere the train stops there is an Indian settlement. The line was built by our Indians, every station master is an Indian, and every conductor is also one of ours. Our people are doing well under the British (35).

The games like *Antakshri* that the women play in leisure, reverberates in the Muslim prayers, the Hindu bhajans of Mad Mitha, etc. are the portrayal of the transplanted Indian Gujarati identity. The Hindu concept of Karma, soul and its carnations, its rebirth and cycle of sins and merits, etc. are the memories of the Gujarati- Muslims of Tanzania. Ji Bai, the daughter-in-law of Dhanji Govindji and the daughter of Gujarat, left her native as young bride to follow the footsteps of her husband. Salim Juma's Mother Kulsum, observes the Indian traditions when she gives birth to her first child a daughter named Begum, nicknamed Victoria. *TGS* narrates:

Hindu and Muslim traditions harmonized in an alien land. Ji-Bai leans her art of healing from her sister-in-law on the eve of Hindu Diwali and yet the prayers are all Ayats from the Quran. Vassanji narrates the racial tolerance between the Hindus and the Muslims: 'When people of two races combine, beautiful children are born with the virtues of both races.'(204)

The glimpse of the Indian connection is described in the wedding of a daughter and specially the farewell and last ceremony. The Indian consciousness is also ruminated by Salim Juma during his National Service at Camp Uhuru.

Salim Juma goes to do his stint at the National Service. It was welcomed at the Indian Mukhi's house in village. The novel deals with the immigrant experience in East Africa and Canada. The shamshi community thinks that Governments may come and go but the immigrants' only concern is the security of their families, their trade and savings.

One by one the new generation of young boys and girls leave for foreign lands in search of better prospects to the West. When Yasmin, a cousin of Salim Juma departs for London someone said, Okay. She's gone, good buy, Dar, good morning, London, she'll be there in the morning (40)the rise of Idi Amin in Uganda and the Mau rebellion the Asian Africans moved away from East Africa to England, to the USA to Canada.

Vassanji writes of the economic conditions of the Asian Africans. There are three Indian stores and one Arab. The largest is two stores in one, selling clothes on one side, general produce on the other. The clothe store looks dark from the brilliant, sunny outside. Inside rolls of cloth standing upright or lying on shelves; Khangas of all colors

hand, neatly, partly, folded, from wooden beams and pipes hanging from the ceiling; khaki and black shorts clipped to a board in two rows for display, frocks hanging from a rack, a clump of baby knickers and bras hand – sewn and brought in from the city.

There is a global economy market. The stock mixes Africa, India and America presenting the hybrid style and language of Swahili society across their emergent nations. Due to the political unrest the Shamsi Community eventually splits into Hindu and Muslims. Indian traders attempt to keep themselves part of the national fabric but the piece of cloth which gave symbolic unity to the independent Tanzania itself becomes a sign of separate communities in its flag which is Black, green and Gold in Color.

The people who migrated to the First world had to face a set of racialized discourses of nation, essentially termed as *Africans* or *Asians* or *Paki*. Living in these physical and cultural ghettos they feel rootless or detached. The characters in the novel live on the fringes of the host society and dreaming of home, replete with intimate memories and feeling of emotional affiliations. Their selfish motif of self – survival, self-survival, separations, depressions, losses are never written or narrated in any nationalistic politics but are recorded in the creative genius of the immigrant writers.

The narrator who is a weary traveler to be free from prison called house of the past and from the maze of the narratives. The Scheherazade must be made to sleep, forever. So at the end of the novel it is narrated:

She lies on the floor, crumpled, her throat cut guts spilled, blood on the floor.... Thus, the disposition of the past to be remembered and acknowledged in only a party understood, without the baggage of Paraphernalia. (308)

Dhanji Govindji arrives to Zanzibar as a trader from Junapur in Gujarat and settles at Matamu in Tanzania. He looks for mukhi in an alien land like other dislocated people. Mukhi comes to rescue Salim Juma when he is in trouble at Uhuru Camp. Salim Juma faced problems being not the blacks at the camp.

Dhanji Govindji had an illicit relationship with a discarded African slave, Bibi Taratibu and results in his son Hussein. Later Dhanji Govindji grows in wealth and prosperity and marries Fatima, of Indian extraction, to trigger the journey of two races in one family, one of Hussein's family with her instinctively black creed and the second of Gulam, a mulatto Indian. Hussein marries Moti and Gulam marries Ji Bai, the caretaker of the gunny sack. Both Hussein's and Gulam's marriages enter in their fourth generations with grandchildren kala (black) and Sona (gold). Dhanji Govindji becomes a prosperous Mukhi. Dhanji Govindji's half African son Hussein disappears into the east hinterland. He shells out his fortune in attempt to find his half African son, Hussein. In this mission he spends not just his own money but embezzles that of others to support his search mission of his lost son. The fact describes the situation of the Asian family during the war as follows:

It was August 1915, Gulam at twenty-four was mukhi of Mtamau in place of his father, b now dead more than two years. He and Ji Bai had a crop of five children, the youngest, Mongi, just over a year old.... News of the war reached them through word of mouth and gossip in the village, and dispatches from Sheath Samji in Dar es Salaam. Exports to India and Britain had stopped, there were shortages of food and stock piles are being depleted, and the government had introduced the one-rupee note to

conserve metal. Villagers had heard of the *Konigsberg* – or *Koniki* – how it was destroyed in the Rufiji (53)

One morning Dhanji Govindji is mysteriously murdered. The cause of Dhanji's death is narrated as a shabby affair that might be tied to his serving of ties with his relatives in India to establish and his descendants in the new world:

A few years before, the Shamshi community in India had been torn apart by strife. Various parties had sprung up, with diverging fundamentalist positions, each taking up some thread of the complex and sometimes contradictory set of traditional beliefs, hitherto untainted by theologian hands, to some extreme conclusion and claiming to represent the entire community. The bone of contention among Shaia, Sunni, and Sufi and Vedanti factions became the funds collected in the small centers and mosques. Faced with this situation, Dhanji simply stopped sending the money on to any of the big centre and kept it in trust for the Matamu community. The strife had resulted in murders in Bombay and Zanzibar. And now it seemed, in Matamu.... Mukhi Dhanji Govindji, Sharrifu to the Swahilis, was buried with full honours by the village of Matamu, carried in a procession of males headed by Shamshi, Bhatia and Swahili elders to the grave, grieved for by women ululating along the way. (48-49)

The second section of the novel is named after Kulsum who is the granddaughter of Govindji. She becomes the wife of Hussein's son, Juma. Salim Juma who is the main narrator of *The Gunny Sack*. Here Vassanji narrates the older Juma's childhood as a

second-class member of his stepmother's family after his mother Moti dies. At this time the family of Govindji has mushroomed into various related families of cousins and siblings. Then Kulum moves back to Dar es Salaam in order to make the both ends meet. The narrator recalls the purposefulness of revisiting the accounts of the past, recalling the words of Ji Bai they do not know where they go after death.

Salim Juma remembers his mother's store, and neighbors intrigue the beauty of his pristine English teacher, Miss Penny (later Mrs. Gaunt) at primary school in colonial Dar, cricket matches and attempts commune with the ghost of his father. The Asian Africans struggle to find a safe place to avoid the *Mau Mau* uprisings as the Asians were suspicious to them. They then go to England, the United States and Canada in search of other homes.

The title of the third section the novel is "Amina", an African girl. Salim Juma, dark in colour falls in love with her. He meets her while doing his National Service at Camp Uhuru. This is so because the National Service was a prerequisite for joining University. As a migrant community, most Asian African families would go long way to make their children go to National Service Camps near Dar es Salaam where the core of the community lived. But Salim's name – Juma, an African name, and his dark complexion due to his ancestry from Bibi Taratibu could not convince the recruitment officers that he was not an indigenous African. He was sent to the farthest National Service Camp in northern Tanzania where he was the only Asian African amidst many indigenous African colleagues. He was persecuted on racial grounds in the Tanzanian government, because he was of Asian extraction.

Salim develops an intimate relationship with Amina at the camp Uhuru. Their first conversation reveals about their right on Africa:

“Why do you call me ‘Indian’? I too am an African. I was born here. My father was born here – even my grandfather!”

‘And then? Beyond that what did they come to do, these ancestors of yours? Can you tell me? Perhaps you don’t know. Perhaps you conveniently forgot – they financed the slave trade!’ “Not all of them-““Enough of them!”... And what of your Swahili ancestors, Amina? If mine financed the slave trade, yours ran it. It was your people who took guns and whips and burnt villages in the interior, who brought back boys and girls in chains to Bagamoyo. Not all, you too will say... (242).

Amina is an indigenous African and their relationship inevitably causes Juma’s family anxiety, until the militant Amina leaves for New York. He leaves an Asian African wife and daughter. On returning from New York turns out to be a Racial Human rights Activist. Salim takes exile in Canada, and from there he deciphers the memorabilia of four generations contained in the gunny sack he inherits, hoping that he will be the last migrant of his family-line. Juma’s wish is revealed:

The running must stop now, Amina. The cycle of escape and rebirth, uprooting and regeneration, must cease in me. Let this be last runway, returned with one last, quixotic dream. Yes, perhaps her lies redemption, a faith in the future, even if it means for now to embrace the banal present, to pick up the pieces of our wounded selves, our wounded dreams, Little one we dreamt the world, which was large and beautiful and exciting and

it came to us this world, even though it was more than we bargained for, it came in large soaking waves and wrecked us but we are thankful, for to have dream was enough. And so, dream, little flowered... (TGS, 308)

Salim Juma lives as an exile in Canada. He left East Africa after independence for Britain, Canada and the United States. After the migration of his family from Tanzania to Kenya, then back to Tanzania and finally after his migration to Canada, Salim is tired and exhausted by the perpetual feelings of unhomeliness and impossibility of belonging. The novel is the fictionalized account of Shamsi community, which goes through the journey of survival amidst colonial oppression, fragmentation amidst the African uprising and displacement after the African independence. The Shamsi community holds the position of a fulcrum with the colonial white towards the sky and the indigenous black fixed to the ground. In the novel Dhanji Govindji expresses in one of his conversations with his African born daughter-in-law, Ji Bai, the position of Asian Africans as well as his community in the African habitat as living in-betweenness.

The community of South Asians in popular East African discourse are known as 'Asians'. In East Africa this community inhabits a middle area, both in colour and status, between whites and African blacks, entrapped between home 'there' and 'here'. The attempt to make sense out of inhabiting worlds in-between the black and the white has in fact become a congenital theme and leitmotif in almost all genres of writings of Asians from East Africa. It is argued that Vassanji's community, historically and socio-politically, was strictly never a part of the black/ White (post) coloniality but a community in-between the two. The Asians are situated in-between the Africans and the

Whites. M.G. The author describes the place, Matamu, a fictional location somewhere in present-day Tanzania:

Matamu, the name always had a tart sound to it, an after taste to the sweetness, a far-off echo that spoke of a distant, primeval time, the yea zoo. An epoch that cast a dim but sombre shadow present. It is the town where my forebear unloaded his donkey one day and made his home. Where Africa opened its womb to India and produced a being who forever stalks the forces in search of himself (*TGS*, 45).

M G Vassanji seems to suggest that when several cultures exist together, it is essential for each culture to have its own distinguishing identity. This is evident in the relationship of Salim and Kulsum:

When God was well and ready after all his exertions finally to create mankind, he sat himself beside a red hot oven with a plate of dough. From this he fashioned three identical dolls. He put the first doll into the oven to finish it, but alas, brought it out too soon. It came out white and undone. In this way was born the white race. With this lesson learnt, the Almighty put the second doll into the oven, but this time he kept it in for too long. It came out burnt and black. Thus the black race. Finally the One and only put the last doll inside the oven, and brought it out just the right time, it came out golden brown, the Asian, simply perfect. (*TGS*, 73)

The narrator's mother invokes the above-cited myth to explain the politics of colour and belonging to her sons Salim and Juma.

