



Historical Perspectives and Problems of Indo Fijian Diaspora - A Thematic Study of Indian Writings

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ABSTRACT

Diaspora is a minority community living in exile. The emerging nature of Indian diaspora in Fiji is a unique case in point. It is unique because, in Fiji, though, they are the majority community; they have been effectively deprived of not only the political power and human rights but also the imagination of nation. The consciousness has paralysed the creative universe of the writers of Indian indenture diaspora in a big way. The Fiji-Indian writers like Nandan, Subramani and Sudesh Mishra, possessing indenture consciousness have experienced how they are intertwined with the fate of the dispossessed people. Based on the poetical and prose writings of Satendra P Nandan, an attempt has been made in this paper to map the problems of Indo Fijian writers that are related to the nature of their migration, their socio-cultural condition and the majority-minority syndrome in the countries in which they live.

Keywords : indo Fijian literature, indenture Diaspora, socio cultural conditions

I. Introduction

The wider definition of diaspora by William Safran, as cited by Emmanuel Nelson (1992), is used to provide context to the development of ideas on the diaspora and to cite it as evidence of it being problematic. In this paper an attempt has been made to identify the problems in the construction of national identity by focusing on the poetical and prose writings of Satendra P Nandan, a twice-banished Indian diasporic writer of girmitya origin. It is a well-documented fact that Indian diaspora is widely scattered across the globe. Significantly enough, they exhibit all the cultural linguistic and religious diversities that India has. But more significantly, the formation and consolidation of their national and cultural identities in diaspora are grounded deeply in the world of uncertainties.

II. Review of Literature

Etymologically, 'Diaspora' with its connotative political weight is drawn from Greek meaning to disperse and signifies a voluntary or forcible movement of the people from the homeland into new regions." (Pp.68-69) Under Colonialism, 'Diaspora' is a multifarious movement which involves- The temporary or permanent movement of Europeans all over the world, leading to Colonial settlement, consequently the ensuing economic exploitation of the settled areas necessitated large amount of labor that could not be fulfilled by local populace. This led to the Diaspora resulting from the enslavement of Africans and their relocation to places like the British colonies. After slavery was out lawed the continued demand for workers created indenturement labor. This produces: Large bodies of the people from poor areas of India, China and others to the West Indies, Malaya Fiji. Eastern and Southern Africa, etc.

Types of Diaspora:

There are conceptual categories to display the variety of meanings the word Diaspora invokes. According to Robin Cohen diaspora can be classified into six categories namely

- Victim Diasporas
- Labour Diasporas
- Imperial Diasporas
- Trade Diasporas

- Homeland Diasporas
- Cultural Diasporas

The author finds a common element in all forms of Diaspora; these are people who live outside their 'natal (or imagined natal) territories' (ix) and recognize that their traditional homelands are reflected deeply in the languages they speak, religion they adopt, and cultures they produce. Each of the categories of Diasporas underline a particular cause of migration usually associated with particular groups of people. So for example, the Africans through their experience of slavery have been noted to be victims of extremely aggressive transmigration policies. (Cohen).

Though in the age of technological advancement which has made the traveling easier and the distance