Amina comes home to Tanzania. She is charged with conspiracy to overthrow the government. Kala Juma fears that he too may be implicated in the same crime due to his association with Amina. So he runs away from the country and arrives in Canada via Lisbon and Boston. Many others namely Uncle Goa, Zera Auntie, Hassan uncle, Jamal Juma alias Sona, Kala Juma's brother too leave Tanzania, which proves hostile to the Indian diaspora in the post-independent period. His characters are people living on the fringes of host society and dreaming of a home, replete with intimate memories and feelings of emotional affiliations. The lives of the Indian traders are seen in the remarks of the narrator:

Among the trading immigrant peoples, loyalty to a land or a government, always loudly professed, is a trait one can normally look for vain. Governments may come and go, but the immigrants only concern is the security of their families, their trade and their savings. (TGS,52)

This thought of dislocation reminds Bhabha who appears to be grappling with when he says in the book *The location of Culture* (1994): The recesses of the domestic space become site of histories most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and the world, become confused and uncannily, the private and the public becomes part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is divided and disorientating. (9)

Salim Juma and other Asian Africans flee the region after independence. Salim Juma is like Vassanji who says that no matter where he goes, he carries the East African world with him, indeed within him. In an interview with M.F. Salat in 'The Need to discover: M.G. Vassanji's Writings', Vassanji says:

I write about my own people because we are a people without any sense of history and place. A person without history is like an orphan. We know the name of the place we stay, we know our immediate surroundings, but we tend to look towards a future – tomorrow and day after tomorrow- of better future may be. But where is our past? Where are our roots? *World Literature Today* 76.2 (Spring1993), p. 279

In Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* (1989), the historical past concerning origins engages his characters in a tortuous way, mediated through memories of countless displacements and ruptures:

Wisps of memory. Cotton balls gliding from the gunny sack, each a window to the World... Asynchronous images projected on multiple cinema screens... time here is not the continuous co-ordinate... but a collection of blots like uncle Jim drew in the Sunday Herald for the children, except that uncle Jim numbered the blots for you so you traced the picture of a dog or a horse when you followed them with a pencil... here you number your own blots and there is no end to them, and each lies in wait for you like a black hole from which you could never return (129).

In the novel memory plays a vital role to negotiate the colonial and postcolonial history of East Africa. The Asian Africans are forced to migrate and re-migrate to places both imaginary and real after the end of colonization. Throughout the novel Salim Juma negotiates communal and individual identities, the life of the continent of Africa and the

lives of individuals. He explores the past, constructs genealogies and traces the complex formations of the sites of subjectivities through ruptures, dispersal and mutations.

Ji Bai speaks to him almost like a prophet. She says to him that she will give him his father Juma and his father Hussein and his father – And there upon begins Juma's journey back into the realms of past. He says:

Ji Bai opened a small window into the dark past for me...and a whole world flew in, a world of my great grandfather who left India and my great grandmother who was an African, the world of Matamu where India and Africa met and the mixture exploded in the person of my half-cast grandfather Hussein who disappeared into the forest one day and never returned, the world of a changing Africa where Africa and Europe met and the result was even more explosive, not only in the lives of men but in the life of the continent. (*TGS*,135)

The end of the novel is where Vasanji puts the past to rest for a better and promising future. In the last chapter titled 'And the Final Night', Salim addresses memory as "Memory, Ji Bai, is this gunny sack...

I can put it all back and shake it and churn it and sift it and start again, re-order memory, draw a new set of lines through those blots, except that each of them is like a black hole, a doorway to universe... it can last for ever, this game, the past has no end, Sherbanoo, you will not snare me like that, let it end today, this your last night." (*TGS*, 305)

Kala's ambivalent attitude towards Britain is presented in a scene where he watches a parade arranged in honor of the Queen's birthday. He sees the king's African Rifles and the governor, Sir Edward Twining, march by:

You will forget the faces and the contexts but you'll carry the single of those names to your grave... what's in a name, you ask... the sounds of power and authority, the awe and the glory. They will stir inside you, these sounds, when a small part of you in your heart of heart holds back, holds back when they condemn her. (*TGS*, 132).

Salim's loneliness and his lost memories coming out from the gunny sack raise hopes that he will be with his family. *The Gunny Sack* is a novel of escape, wanderlust and rootlessness that afflict so many people in the Shamsi, a fictional device for "Ismaili" community in East Africa. It is also a novel of soul-searching, self-realization, and rebirth. Vassanji demonstrates an admirable ability to delineate the complexities of an individual character and the dynamics of the political and social forces that shaped the eastern part of Africa.

NO NEW LAND: Identity Formation and Post-colonialism

No New Land (1991) is the first novel by Vassanji set outside East Africa. The major concern of the novel is about the question of identity. The novelist concentrates here on the experiences of members of the Ismail community, fictionalized as the Shamsi community but now shifts his focus to the experiences of members of this community who later emigrated from East Africa to North America in general, and Canada specifically, immediately after independence of Kenya and Tanzania in the early

1960s. The novel revolves around Nurdin Lalani, the protagonist of the novel. The Lalani family moves to Canada in search of better life full of new opportunities. They make their home in Toronto's suburb of Don Mills. The protagonist, Nurdin Lalani, born in Tanzania, is a second-generation Asian African from Dar es Salaam, the main city of Tanzania. His ancestors came from the Indian sub-continent but his father like him was born in Tanzania. Lalani is confronted with a number of embarrassing and uncomfortable situations, when he relocates to Canada. When he moves to this new Western society with his family he tries on one hand to adapt into this new land but on the other hand he wants to keep his loyalties to the values of his ethnic community, the Shamsis that he brings from Africa.

Vassanji's background is the similar to the cultural history of the fictional Lalani family, having also immigrated to Canada from East Africa (via America), as have scores of other Asian families from Tanzania for better opportunities. The novel *No New land* portrays the difficulties that an expatriates faces in a host land with a culture that differs much from one's own home country. In this regard Neil Bissondath writes:

Vassanji's descriptions of this community of exiles – so tight, so self-contained, and so alienated from the mainstream – is that of an almost classic ghetto. It is not an extreme of multiculturalism but its ideal: a way of life transported whole, a little outpost of exoticism preserved and protected.

The protagonist of the novel, Lalani after a long journey arrives with his wife Zera and his two children Fatima and Hanif in Canada, where other members of the Shamshi community have already settled down; initially, he is full of hopes and

expectations about a bright future in the multicultural and prospectus city of Toronto. He makes an effort to acculturate and assimilate to Canada society but finds it difficult. Vassanji uses the character of Lalani to develop the theme of an individual who has to struggle and find a place in a society different the one he was born into. In this novel, his failure to adapt is grounded on social as well as individual reasons. Lalani has to redefine his already hybrid identity, which is characterized by a feeling of “ambivalent affiliation” according to Amin (280). This means that Vassanji uses the character of Lalani to broach the issue of the individual versus society in the ambiguous context of immigration, or more accurately, postcolonial relocation.

This ambiguity emanates from as the novelist splits the novel into two different worlds. One is the ‘Old Land’ that encompasses the experience of the ethnic Indian community, the Shamshis, in colonial and post-colonial East Africa. The other encompasses the experience of this community and especially the Lalani family and its male head Nurdin Lalani, the protagonist, in Canada; a Canada in transition too. Vassanji writes the split between the two lands using a rich range of characters from this community and its individual members, notably Mr. Lalani.

The Ismailis were identified with the colonizers and rewarded. As Vassanji writes in *No New Land*, it is not surprising:

The idea of empire was relinquished slowly in the Asian communities [...] The Asians had spawned at least two knights of the empire in their slumps, they had had Princes Elizabeth in their midst, greeted Princess Margaret with a tumultuous welcome. They spoke proudly of Churchill and

Mountbatten, fondly of Vitoria. What a schoolboy or girl had not heard over the radio the reassuring chimes of Big Ben before falling asleep, or the terrified voice of Dicken's Pip, the triumphant voice of Portia, the Queen's birthday message. (Henceforth, *No New Land* as NNL23-24)

The Asians in East Africa, the Indian colonial elites of East Africa were forced to migrate. They migrated to North America and faced with a destabilizing polemical situation of the "in-betweenness" in the newly adopted land, Canada. Thus they suffer from a loss of inherited native identity in their host county. In this novel, Vassanji writes of the theme of identity, race, culture and tradition. The protagonist Nurdin suffers the enigma of identity throughout his life, after he migrated to Canada. Nurdin, an average man, is regarded by his father as a useless "good-for-nothing" (19), an underachiever. He was in school among friends Nurdin Lalani was a middle kind of boy. Vassanji writes how his own younger brother earns money: "One brother making millions in the diamond business, the other making hiss- so Nurdin had heard – in the black market. Always he, Nurdin, the middle one, neither here nor there" (169).

The novel deals with the ironies, the pathos and the hardships of having to live between two worlds. Vassanji highlights the East Indian immigrant's feelings of segregation and alienation from the mainstream Canadian society. Through the character of Nurdin Lalani Vassanji exposes the hyphenated identity that the federal government of Multicultural Canada labeled on the immigrants. The novel reflects on the diasporic condition of Shamsi community in Africa and Canada. Lalani's family faced the political persecution, displacement, economic distress in East Africa and this made them to leave the country and settle in Canada:

During the short-lived mutiny in Dar, looking out, frightened, through their windows, Asians witnessed their shops being looted. (23) In Uganda, General Idi Amin, who had overthrown and elected government, had a dream. In this dream, Allah told him that the Asians, exploiters who did not want to integrate with the African, had to go. The Uganda exodus showed a way out for Dar's Asians. Canada was open and, for the rich American too. Thus began a run on Canada. (NNL, 25)

The Asian Africans were attacked by the homeland people as Vassanji writes: "What do you have there, Paki? Hey, hey? Paki-paki-paki...." (NNL, 95) Esmail, punched in the stomach, had been thrown down and was crying in horrible, pathetic moans, "Save me, save me, I have done nothing." People shouted encouragements: "Get up! Stand up!" But Esmail couldn't get up. (NNL, 96).

The novel deals with the tension between assimilation and acculturation to mainstream Canadian culture versus maintaining some kind of racial or cultural integrity over from the old land. The Toronto suburb is an opportunity to the East Indians who sees Canada as the *El-dorado*. Nurdin Lalani went on a symbolic "quest for a Shangri-la" (Dabydeen "Bowl to Apollo", 2017:109), a dream space to achieve creative fulfillment, an escape away from the disillusioning reality that a post independent Guyana offered. The harsh, impoverished environment of his childhood and growing up years in the coastal area, fuels his imagination of dream Canada and triggered his impulse to escape. From outside Canada looks pretty, yes it is but only for whites who belongs to Europe. Nurdin Lalani and his family experienced same when they landed in London. They were refused to enter U.K. without any reason. They had to move Canada forcefully. Their

journey continued till end: What the immigration official saw, apparently was a pack of skilled and rehearsed actors from the former colonies out to steal jobs from hard-working English men and women. (*NNL*,33)

Vassanji tells his experience when he enters Canada: Snow had fallen, a blistering wind blew squalls on the road and, as they stopped outside the airport building, it made sails of their ill-fitting secondhand clothes, which had seen better days on the backs of colonial bwanas and memsahibs on chilly African evenings. “So this is snow,” Zera remarked. It had been cleared into unimpressive mounds and at their feet was a fine powder blown about reckless gusts. Toes freezing, faces partly paralyzed, eyes tearing, they stood outside, shoulders hunched. The two children were moaning and shivering, weeping, hiding behind adult coats, creating fresh pockets and exposing fresher areas of anatomy for the wind to snatch at. After the projected taxi fare was mentally converted to shillings, they opted for a bus. (*NNL*, 35)

The Asian Africans were identified with their skin colour. People call them by their belongings like Paki, Indian, African and others. Nurdin denied promotion as he is not black: “Peons, it seemed to Nurdin, rose above him merely because of their black skins. The Europeans had always been masters; their higher positions he had taken as master of course” (*NNL*,28). But his racial discrimination turns violent in Toronto when he is accused of raping white girl. Instinctively he hurried towards her, parking the trolley on the way. “Madam-Miss –is anything wrong? Can I be of any help?” (*NNL*, 178). He tried again. “Miss, shall I call a doctor?’...: “RAPE!” she cried. “He’s trying to rape me!” (*NNL*179).

Out of this world Nurdin would wander in search of a job and return dejected, plunged into deeper despair. Sometimes he took daily jobs, invariably menial, loading and unloading with fellow Dar immigrants, and would come home and lie and say ‘filing’, until that became a joke. Everyone knew what ‘filing’ meant. Sometimes he knew simply refused to out to these humiliations, watching game shows at home, and joining the ‘A-T’ crowd of idle men who met for chitchat and tea downstairs in the lobby in emulation of Dar’s famous A-T shop. On his idle day, in the afternoons, he would clean up at home, sweeping away evidence of degeneracy, fiving the television time enough to cool. You could be sure that Fatima on one pretext or another, or when you were not looking, would detect any telltale residual o its body. And when she did – did the girl show contempt already at this stage. (*NNL*, 65-66)

Nurdin feels alive in the armchair and looks at CN tower’s blinking light in open window of Sixty-nine of Rosecliffe Park and remembers about his past life. He always feels proud about his father who lived gentleman life and managed the family which Nurdin fails to do. In the whole novel we can see series of past memories:

In reaction to this destabilization, diasporic identity constantly translated and notions of East Africanness/ Canadianness are reconfigured within the broader boundary markers. In the novel, the diaspora community builds up a complex microcosm of shops, eateries, mosques and clubs, asserting their ‘East Africanness’ in the face of Canada’s multiculturalism: “Why does not someone tell these Canadians we are not Pakis. Tell them we are East Africans” (*NNL*, 103). The ex Dar es Salaam diaspora community also resists the strategic essentialism of the broader community. They do not want to be identified with other diaspora communities for the sake of making a political statement

about the problems facing immigrant communities: “A Paki rally was not really their cup of tea – weren’t they from Africa? It seemed that they were being forced into an identity they care for, by the media and public, and now by these Paki Asian who meant well but couldn’t keep their distance”. (*NNL*, 109)

The novel emphasizes the East African diaspora community’s strong influence on individual migrants, who, particularly just after their arrival in Canada, see their “main identity as community member” (Vassanji in conversation, Cape Town, April, 2005). This identity is refracted and differentiated by other identities – of gender, class and generation. In a lecture at the university of Cape Town, Vassanji responded to the question of identity as follows: “Identity does not equal A and then b and then C. It cannot be fixed. You can be many things at the same time” (Vassanji, 2005).

The history of complex origins, as reflected in Vassanji’s own life and in the migration stories he tells, points to possible reasons for the move from East Africa to the West. In the novel *No New Land* (1991) for instance, one could argue that the newly independent state is a threat to the Asian population in Dar es Salaam, which fears that the coup in Zanzibar would repeat itself on the mainland:

As if confirming the worst fears, within a few weeks followed many mutinies in Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika, quelled, embarrassingly enough, with the help of British commandos. During the short-lived mutiny in Dar, looking out, frightened, through their windows, Assaians witness their shops being looted. (23) Weeks later, in Dar, rental properties, most of them Asian, were nationalized. The “Uganda exodus” showed a way out for Dar’s Asians. (*NNL*,25).

Canada becomes a site of desire and longing with its ‘dazzle and sparkle that’s seen as far as Asia and Africa in the bosoms of bourgeois homes where they dream of foreign goods and emigration” (*NNL*, 40). Technology and progress are the promises that Canada holds for the Asian Africans in Dar, which is assuaged by “insecurity”, “fear”, “competition”, and “greed’.

In the novel, Nurdin Lalani, a salesperson, and his wife Zera, with teenage children, Hanif and Fatima, Asian migrants from Dar es Salaam arrive to the Toronto suburb of Don Mills to find a new life, only to discover that aspects of the past pursue them in their new environment. Hence, it is not only the strangeness of the new place with which the various characters grapple, but the fact that “we are but creatures of our origins” as Nurdin points out (*NNL*,9). The novel asserts again and again the continuity between past and present, between the left-behind locale and the new location, upheld by the diaspora community’s aim to resist assimilation into mainstream Canada: Of course, the Shamsis of Dar had, recreated their community life in Toronto: the mosques, the neighborhoods, the clubs, and the associations. They even had Girl Guides, with the same troop leaders as in Dar. But no boy Scouts: some things were different. That was the whole crux of the matter now. Their Dar, however, close they tried to make it to the original, was not quite the same. The sparkle was missing. (*NNL*,170-171)

The Canadian Dar, an imitation or translation of the real city, recreates the social set-up, even though it was not quite the same as the narrator suggests here. Salman Rushdie points out in his introduction to *Imaginary Homelands*:

It may be writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at a risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities, or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of the mind. (10)

The novel represents the three women characters, namely Roshan, Zera and Sushiala, in relation to the diaspora community in East Africa. Nurdin's sister-in-law, Roshan, who arrived in Canada before them with her husband, Abdul, eagerly embraces Canada's materialism, expressed by her mantra "this is Canada" (*NNL*, 35). Her hopes for a better life are encapsulated by these words. Roshan's suffering under the violent attacks of her husband does not get resolved. But in Roshan's case of abuse, Nurdin exhorts her to "call the police [...]. This is Canada" but the women decide to keep quiet "hush-hush, don't wash your dirty linen in public" (*NNL*, 137). The text positions the female characters as the repository of tradition and also exposes how this can operate against their interests. Zera is a female character who "did not like change" (*NNL*, 6) and who works tirelessly to get Missionary, their religious and social leader back home, to emigrate as well. Missionary's arrival causes two important results: Nurdin stays with his family, resisting the temptation of an extra-marital affair and Nanji, a young linguistics lecturer and family friend, gets married to Missionary's daughter, Khati. The past is seen

as one solution to the turmoils of the migrancy. Nurdin is incapable of embracing new possibilities in the relationship with Sushila.

Sushiala, a cobbler's daughter from Dar, widowed, living on her own above Kensington market, challenges the traditional gender roles and the forceful role of the diaspora community. She is represented as a character with determination. She breaks with the tradition and class by refusing to go back and help her family after her husband's death and by studying for a high school diploma in middle age as she had not been this opportunity as a child (*NNL*, 157). When she proposes they spend an afternoon together Nurdin realizes the possible freedom this offer presents:

What to do? Let his life slip by, this golden opportunity escape – for what? He was a mere servant, slaving away for his children, whose lives now all lay before them, full of possibilities – did they need him anymore? And Zera was wedded to God, it seemed.... Sushila promised release. But wasn't it this freedom that was so attractive, that made possible a new world - his own freedom? (*NNL*, 175)

Sushiala thus looks for a new reality as an older woman. Nurdin rejects her in her acceptance of the past, foregrounding that the possibilities of his individual identity – this tentative – are subordinate to the collective identity:

It seemed to Nurdin that with the dust settled [...] Missionary had exorcised the past, yet how firmly he had also entrenched it in their hearts. That afternoon of opportunity [...] had receded into the distance, into another and unknowable world (*NNL*, 207-8).

Missionary the community leader from Dar, who agrees to emigrate to Canada to establish a link to the past and Nurdin's personal experiences that distance him from the diaspora community are erased- they become an unknowable world.

The text initially positions the diaspora community as a social safety net. Nurdin's fruitless search for a job reminds the reader of the constant attrition of unemployment which is exacerbated by the lack of support from the diaspora community: Dejection and defeat written all over his face, he looked like a shrunken version of himself, red eyes, weary, his clothes crumpled, the day's growth of beard bristly on his face. Nurdin's search for a job takes a toll on his body: "he felt tired these days, old. His hair had greyed and thinned, there were lines on his face, and his skin somehow looked more opaque in the mirror" (NNL 85). Nurdin faces his children's unsympathetic questions about his inability to find a job: "Gone were the days of fullness of heart, the sense of wholeness at having children. Time was when it was children that brought a man rushing home. But this country had taken his children away, and he felt distanced, rejected by them." (NNL, 166)

Zera and Nurdin's daughter, Fatima, is disdainful of their past and tries hard to emulate everything Canadian: "Fatima, who went to school and spoke English with an accent neither of her parents could even move their mouths to imitate, now had a mind of her own (NNL, 67). She insists to go and watch fireworks by the lake- a Canadian activity:

Act like Canadians, for chrissakes! All this playing cards and chatting and discussing silly topics while glugging tea by the gallon and eating samosas – is not

Canadian. Not realizing that most Canadians she knew and met were like he, with parents not too different from hers (*NNL*,129). Malak points out: Vassnji's characters – whether in Africa, in Europe, or in North America – are hounded and haunted by racism, real or perceived; it hinders their progress and cripples their emotional/intellectual growth, leading them to give survival and exceptional priority in their lives (6). To create a home from home means the interrelation of East Africanness with Canadianness, an ongoing process, constantly in flux. When discussing the regret at having left Dar, the characters have to confront their changed reality in Canada:

That intangible that lights up the atmosphere – the spirit, perhaps – was missing, as everyone, even Roshan. This-is-Canada acknowledged. All this said was that they, themselves, waiting for their master, missionary, to come and reinforce their faiths, were also not quite the same (*NNL*,171).Jamal is a lawyer who came to Canada empty-handed but has now got his own firm. He becomes “their former friend, they had to remind themselves, now that he'd moved up in the world” (*NNL*, 8-9). Jamal widens the gaps and becomes an unlikeable character:

There was a proper distance between a lawyer and a client. Professional conduct demanded it. He maintained this distance by putting between himself and them a secretary, a saucy ‘Canadian’, who recognized no relationship bar that of lawyer and client. (*NNL*, 160)

In his personal life he consolidates this distance by marrying a Canadian woman: The residents of Sixty-nine – those who had been invited- had never forgiven Jamal his wedding reception, where they had been thrown together with people they could not

relate to, all the accommodation – including the speech and jokes – being made for those others (the ‘Canadians’) and not for them, it made feel inferior (*NNL*, 159).

Nanji also feels and comes closest to expressing Vassanji’s opinions, knows that this acculturations is a risky process and he muses: “If there is anyone worth watching, any life worth following, it’s surely his. Even in his conformity, his assured respectability, he is taking a risk, walking a dangerous path” (*NNL*, 162). Nurdin, unlike Jamal, re-establishes his link to the diaspora community and also acknowledges he has changed in Canada. With the help of Missionary, he is able to exorcise the fear of his late autocratic father: “in one stroke that photograph on the wall had lost all potency, its accusing eyes were now blank, its expression dumb. Suddenly they were here, in the modern world, laughing at the past” (*NNL*, 197). Through his own community he gets greater psychological freedom in Canada, ‘the modern world’.

Nurdin negotiates his own multiple positions as well as the strange country, Canada. Vassanji writes of his community. His background is the similar to the cultural history of the fictional Lalani family, having also emigrated to Canada from Africa (via America), as have scores of other Asian families from Tanzania. Meena Alexander (2003) explains:

In *No New Land*, Vassanji draws particular attention to the importance of imagination in constituting identity by portraying a character whose imagination bars him from coming to grips with a real life: that is, a character who becomes a victim of his own imagination (208).

Lalani's psyche is affected by his position in the family. Vassanji's *No New Land* too throws a flood of light on the process of marginalization. Infact, multiculturalism is ironically called 'multivulturalism' (*NNL*, 111). Focusing on the job scene of the immigrants, Vassanji puns on the catch words used such as "Canadian experience" (*NNL*, 44) or "Overqualified" (*NNL*, 48). Nurdin Lalani in *No New Land* is an African refuge to Canada.

Like many other writers of Indian writers, Vassanji uses the names of Indian cuisines and mentions the Indian foods deliberately. "Samosas" are the favorites snacks of people of the northern India. Vassanji mentions the food habit of the Shamshis. In the novel, Sheru Mama and her husband tend to serve chappati that way:

Sheru Mama makes hundreds of *chappati* every day and baby-sits to toddlers at the same time, while husband Ramju helps with the dishes and puts the required dollop of margarine over *chappati*. Her customers tend to be single men who will eat a *chappati* with a pickle, or butter and jam, or curry canned in the U.S. (*NNL*, 61)

No New Land can be considered an autobiographical bildungsroman because it narrates the life of a young man Nurdin Lalani who creates a self as the culmination of his psychological, intellectual and moral development. The novel is the story of the failure of Nurdin Lalani, the protagonist of the novel. In the words of Neil Bissoondath in his *Selling Illusions*:

Bitter-sweet descriptions of Dar es Salaam offer nostalgic vision of the past and make the present even darker than it really is, emphasizing the central point that there are, as the title states, no new lands, only new circumstances. (19)

The exorcism of his father leads to a shedding of old cultural conventions that is responsible for the optimistic outlook with which the novel ends. The parameters of the old are finally open to modification:

Before, the past tried to fix you from a distance, and you looked away, but missionary had brought it across the chasm, vivid, devoid of mystery. Now it was all over you. And with this past before you, all around you, you take on the future more evenly matched. (*NNL*,207)

Both his Canadian society and his own community, family, Lalani gradually feels alienated by showing lack of respect and support. Vassanji's characterization of Lalani is a perfect illustration of that postcolonial theme of "in-betweenness" especially in the context of transnationalism and diaspora discourse. His stories are about individual characters, but they must be seen in the context of their community. Through his literary practice, Vassanji challenges the subjacent status of his community within the postcolonial equation. Literature in the Post-colony, as in the novels of Vassanji, is a complex system of relationship between different peoples, groups, and institutions. The image of the diversity of Asian Africans in East Africa emasculates the complexity and variety of Asian Africans as an African community by propounding the generalization that all members of that community do nothing other than engage in commerce; malpractised commerce in East Africa. This makes them suspicious in the eyes of the blacks.

Asian Africans in East Africa have contributed in various ways in the making of East African states, especially, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Lalani feels that his social

surroundings are in a process of erasing his identity. He comes across as an isolated and lonely man, a victim of forces forming his identity far greater than his own internal nature. The various forms of ambivalence in his life result in the construction of double life. On one side the tragic protagonist one finds honest desires and longing for liberation and quest for success as well as optimism whereas on the other hand are the constraints of tradition and society whose forces are far beyond his control. Conflicts due to racism, religious conservatism and a dysfunctional family hinder the protagonist from performing his identity as the head of his family and a useful member of the community and society at large.

In *No New Land* M.G.Vassanji writes about the Canadian immigrant experiences of the Indian Shamshi community, largely migrated to Canada. These communities establish themselves as successful shopkeeper and businessmen on the coast of British East and German East Africa. Their role as marginal men lent them the flexibility to operate as cultural translators and to function as “a buffer zone between the indigenous Africans and the colonial administrators, as says Amin Malak in “Ambivalent Affiliations and the Postcolonial condition: The Fiction of M.G. Vassanji”.

Vassanji revisionism suggests that Canada is no new land not only because of racial discrimination as the Asian Africans faced in East Africa but also Canada resembles the old land because of the rigidity of Nurdin’s psychological disposition. The novel is thus a successful story of coming-of-age story for the son. Identity in Canada is dynamic for the young generation. It is not filiation that determines identity; identity is a matter of construction that defies stasis. It is not static; it is fluid.

In this chapter the novels *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land* are analysed textually to show the representations of the Asian Africans in his novels. Vassanji portrays the Asian Africans as a migrant community living in an alien environment. These communities live in the in-betweenness to the blacks and the whites, in East Africa. The Asian Africans live in as a different community in the society with their culture, beliefs, rituals, traditions. Vassanji emphasizes that truly post-colonial writers and their communities should use their own literatures, their own community, their history, their culture both to understand their complex cultures and to create continuity with their pasts also appears in the writings of other Asian African writers.

Vassanji's novels are representation of the diasporic experience of Asian Africans of East Africa that give us with fresh insights into the nature of the cultural identity of this community. Writing on identity and narratives he views the quest for cultural identity in the postcolonial worlds as a deliberate and purposeful construction of our life stories. His view that every identity has a history becomes crucial to our understanding because of the way it explains why Vassanji structurally and thematically draws from the personal, communal and national histories of his people in the selected novels. In this way, Vassanji emphasizes that truly post-colonial writers and their communities should use their own literatures both to understand their complex cultures and to create continuity with their pasts also appears in the writings of other Asian African writers.

Chapter Four

MULTIPLICITIES OF LOCATIONS AND SUBJECTIVITIES IN *THE IN-BETWEEN WORLD OF VIKRAM LALL* AND *THE BOOK OF SECRETS*

I do not know very much about the Asian community, but I think they are also affected by the land. It is more than material; it is not just because of its economic possibilities, it is something almost akin to spiritual.

Ngugi wa thiong'o (African Writers Talking, 1972: 123)

4.1. Introduction:

This chapter explores the construction of locations, subjectivity and/or otherness, complexity of colonial predicament, sense of alienation of diaspora, reflected through postcolonial cultural perspectives in the novels *The book of Secrets* (1993) and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003). In these fictions, the multiple streams of fact and fiction, history and myth meet in harmony and represent the story of the Shamshi community living in East Africa and North America, and these people have endeared through rough times and trying situations, overcoming obstacles and emerging triumphant.

Rajesh Radhakrishnan points out in his book *Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Location* (1996) that the diasporic location “is the space of the hyphen that tries to coordinate, within an evolving relationship, the identity politics of one’s place of origin with that of one’s present home”. (xiii) Ian Chambers writes in the book *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (1996), that “the migrant’s sense of being rootless, of living between

worlds, between a lost past and non-integrated present, is perhaps the most fitting metaphor of this (post)modern condition” (27). The idea of land is crucial to the East African people. Most of the settings of Vassanji’s novels are interstitial locations and his characters live in in-between. Shiva Naipaul in his book *North of South* (1978), once cynically pointed out that the existence of the Asian African in East Africa can best be captured by the phrase “caught in-between the master and the slave” (121). Kikono, Matamu, Msimbazi, precolonial Zanzibar, Dar, Moshi, colonial Nairobi and generally speaking East Africa as locations all are specifically different but generically similar and related scenes inhabited by the Shamshi community, the Asian Africans. These are all interstitial locations or simply in-between spaces. Homi K. Bhabha points out in *The Location of Culture* (1994):

These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itselfIt is in the emergence of the interstices- the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural values are negotiated.(1-2) He has written a number of novels capturing the condition of his community as a diasporic people living in Africa with ancestral roots in the Indian sub-continent. The two novels that we shall subject to scholarly scrutiny as we examine the images of protagonists in them are: *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003) and *The Book of Secrets* (1993). More than just signifiers of Asian African social experiences, Asian African literatures by the authors like

M.G.Vassanji are a significant constituency of contemporary Africa's cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism.

4.2. Analysis of *The In-Between world of Vikram Lall* (2003)

The In-Between World of Vikram Lall (2003) represents the Indian Shamshi community settled in colonized Kenya, the freedom struggle in the form of Mau Mau rebellion and the political idealism following the independence of East Africa with a view to portray the postcolonial society. It explores the dark areas of Kenya's history by focusing on the country's Indian community, the Shamshis in East Africa and this community's relation with the black, the natives and the white, the ruler.

This novel is a narrative of diasporic home coming. Vassanji's past triggers off imaginary accounts and confront the ghosts of the past. The powerful narrative subtly manoeuvres history and fiction, tracing intertwining thread of personal and public histories, foregrounding the realities of the in-between existence of the Indian community in Kenya. The novel portrays *the* enigma of the Asians of Africa. The Shamshi community known as Asian Africans of East Africa embodies hybridity and in fact should, like the Indian Ocean which forms the backdrop to Vassanji's narratives, epitomize cosmopolitanism.

The novel depicts the Asian-Africans who are alienated from their African homelands regardless of their emotional attachment and legal status. The central theme of the novel is the feeling of belonging and not belonging. The novel deals with the people who are in-between. This novel is a profound and careful examination of Vikram Lall's search for his place in the world and at the same time it deals with rootlessness of those

who have no fixed national identity as the Asian Africans are. In independent Kenya Vikram Lall, the narrator, desires to secure his identity as a civil servant but the officers and politicians cut him out. The Indians in East Africa during colonialism were in a sort of buffer zone between the British (and German) colonials and the African population. In East Africa most of the Indians were traders, artisans, or lower professionals, occupying the middle position between black and white in the colonial hierarchy; they enjoyed the favors of the whites. They lived in their own large shamshi communities, segregated from both the Africans and the English. They were the essential instrument of British rule over the indigenous population, and had greater contact with the Africans than with the British.

The story of the novel is divided in four parts- the Years of our Loves and Friendships, the years of her passion, the years of Betrayal and Homecoming. The novel captures the basic problems of the diasporic people – of not belonging anywhere, of feeling displaced, and being without any roots. The story revolves around Vikram Lall whose grandfather, Anand Lall, was brought from India as an indentured worker to Kenya to help build the East African railway. His grandfather played a significant role in the development of Kenyan railway but the status of his family remains enigmatic unsettlers. Indians in Africa is viewed as the Other by both Whites and blacks. It is a profound and careful examination of an immigrant's search for his place in the world. It also takes up themes that have run through Vassanji's work, such as the nature of community in a volatile society, the relations between colony and colonizer and the inescapable presence of the past. This novel deals with exile, memory, alienation, longing

for home, in-between status of the Asian Africans and search for identity. Here Vassanji demonstrates how the individual is caught in the conflicting demands of race and nation.

With the variety of characters from both Asian families and African friends, Vassanji has put in touching words about the Asian-Africans and breathed the fragrance of the landscapes. Vassanji writes all through the novel of conflicting interests and divided loyalties to portray his characters. He writes about the distinct ethnic groups, the Arabs, the Swahili, the Masai, the Shamshis or Khoja and so on.

Vikram Lall, the narrator, the prototype of M.G.Vassanji, begins his tale sitting Toronto:

My name is Vikram Lall. I have the distinction of having been numbered one of Africa's most corrupt men, a cheat of monstrous and reptilian cunning... I simply crave to tell my story...I have even come upon a small revelation – and as I proceed daily to recall and reflect, and lay out on page, it is with and increasing conviction of its truth, that if more of us told our stories to each other, where I come from [East Africa], we would be a far happier and less nervous people.
(Henceforth *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* as *Vikram Lall*, 1)

Vassanji as a writer and myth maker of postcolonial writer depicts the post-independence of Kenya that became free of colonization in 1953.

It was 1953, the coronation year of our new monarch who looked upon us from afar, a cold England of pastel, watery shades, and I was eight years old. They had rather refined accents, their language sharp and crystalline and musical, beside which our seemed a crude approximation, for we had learned it in school and

knew it to be the language of power and distinction but could never speak it their way. Their clothes were smart; their mannerisms so relaxed. (*Vikram Lall*, 1).

Vikram Lall is at the centre of two warring worlds – one of childhood “innocence”, and the Other a “colonial world of repressive, undignified subjecthood”. He recalls his idyllic childhood days and growing up in this former British colony: “It was a world of innocence and play, under a guileless constant sun; as well, of barbarous cruelty and terror lurking in darkest night; a colonial world of repressive, undignified subject-hood, as also of seductive order and security.” (*Vikram Lall*, 5)

Lall inhabits a place in-between the young playmates in his town in Kenya. He feels that he is neither a native of the land like his friend Njoroge nor is he anything like Bill and Annie, the children of British colonials; in a sense Vikram is in a liminal space. He is a migrant in Canada, a perpetually offshore Indian and a native of Africa. His in-between world is that of the Asian African in colonial and postcolonial Africa. He belongs to the Indian community of Kenya, which is socially and politically sandwiched between the White and the Black. Before independence the British used the Kenyan Indians to suppress the Africans.

Vikram feels that they lived in a compartmentalized society; every evening from the melting pot of city life each person went his long way to his family, his church and his fold. Vikram is a third generation Asian African in Kenya. In his early life Vikram experiences the racism apparent everywhere. The British or the Whites, were at the top of social ladder, while the Africans were on the bottom and in the middle were the Indians.

Vikram Lall recalls the racialised society that he faces in the multicultural society of Canada:

...We Asians are special: we were brown, we were few and frightened and caricatured, and we could be threatened with deportation as aliens even if had been in the country since the time of Vasco da Gama and before some of the Africans people had even arrived in the land. (*Vikram Lall*, 303).

Deepa and Njoroge love each other deeply but finds her family as obstinately against their relationship as Vikram finds his girl friend's family to be against him – her family is Muslim from Gujrat while his is Hindu from Punjab. The novel deals with the strange position of Asian Africans in the East Africa. In the figure of Vikram Lall, Vassanji has created a character whose life reflects the myriad experiences of thousands of Asian Africans in later half of twentieth century, but also, more generally, a figure through whom he explores broader issues of the Indian diaspora. M.G.Vassanji is a wordsmith. His descriptions of Indian food, family and community are both rich and delicious. Vikram remembers:

On Saturday mornings, with the schools closed, my sister and I went down to the shop with our parents. Sun-drenched Saturdays is how I think of those days, what memories trapped for me days of play. Though it could get cold at times, and in the morning the ground might be covered in frost. At the other end of the mall from us, Lakshmi Sweets was always bustling at midmorning, Indian families having stopped over in their cars for bhajias, samosas, dhokras, bhel-puri and tea, which they consumed noisily and with gusto. (*Vikram Lall*, 6).

The novel highlights the dilemma forced on to the transplanted citizens all over the world. Vikram says: "... I should start my life anew, a life as simple and pure as mountain water..." (389).

Vikram Lall, comments about his experience:

I have wondered sometimes if I took the easy way out, but always came out with the answer, No. to the African I would always be the Asian, the Shylock; I would never escape that suspicion, the stigma. We lived in a compartmentalized society; every evening from the melting pot of city life each person went his long way to home for his family, his church, his folk. To the kikuyu, the Luo were the crafty, rebellious eggheads of Lake Victoria, the Masai awkward naked nomads. The Meru prided themselves on being special, having descended from some wandering Semitic tribe. There were the Dorboo., the Turkana, the Boran, the Somali, the Swahili, each also different from each other. And then there were the Wahindi – the wily Asians who were not really African. (Vikram Lall 286-287)

Vikram's father, Ashok Lall, runs a grocery store in Nakuru before moving to the capital, Nairobi. Every Saturday morning, in a parking lot near his father's grocery store, Vikram plays with his sister, Deepa, their English friends, Bill and Annie, and Njoroge, the black grandson of the Lalls' loyal kikuyu gardener. Indeed Vassanji's views of Kenyan Asians appears as ambivalent as his "in-between" protagonist's identity crisis. There is Mahesh uncle, a veteran of the Mahatma Gandhi's Indian freedom struggle and a Mau Mau supporter, and Ashok Lall, a stereotypical Punjabi, loyal to the Queen and a member of the Asian Home Guard troops used by the British to suppress the blacks.

Years later Snow-bound in his Canadian home-in-exile, Vikram is dispassionate about the moral choices he has made:

I am actually quite the simpleton. I long believed that mine were crimes of circumstance, of finding oneself in a situation and simply along with the way of the world. I've convinced myself now that this excuse is not good enough [...] that's what many of the killers in Rwanda would also say. Thank your stars you did not find yourself there during the genocide, going along, as you say [...]. There are different ways of killing Mr. Lall. (Vikram Lall, 371-372)

Vikram seeks refuge in Canada. Vassanji's Africa is an inhabited space, where the baggage of history jostles with the actions of its inhabitants, and where hope, generosity and personal responsibility wrestle with despair, greed and corruption. Its people are in-between; the central theme of the novel is the feeling of belonging and not belonging: "and so the years pass and before you know it you've lived here decades and unwillingly, unwittingly, belong. *Belong*, I echoed her word and asked myself, Can I too learn to belong here?" (*Vikram Lall* ,370).

The novel *The In-Between of Vikram Lall* throws light on the ambiguous situation of Asian diaspora in Kenya, who are neither 'native' Africans nor European settlers. They are torn between allegiance to more than one nation and national culture. In Vassanji's words, all their affiliations are "neti, neti" (not this, not that). Vikram Lall, the protagonist, remembers his early childhood days and his infatuation with Bill's sister and his sister's affair with Njoroge, a native. They are now playmates.

When the narrator compares himself with his European and African childhood friends, he finds himself different from them. He thinks that both Bill and Njoroge were genuine, in their very different ways and he stood in the middle of them, Vikram Lall, cherished son of an Indian grocer, sounded false to myself, rang hollow like a bed penny.(49)

The in-between position of Indians in the novel is vividly portrayed when the parents of Deepa start looking for a bridegroom for their daughter. Deepa wants to marry her childhood sweetheart Njoroge, but her mother Sheila puts up much resistance to such a relationship with a Nigger. Vikram's sister Deepa, in love with the African Njoroge personifies the frustration when their parents reject their union:

What do you mean you will marry anyone whom you want? Apa exploded. We are not Europeans, remember that, we are desis, Indians. Proud Indians, we have our customs, and we marry with the permission and blessings of our parents! She and Njoroge had declared their love and committed themselves to each other the previous morning. When she revealed that declaration to me [...]. I recall a shiver at the back of my neck, a quiver of excitement, of fear for them both... She did not seem to understand the seriousness of her offence, not to me but to the values of our times and people. We did not marry blacks or whites, or low-castes or Muslims; there were other restrictions, too subtle for us of the younger generation to follow: Hindu Punjabis were the strong preference always. Times were changing, certainly, but Deepa in her typical impulsive way had leaped ahead of them. [...] Get this in your head, Deepa, he is an African, Papa said. He is not us. Not even in your wildest dream can marry an African. What do you mean?

What's wrong with an African? I am an African. What hypocrisy! Mother took a deep breath and replied, there's nothing wrong with being an African or Asian or European. But they can't mix. It doesn't work. (Vikram Lall, 185-86)

The horrible killings and increasing unrest create a sudden displacement for everybody. Vikram's family moves to Nairobi hoping to have a safe home, away from the Mau-Mau killings. Still Vic cannot manage to shake away his image of the brutal killings. After moving to Nairobi, Vic's father, Ashok, gives up business as a shopkeeper and begins to work as an estate agent. He starts selling the houses of many white Kenyans who choose to flee the newly independent nation they once called home.

Njoroge, Vic's childhood friend, is in Nairobi, too, studying Economics at Makerere. Njoroge and Deepa try to rekindle their love. They grow up a passionate love affair but neither community approves their relationship. Deepa's love is fiercely opposed by her mother. Eventually Deepa is married with Dilip, a young and wealthy Indian. After marriage Deepa and Dilip soon leave for London, but Deepa's love for Njoroge remains a central theme in the novel.

In Part three, entitled "Three years of betrayal" Vassanji highlights the varied and multiple ways in which human beings betray each other, themselves and their nations. In the period covered here Lall's father is unfaithful to his wife; Deepa to Dilip; Vic to his wife Shobha; politicians such as Jomo Kenatta, Okello Okello and Paul Nderi will betray their people; friends and family both cheat and suffer the ignominy of deception and lies. This section narrates the map of Kenya's long and painful transition between political independence and national maturity. Vassanji describes Kenya's

political, national struggle through a focus on the acts, dreams, fears and desires of anonymous people such as Vikram Lall and the other Asian Africans. It traces Vikram's career. After completing his studies he finds a prestigious post in the new government, first as comptroller in the Ministry of transport and then as a personal assistant to Paul Nderi, a corrupt minister. On the basis of his talent and diligence he swiftly raises through the ranks, to the point where he has the trust of all powerful Faber of the Nation, Jomo Kenyatta. As a fixer of rare talent, Vikram is gradually drawn into a web of official and political legacy.

Nderi uses Vikram to conduct a massive money-laundering scheme involving American aid money and members of Vikram's extended family who become the chief financiers of corrupt deals and dubious transactions on behalf of powerful politicians. He is sucked from a successful civil service career into the corruption of a postcolonial Kenya, where he becomes involved, with others, in scams that skim millions of dollars of aid money from public coffers, earning him the notoriety of one of the hated men of his time and place. In the end he is framed by his party led down by the very people that employed him. He is the perfect scapegoat. After his dismissal he is a marked man in Kenya. He escaped to Canada from where he tells his life story.

Vassanji describes Canada in terms of a sanctuary and neutral ground, and the snowy cityscape serves a narrative centre from which Vikram's flashbacks are conveyed and connected into a narrative. What Vassanji keeps on coming back to is the very feeling of not quite belonging, of not being accepted, either by the Europeans or the Africans:

I told myself how desperately I loved this country that somehow could not quite accept me. Was there really something prohibitively negative in me, and in those like me, with our alien forbidding skins off which the soul of Africa simply slipped away? (325).

The image of in-betweenness haunts Vikram Lall and describes the positions of the Asians:

I couldn't help feeling that both Bill and Njoroge *were genuine*, in their very different ways; only I, who stood in the middle, Vikram Lall, cherished son of an Indian grocer, sounded false to myself, rang hollow like a bad penny. (*Vikram Lall*, 49).

The narrator's frustration is described as a feeling of being caught in the middle of a colonial encounter between the Europeans and the Africans the rules of which were already set upon the Asian's arrival:

I would like to defend myself against that charge, give a finer shade of meaning, a context, to my relationship with the Africans around me. I wish I could explain to Joseph, a descendant of those people, that world was not of my devising. But I fear I already sound too earnest. (*Vikram Lall*, 32)

Vassanji describes the in-between position of Asians in Africa from an African perspective, voiced through Njoroge: "You were in with the whites, so you had power over us. And you were so alien, more so than the whites. We never know what you think. You are so inscrutable, so Indians" (*Vikram Lall*, 92).

In the last section entitled “Homecoming”, the author presents the adult Vikram living in a snowy town in rural Ontario and Vikram’s tainted past. Meanwhile Njoroge’s angry young son, Joseph, visits Kenya. Now settled in Canada, Deepa asked Lall to look after Joseph who is shortly to begin college in Toronto. Vikram reveals that Joseph had become involved in student activism back home in Kenya, a tempting and hazardous occupation. He resents his radical politics – Vic’s tense relationship with Joseph, who despises Vikram for plundering his country, sets Vic reflecting on the past. Vic decides to return to Kenya from his safe haven Canada and also to pay his debt to Kenya and to settle anew in the place he calls home. It is important to note that Vikram’s growing up parallels Kenya’s struggle for freedom from the British. It is the time when the Kikuyu Mau Mau fighters started killing the Whites as they believe it will rid the country of the colonizers. The British on the other hand used the majority of the Kenyan Indians in hunting down the Mau Mau guerrilla because they could not distinguish the good natives from the bad ones at times of war. It is for this reason that Kenyan Indians become suspect in the eyes of the black African communities. The head has changed but the body of the politics is the same. Vikram concludes substantiating that to the Africans he would always be the Asian, the shylock; he would never escape that suspicion, that stigma.

The racial intolerance towards the Indians in Kenya results in the sudden displacement of everybody. Vikram’s family moves to Nairobi in order to find the safer home. Right after independence, Jomo Kenyatta becomes the country’s president of Kenya, and Vikram Lall becomes an influential figure in the new government, due to his position as a personal assistant to Paul Nderi, Minister of Transport. It seems that he has finally constructed his Kenyan identity. Paul Nderi, a corrupt politician, uses him as a

scapegoat to legitimize his fraudulent money transactions. Later on, Vikram Lall is framed in the gemstone scandal and is dropped. For his Asian link-up, Paul Nderi comments: "...you people have your feet planted in both countries, and when one place gets too hot for you, you flee to the other." (*Vikram Lall*, 314) Vikram replies rather angrily: "It's rather that "we people"...don't have a place anywhere, not even where we call home". (*Vikram Lall*, 314) In this way the novel reflects the dilemma forced on to the diasporic Indian community of East Africa. For Lalls, it is disturbing because they have lost their homeland during partition as is evident from the statement: "By some perverse twist of fate, Peshwar, our ancestral home, had become an alien, hostile place; it was in Pakistan". In the end Vic has a question: "...how desperately I loved this country that somehow could not quite accept me. Was there really something... negative in me, are in those like me" (*Vikram Lall*, 325). In order to avoid prosecution, Vikram escapes to a small town by Lake Ontario in Canada, and moulds himself to live a new life. The diaspora's typical problem of identity is depicted in the novel by the in-between position of the Asian community in Africa, as they were sandwiched between the Whites and the Blacks. Both Vassanji and his protagonist Vikram are diasporic and both turn to the west for stability and belongingness. In all Vassanji's writings, history and biography, political and personal are mingled. His strength lies in his economical characterization. Vassanji explores the importance of traditions in the modern world. Writing for him is, in fact 'a search for home.'

As an immigrant Vikram retains a collective memory, vision, or myth about his original homeland – its physical location, history and achievement. This novel is a profound and careful examination of Vikram Lall's search for his place in the world and

at the same time it deals with rootlessness of those who have no fixed national identity. Independent Kenya he wants to secure his identity as a Civil Servant but the officers and politicians cut him out. He is declared as “one of Africa’s most corrupt men.” He has been labeled with “a cheat of monstrous reptilian cunning.” Vic, the metonymy of Indian Kenyans, wants to survive but rootlessness, racism, displacement and in-betweenness appear as barriers before him.

In this novel, there is a clear sense of the “unhomeliness” that Homi Bhabha refers to as “the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world” and to a condition that is “extra-territorial and cross-cultural” (*The Location of Culture*, 1994:9). This is the place or in-between world Vikram Lall inhabits. Lall inhabits a place in-between the young playmates in his town. He feels that he is neither a native of the land like his friend like Njoroge nor is he anything like Bill and Annie, the children of British colonials; in a sense Vikram Lall is an in-between from very early in his life. The novel deals with Vikram Lall’s liminal position. He is a migrant in Canada, a perpetually offshore Indian and a native of Africa. His in-between world is that of Asian African colonial and postcolonial Africa. He belongs to Indian community in Kenya, which is socially and politically sandwiched between the White and the Black. Before independence the British used the Kenyan Indian to suppress the Africans.

The novel deals with the strange position of Asian Africans in East Africa. In the figure of Vikram Lall, Vassanji creates a character whose life reflects the myriad experiences of thousands of Asian Africans in later half of twentieth century but also more generally, a figure through which he explores broader issues of the Indian diaspora. With the help of this use the author wants to affirm the existence and identity of the

Indian immigrants in Kenya. “Samosas” are the favourite snacks of people of Northern India. Vikram remembers his idyllic childhood and says the Indian communities like bhajias, samosas, dhokras, bhel-puri and tea, which they consumed noisily and with gusto. His father and mother always ordered tea and snacks.

In the course of the novel Lall becomes the personified stereotype of a corrupt and money blinded Indian. What also matches the comparison between novel and reality is the fact that in Vikram’s childhood his father is a merchant son of an ex-railway builder who runs “a provision store” (*Vikram Lall*, 6) in the small colonial settler town of Nakuru. The Lall family lives in this town in the Asian section in a home “considered of four rectangular buildings on either side of a small street, each with adjoining homes and servant quarters at the back (*Vikram Lall*, 30). Nakuru today is still an important town in the agricultural province of Kenya set in the deep Rift Valley and is a major train terminus between Mombasa and Kisumu which lies diagonal to Uganda across Lake Victoria. The centrality of the railway in this novel as outlined above brings us to the concerns of this sub-section.

The railway implanted in Kenya is on the one hand a symbol of Asian-African identity and a bridge that connects them to the lands of East Africa in general and Kenya in particular. On the other hand it is a metaphor for exploitation and emphasizes the tragic development of the main character, Vikram Lall’s personality. In order to prove this case, let us examine certain passages from the novel which serve as representative arguments in favour of this interpretation of Kenya-Uganda railway as treated in Vassanji’s novel. In Chapter 9, the Lall family makes a trip to Nairobi by train, the capital city of the colonial state, just as it is now the republic of Kenya. It is a very special experience for Lall.

Totally fascinated and full of enthusiasm, he recalls impressions which almost overwhelm him when riding on the train:

How can I describe that feeling of looking out of the sliding window above the little washbasin, as the small second-class jostled and bumped along the rails, and taking in the deep breaths of that cool, clean air, and simply, with wide hungry eyes absorbing my world? (*Vikram Lall* 111)

Vassanji uses a number of stylistic devices to provide the reader with a very authentic illustration of Lall's perceptions. The novelist uses, for example, anaphora such as "small second class", "cool, clean air" and "with wide hungry eyes" to create a rhythmical sound pattern across the text reminiscent to the movement of the train. Thus the railway serves as a medium which helps Lall to perceive Kenya and his country and base of identity and with it in mind he feels his identity stabilize.

4.3. Analysis of *The Book of Secrets* (1993)

The novel is an eloquent story of the diary of a colonial officer in East Africa, and the unraveling of its many secrets. It is the story of a stolen diary harboring the "little secrets" of, and belonging to Alfred Corbin, a British governor of a small fictitious town, Kikono, on the borderland between Tanzania and Kenya. The novel explores the complex web of relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, and questioning the issues of migration, home, historical truth and identity.

The Book of Secrets is fascinating due to its amalgamation of history and mystery. The narrator, Pius Fernandes, uses the 1913 diary of a former British Assistant District Commissioner to reconstruct the history of the Shamshi community in Kikono, a fictional

town near the border of Tanganyika and British East Africa. At the dawn of the twentieth century British imperialism was setting its roots in East Africa. Around the diary is woven the captivating story of a young Asian African, Nurmohamed Pipa and his mysterious wife, Mariamu, as the forces of world history such as the First World War and African Nationalism break down their door. Vassanji tells a rich tale complete with historical dates and vivid descriptions of Asian African experience in East Africa from 1913 to 1988. He narrates from the perspective of a retired Dar es Salaam history teacher, Pius Fernandes who finds the old diary with one of his former students and reconstructs its story. The evolution of the Asian African community as a migrant people settled in East Africa is an important theme in *The Book of Secrets*. The perseverance of Asian African characters such as Pipa and the attempts at making sense out of the geopolitical tumult and social dynamics of change are also other narrative strands that woven into Vassanji's thematic web. The storyline of this novel is actually allegorical of Asian African personal and communal quest for success, stability and rootedness in the face of dramatic terrestrial machinations. The novel is about the life experiences of Nurmohamed Pipa.

The colonial history of Kenya and Tanzania are the backdrop of *The book of Secrets*. Here M.G. Vassanji tells a rich tale of complete with historical date and vivid descriptions of Asian African experience in East Africa in 1913 to 1988. The novel begins in 1988 when 1913 diary of Alfred Corbin is discovered hidden in an East African shopkeeper's backroom in *Dar es Salaam*. A local expert, a retired Goan school teacher of history named Pius Fernandes is requested to see if it is worth anything. It is he who has served for several years at a community school in the former German Colony and

British protectorate of Tanzania. He is entrusted with this diary that details the experiences of Alfred Corbin. This diary interests and inspires him personally as well as professionally. The diary introduces Pius and Vassanji's readers to the local Indians. The events described in it connect with chains that span three generations and spread over their continents. Pius Fernandes sets out to tell its story but is ensnared by its plot. He reads it and attempts to trace the events that occur after the diary stops. Pius loses his scientific temperament. He feels that the story of the diary deals with its writer's life and at the same time the story of his own life. He finds himself re-examining his own life as an immigrant. He attempts to illuminate the past. Ultimately he learns, "the story is the teller's, it's mine." In the prologue he says: "...because it has no end, this book, it ingests us and carries us with it, and so it grows". (TBS 2)

The plot of the novel has two strands. The author first gives portions of Corbin's diary itself, with its fresh views of colonial life. In the novel, Fernandes discovers in tracing the history of the book and lives of the book and the lives it has touched. A young Shamshi Indian Nur Mohammed Pipa and his mysterious wife are the central characters. The second part of the novel follows Mariamu's son Ali's adventures as a successful businessman. He moves to London with his young wife named Rita, who was a student of Fernandes and with whom Fernandes was in love.

The evolution of Asian African community as migrant people settled in East Africa is important theme in the novel. The story line of this novel is actually allegorical of Asian African personal and communal quests for success, stability and rootedness in the face of dramatic terrestrial machinations. Vassanji represents Nurmohammed Pipa as a true diasporic figure around the stereotype of Asian Africa Diaspora. The development

of Nurmohammed Pipa's character is analysed in the light of historical experience as a member of migrant, racially distinct Asian African community. In Nurmohammed's character Vassanji creates an Asian African character. He is a living being caught in the webs of vicissitudes of his life as a colonial subject and postcolonial citizen in East Africa. Vassanji is an authoritative symbolic vehicle that articulates the various discourses of marginality, diasporality, migrancy and dispossession.

At first the narrator introduces Nurmohammed Pipa as: Mzee Pipa, Old Barrel, was the oldest student on the corner of Kichwele and Viongozi-street. Also called Pipa corner.....The Guuny Sack . (Henceforth *The book of secrets* as *TBS*, 99)

The younger Pipa is a burly, quarrelsome youth. He is travelling from the border town Moshi in Tanzania to Kikono on the Kenyan side to attend Shamsi community celebrations in a bid to see a girl he intends to marry.

The characters like Pius Fernandes, Pipa, Mariamu, Ali and Rita – all are trying to establish their own relative identities with authenticity. The differentiation between Africans, Indians and White people projects the subtlety of the quest for identity. The identity Vassanji portrays for all his characters from the theory of discrimination is through the real feeling of the Whites for the people like Nurmohammed Pipa. “The Indians are half savages,” Mrs. Bailey observed, beginning an explanation she had obviously thought out conclusively and in detail. Pipa like his community in real life forever finds himself at the nexus between political discourse and identity formation. His estranged sense of being starts from the very early moments of his life :

His name was Nurmohamed Pipa ... Pipa was the nickname given to the family by the neighborhood, and the stuck. It made him feel a lack of respectability, of a place that was truly home. He was simply an Indian, a mhindi, from Moshi, a town in the vicinity of Kilimanjaro whose masters were Germans. (*TBS* 127) Vassanji tells referring to Pipa's parents:

He did not know where he himself had been born and when, in any calendar, German, Arabic or Indian. of his father, he remembered only a tall thin man with a scraggly beard, a kindly grin on his face as he pulled the body's cheeks saying 'Dahaboo'. His father had not died.... Nurmaohamed Pipa could not recall grief, a graveyard. His father had gone away, and the boy carried this knowledge within him like a hidden deformity. He remembered him as Dhaboo, and for many years lived in the expectation that his father would return that one day when he came home from play Dhaboo would be there waiting. Of his mother, he remembered the long rains in the wet season falling through the cracks in the thatch roof, himself standing with her, shivering in a pool of water, his sister holding his hand. Another scene: squatting in the latrine with his mother, watching a fast and furious stream hit the ground under her and joining with his own wavering spurt. He looked in vain at her darkness for a member corresponding to his own, had had his arm smacked for pointing at that mysterious shadow... The boy was big and thickest, and nicknamed Pipa, meaning, 'barrel', described him so well that it became exclusively his. Boys passed him running fast and jeering, 'Pip..Pippip..Pipal' (*TBS*, 127-28)

The central theme of the novel is the origin of Pipa. In the ordinary moment of Nurmohamed Pipa's begins the narrative of location and dislocation. He seems to emerge from a world that fantastically has already set a destiny for him. M.G.Vassanji sums up:

... a burly youth with an angry glower for a world that did not want him. (*TBS*, 128)

The plot of the novel deals with Nurmohamed Pipa's mission of quest for a kind of belonging. In search of good fortunes Nurmohamed Pipa plunges from the borderland town Moshi into the coastal towns of Tonga and Dar es Salaam. In Tonga he gets an opportunity:

He found a job as a sweeper in the big hotel called Kaiser shop on the promenade. He would clean under the tables and chairs after they had gone, sweeping away cigarettes stubs and crumbs, scraps of paper. On rare but not impossible occasions, they left something behind. Once he returned a wallet not before removing one note from it, a modest one... And was rewarded ... From this sweeper's job he moved on to pulling a rickshaw rented from an Indian. (*TBS* 130)

Pipa then moves to Dar Es Salaam and engages himself in a number of odd jobs for a few months. Vassanji observes:

Dar es Salaam was all that he had been promised it would be... Her, surely, was opportunity; yet how was to go about finding it? Who was he in this town, who knew him? As he was to find out, you had to... be somebody. Of his savings only a little remained, and certainly not enough to go back home the way he had come. (*TBS*, 131)

In this novel the diaspora finds beautiful reflection and articulation. The Shamshis are M.G. Vassanji's fictional rendering of the Ismailis, a Muslim community that migrated to East Africa from the north west of India in the 19th century. The Shamshis, as they appear in this novel, are tightly knit community with its own channels of communication. The Shamshos are closely knitted community. The Shamshis helps and assists each other with material support or with finding suitable partners just like Pipa who married Mariamu. Pipa who was born in Moshi moves between Moshi, Tangas, Dar es Salaam and Kikono. He migrates to escape insecurity, shame and poverty. He is homeless by character.

The deep sense of unhomeliness drives Pipa and many other Asians away from his borderland birthplace of Moshi in search of comfort, home and security. East Africa is a borderland, a world in-between India and the new Asian African homelands in North America and Europe. In the novel Nurmohamed Pipa feels compelled to run away from spaces that stand in the very way of his desire for homely life. That is why Pius Fernandes expresses his view:

Pipa was home now, yet lived in fear. He was a marked man, known both to the agents of Maynard and the allies of Germans; any of them could call on him as they had done in Kikono. (TBS 200)

The past, according to Pius Fernandes, should be represented because it can offer meaning:

And so I would construct a history, a living tapestry to join the past to the present, to defy the blistering shimmering dusty bustle of city life outside which makes transients of all. (*TBS* 18)

Although the narrative worlds of *The Book of Secrets* is populated with many familiar Asian African figures such as women and men, children and adults, Muslim and Hindu, rich and poor, strong and weak. Vassanji's novels are about individual characters, but in the context of their community.

The Asian Africans live in in-between places. The narrator Pius Fernandes says in this context:

I had returned to a country on the brink of independence, one that was preparing to transmute. The date had been set for December that year, six month away, and the laid-laced Dar I had known was bubbling with excitement. There was hope in the air, and a cheery confidence, symbolized in the promise of a torch of freedom to be mounted on the summit of Kilimanjaro for all to see, across the continent and beyond. If in later years, bush-shirted demagogues waylaid those dreams with arid ideologies, and torpid bureaucrat drained our energies, at least we were spared the butchers... but I am losing perspective. (*TBS*, 273)

Pipa is not born aggressive; but aggression is brought out from within him by factors that lie outside him. Vassanji describes it this way:

Like many of the boys in Moshi, he made a few hellers carrying at the railway station, and like them became more adept and aggressive as he grew older, jostling and

shouting and crowding around the two weekly trains on the Tanga- Moshi line. And like many a young man, one day he allowed a Tanga-bound train to take him in its third-class carriage to whatever it would. (*TBS*, 129)

Pipa finds in the Shamshi community at Tanga, a community that he feels he belongs to. Pipa's industry can be seen even at the start of his working life:

He found a job as sweeper in the big hotel called Kaiserhof on the promenade... He would clean under the tables and chairs after had gone, sweeping away cigarettes stubs and crumbs, scraps of paper. On rare but not impossible occasions, they left something behind. Once he returned a wallet- not before removing one note from it, a modest one- and was rewarded. (*TBS*, 130)

He feels the need to belong, the need to identify with a certain people, a certain place at Tanga. Kikono and Tanga become sites of the Asian African experience as articulated in the actual subjectification embodied by Pipa. We can get an idea of the intricate interweaving of setting, community, individual and ambition in the following excerpt:

Dar es Salaam was an important place. It was the residence of the German Governor. There were many Europeans, many officials, whom it was best to avoid. Visitors poured in from the harbor. Within minute, a street could be clear to make way for the dignitary- on horse, in a motorcar or rickshaw, or even on foot. There were people – from the interior, mostly – who would go on their knees, down on their knees in fear when a dignitary passed and humbly touch the ground with their heads lest they offend. In a place like this, there were many

rules, and regulations, and a police force to see that they were obeyed. It mattered who you were, where you belonged: you were your tribe, caste, community. There was rivalry among Indian communities, jealousy and enmity from the old country. Many a lonely young man had been compelled to change allegiance, many a willing young man duly rewarded with a bride and a business...(TBS, 133)

Whether he was Shamshi community or not, Pipa could not say with certainty. But like many others before him, he accepted the Sahmshis, and the rewards to stay; s that followed: a job and a place to stay; eminent men to vouch for him; and if he wanted a bride. So he could become the camel who at last stopped his endless journey and found a home. Pipa is a cheat and an artful dukawallah. Vassnji describes the young man's industry creatively:

Pipa Store of Kikono was a small provision store. It was here that the legend of the thrift and cunning of Nurmohamed Pipa first took hold. Sitting at his shopfront all day, patiently wrapping packets, dealing with customers, one by one, taking in just a few *heller* or *paisa* at a time. And one couldn't help noticing that the unfortunate young man seemed finally to have attracted Baraka, blessings. Business at his store was brisk. (TBS, 153)

Pipa feels compelled to run away from spaces that stand in the way of his desire for a homely life. This is why Pius Fernandes tells us "Pipa was home now, yet lived in fear. He was a marked man, known both to the agents of Maynard and the allies of

Germans; any of them could come to call on him as they had done in Kikono” (*TBS*, 200).

Pius Fernandes, the protagonist of *The book of Secrets*, is a former school teacher who has worked for several decades at a community school in the former German colony and British protectorate of Tanzania. In 1988, Pius accidentally gets hold of the diary of Alfred Corbin, a British colonial officer who has served many years in various East African colonies. Corbin’s diary interests and inspires Pius personally. He sets out to write a scholarly history of Tanzania from the end of German colonial rule to the end of the 1980s.

The diary introduces Pius and Vassanji’s readers to the local Indian, African and Arab communities. It also familiarizes us with the central characters Mariamu and Pipa. Reading the novel, it is striking that while Pipa is given abundant scope, Vassanji denies Mariamu an independent voice. At the same time, there is no denying the fact that she is at the centre of the fictional universe Vassanji creates. In fact, she becomes an obsession for Pius/Vassanji’s main character Pipa as well as for Pius himself. The secret that the title of Vassanji’s novel alludes to refers to a gap in Mariamu’s biography. Apparently, Mariamu on being married to Pius is no longer a virgin. When she conceives, the question arises as to who is the father of her child. The text, however, resists a definitive answer to that question, just as it refuses to shed light on the circumstances of Mariamu’s death. In the course of the novel, Pius becomes involved in the history he is about to write. We learn that he has fallen in love with Rita who at that time is married to Mariamu’s son Ali. Moreover Pius finds out that he is linked to his historiographical

project through an English friend and fellow teacher, Robert Gregory, who is friendly with Corbin and his wife.

Mariamou inhabits various socio-cultural borders by separating herself from Corbin and the town's people. She wants to move away from the community. Her family wants to constrain her behavior and see her brought back in to the fold. Jamali, the founder and Mukhi of Kikono, exercises social control through the institution of marriage and acts as the agent of the community's control. The Mukhi betroths Mariamou to Pipa. The marriage between Mariamou and Pipa would normalize them. Marriage would control Mariamou's wilderness and make Pipa less an outsider. Mariamou behaves in a manner that not only differentiates her from Alfred Corbin but also reinforces socio-cultural borders that separate the Shamshis from others. She marks the socio-cultural boundaries because she not only exists on the periphery of the community but also appears to be remarkably unlike other Shamshi women: "[h]er features were markedly distinct from other women's, so that she seemed an outsider of some sort: tall and thin, fair, with long face, pronounced nose, full lips" (*TBS*, 43). Mariamou moves from the margins to the centre of the community at dance during a festival where the women "enacted the first conversions of the community from Hinduism, several centuries ago in Gujarat" (*Vikram Lall*, 42). The origins of the Shamshis survive through ritual, and Corbin watches Mariamou perform it:

The circle of women had broken, a few of the younger ones were dancing solo, and in between them danced this siren. The tabalchi-drummer beat faster and the agile dancers kept time, feet thumping, hips gyrating without inhibition, breath drawn sharply, faces glistening with sweat. (*TBS*,43)

Mariamamu inhabits a vacillating contact zone. And through her the novel depicts the socio-cultural borders of the Shamshi community. The settings in the novel also introduce and play with the concept of borders: “[we] were at boundary of sorts. The growth became dense ahead of us, and small trees littered the area” (*TBS*’ 58). The geo-political borders change and cross over the town and Kikono ends up in no man’s land. Vassanji shows that even the geo-political borders move. The Kikono residents feel the effects of the movements of the Arimes, battle lines:

A German troop could come to your door in the middle of the night demanding shelter and information. And the next day soldiers from the King’s African Rifles would come and beat you up for assisting the enemy. And so it was, right in the middle, between warring sides, the Shamshis of Kikono sat trapped and waiting with prayers in their mouths. (*TBS*, 151)

Mariamamu was murdered. The war ends, and the Kikono dissolves and the members of its Shamshi community disperse and move to other towns and centres in East Africa.

The Book of Secrets is a novel of the in-between. It explores the border between the self and the Other, between giving and remaining silent, between the centre and the periphery as well as between the pure and the hybrid. Vassanji’s text is located at the intersection between story and history, between the fictional and the factual as well as between realism and the representation of all art.

The novel is a fine piece of work that deals with the Asians in East Africa. The novel delineates displacement, physical and emotional, and one’s search for identity and a promised land. The novel delves deep into personal lives, loves and cast system

surrounding African Indian society. It investigates notions of history and memory; ideas of home and community as they extend across time and space; and the insidious legacies of colonialism, war, race, prejudice and religious tolerance in East Africa. The world of the novel is part fiction- part memory, a history of the people who left Indian shores in search of dream for Eastern Africa. The novel explores his own past and the past of Indian community in East Africa. He has brilliantly and skillfully woven the past with the present.

South Asians came to Canada from the countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and also from East and South Africa, the Caribbean countries, Fiji, and elsewhere, mostly from a former British colony. The communities live in Toronto as South Asian Canadians. Vassanji.” alls this “meeting of streams” and it “began with the presence of the British in our countries.’(Vassanji, “Is There?” 1). In this context we note an important diasporic meditation in his novel *The Book of Secrets*:

We are intensely aware of our essential homelessness. Our world was diminishing with the Empire. We were all travelers who had on impulse taken off, for all kinds of personal reasons...We were now aware that we would have to choose; to return home... but what was home now? To take up a new nationality ... but what did that mean? To move on to the vestiges of the empire, to the last colonies and do dominations, or perhaps to retreat to where it all began, London. I of course had chosen to throw in my lot with the new nation; being a solitary man without close attachments has been a help in living up to this resolve. But for the others, even after they had opted to stay, the question always remained to plague them – to stay or to go, and where to go? (*TBS*, 274)

In this chapter the two novels *The In-between World of Vikram Lall* and *The Books of Secrets* are analyzed to have a glimpse of the all the subject- positions or images of the Asian Africans in East Africa through the characters of Vikram Lall and Nurmohamed Pipa. Vassanji as a writer in-between the worlds writes of the positions of the Asian Africans in East Africa and Toronto. The Dutch scholar of Ethiopian letters, Reidulf K. Molvaer in his memorable book *Black Lions: The Creative Lives of Modern Ethiopia's Literary Giants and Pioneers* in 1997, writes the truth about literature in general and literature produced in the Eastern part of the continent in particular that: Good literature reflects the life and spirit of people. Writers hold a mirror up to their society. A society finds expression through its authors, and in this way it is the co-author of literary works...In its literature and art a society reveals its "soul". Molvaer (1997, p. ix) Vassanji's novels reflects and mirrors up to the society. His writings reveal the soul of the society, the society of the Shamshi community, living in East Africa and North America.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

M.G.Vassanji as a postcolonial writer is a preserver of the collective tradition, a folk historian and myth maker. He is a transmitter of his people's history. He gives himself a history and recreates the past, which exists only in memory and is otherwise obliterated, so fast has his world transformed as is evident in all his selected novels analyzed and discussed. His history emerges from the oral, preliterate, and unrecorded to the literate. His is a prolific writing with a strong social commitment, and as such he has written to bring his community, Shamshi, to existence and through it, the larger history of East Africa and thereby fulfils the mission of a diasporic writer. South Asian writers as a whole and Vassanji in particular seem to have carved out literary spaces of their own in the colourful Canadian mosaic, a land that he thinks no new land. Through the characters of Nurdin Lalani of *No New Land*, Vikram Lall of *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, Nurmohamed Pipa of *The Book of Secrets* and Salim Juma of *The Gunny Sack*, Vassanji highlights the position of the Shamshi community in East Africa and abroad. Vassanji's desire to understand and preserve the past comes through in all his works. It seems that his novels confront the ghost of the past. The Shamshis as a community East Africa are very well knit through ties of kinship and religion and have own traditions, folk lores, convictions, history and language as represented in his novels. His novels portray the shamshis a community, with a history, language, identity.

M.G. Vassanji as a diasporic writer keeps centrifugal relationship with his homeland wherever he may be. He inhabits in an ambivalent location when he is viewed collectively with other East African novelists such as Elspeth Huxley and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. His novels are analyzed from the nuances of the colonial or postcolonial and situated in colonial, ex-colonial and diasporic settings. This provides a perceptive account of the complexities and intricacies inherent to such societies. The sense of alienation, identity crisis, paradox of freedom and the problem of neocolonialism in the ex-colonies are the major themes that emerge from a reading of his novels. The novels of Vassanji deal with the colonial society, the society of the Shamshi community, the East Asian Africans, of East Africa and are preoccupied with the themes of dispossession, homelessness, alienation, mimicry and the search for an authentic selfhood of his community. His personal experience of being a displaced member of a marginalized Shamshi community in Zanzibar or Dar es Salaam or Toronto provides him issues and essences for his writing and the characters in his novels are continually in search of an identity and home representing Vassanji's as well as the Indian diaspora's search for selfhood. Being an Indian by ancestry, Kenyan by birth and English by intellectual training and residence, Vassanji is indeed a man with a broader perspective and this multiple heritage places him in a position that makes it possible for him to render a detached account of his subjective experiences. Despite the physical isolation and colonization, de-clonization, displacement, slavery and emancipation, importers of railway, the Asian African, an in-between community between the White and the Black, leads to the emergence of 'new world', 'new ethnicity' (Stuart hall), national culture and literary identity in their host country. Most of the postcolonial writers like V.S. Naipaul,

Rohinto Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, Sujata Bhatt, M.G. Vassanji and many others underwent a kind of cultural and linguistic translation. The ‘translation’ and ‘transnational’ characteristic features and identity have placed M.G.Vassanji in the position of ‘not quite’ or ‘in-between’ as Bhabha writes of the migrant writings. His works have contributed enormously to the visibility of the Asian Africans community in East Africa and to the world.

Vassanji subverts and deconstructs the stereotypical image of the Indian settlers in East Africa by revealing a whole complexity of characters, situations, political positioning and motivations pre-colonial and postcolonial. His characters range from the ubiquitous shopkeeper (for example, Pipa in *The Book of Secrets*) to high ranking political advisers (Vikram Lall), from the owner of the gunny sack (Ji Bai) of the title to a pharmacist (Deepa, Vikram Lall’s sister) and the protagonist (Nurdin Lalani). His novels focus on the Shamshi community modeled on the Ismaili Muslims, but his novels also feature Goans as well as Gujarati and Punjabi Hindus.

Vassanji’s literary practice as an archival venture aims to tell and store (hi) stories of the Asian African peoples of East Africa. In his various interviews, like the one with Ray Deonandan, Vassanji tells stories about marginalized people. The Asians in East Africa are not really a “community” as they are fragmented into a multiplicity of religious, linguistic and caste groups. The Asian communities came to realize that the only means of survival in post-colonial East Africa was to unite despite their internal fissures.

Literature tells us not only about others; it tells us about ourselves. The creative writer such as Vassanji brings awareness, creates knowledge; subverts and challenges existing knowledge and established conventions; extends the boundaries of the hitherto unknown world. History untold, when told for the first time can be fascinating. This becomes then the stuff of fiction. It can be magical. A novelist writes and brings his or her place into the world- the larger worlds of readers. Vassanji assimilates both the cultures of his native land and the land of his present living and makes a multilingual commitment to transcend the individual consciousness and thereby aims to achieve universality.

Vassanji in all his novels reflects the life and spirit of his people, the Shamshi community not spoken of, and mirrors their society. The Asian Africans, a community living in in-between the black and the whites, in fear of being persecution and financial insecurity in East Africa, moved away for financial security and intellectual advancement to the West and North America. Writers like M.G.Vassanji, V.S. Naipaul were concerned about his community and their social condition, the culturally fragmented society, the question of literacy, the writer's role and, of course, the question of cultural identity. Vassanji's diasporic discourse needs to be understood in many complex perspectives: the initial East Asian African society with multiple socio-cultural variants, then the evolution of the society to plurality, then Vassanji's colonials self residing in the metropolis colony, Toronto, his perception of East Africa, India and his exilic sensibility. Vassanji not only inquires and examines the involuntary forces of history that shaped him and his ancestry, but also traces phenomenon of a whole gamut of nationalities, cultures, races and people. A writer after a time carries his world with him, his own burden of experience, human

experience and literary experiences as in the case of Vassanji. He finds his equivalent connections with his past wherever he went. Vassanji's diasporic self passes through complicated stages of skepticism, recollection and courage which accompany his idea of not having a literary model, a tradition or a viable subject matter for his subject.

Vassanji records his experiences of adoption and adaptation in the new environment, Toronto and the issues of loss, nostalgia, selfhood and identification provide them their diasporic canvass in which they paint the variant pictures of his new and old homelands. Culture, religion, ancestry, literature and history provide a strong sense of bonding in diapsoric condition, but where this bonding moves or strives for new patterns of ethnic identity, it brings sometimes itself in a conflicting situation or even exclusion in the metropolitan zones of the west.

M.G.Vassanji's stance as Asian African by birth with Indian ancestry, having training in English craftsmanship with English attitudes, experience of meeting the globe with his travelling, exilic contemplation and diasporic self, makes him stand in an extremely superb position to analyse various dynamics of and vitalities of the Asian African communities. Vassanji has introduced us to a cast of vividly drawn characters like Nurmohamed Pipa, Nurdin Lalani, Salim Juma, Vikram Lall, Amina, Mariamu and others within the Shamshi immigrant community. He is keen observer of lives caught between one world and another. The protagonists and themes mirror familiar challenges from the societies we come from and live in. A better understanding of both further validates the mandates of literature as a discipline and a field of humanistic knowledge to the researchers. There have been many imaginary lands, terrains and communities created by writers in order to render the touch of real experience and self-awareness. The

ultimate object of a writer has been to visualize the imperceptible visions, ideas and awareness. Vassanji is one such writer conveying social consciousness stimulating ideas although his fictional Shamshi community projected against colonial history. He has been very successful in juxtaposing the historical realities with imaginary intricacies. Vassanji rummages through the social, political and economic contours of the Asians settled in East Africa as well as in Canada supplying a descriptive invoice of events influencing the affairs of nonages. Accommodating fictional characters in historical premises and recreating history has been forte. Germination of new ideas through the process of dismantling and reconstructing history is an excellent approach of literary ambience. History is not all academic; it is also memory; it is myth, it creative. History is a human product to which literature and myths bear legible witness. They create lasting impressions; they create empathy as is evident in the novels of M.G. Vassanji. His fictional terrains can roughly be located on world map in East Africa, Northwest India and North America. Kikono, Rosecliffe Park and Pir Bag are some of the imaginary lands accommodating the fictional individuals and their community. The present study explores the concept of diasporic identity/sensibility that the authors of post-colonial literature like M.G. Vassanji are constantly preoccupied with the past. This study also makes an attempt to study Vassanji's belongingness to the diapsora of exclusivism and his treatment of the questions of belonging, home and career as symbol of both heritage and values. Vassanji expresses his life of exile through his characters, and this study has identified the problems of existence faced by these characters who struggle for self-assertion. To present an authentic picture of social divisions, economic conditions and cultural

expectations of the people, the study adopts the notion of diaspora as social practice on the basis of an analysis of Vassanji's selected novels.

In order to achieve the evaluation of literary genius of Vassanji and to trace his diasporic sensibility, the study has explored the literary works of Vassanji through critical analysis and interpretations, and by analyzing various critical sources and the texts of M.G. Vassanji; it has also highlighted the issues relating to postcolonial identities and diasporic consciousness. His works are elaborately discussed to perceive his diasporic sensibility which is constantly evolving. The novels are studied carefully with its setting involving postcolonial social and political background. The present research would inspire scholars to explore the exciting field of diaspora.

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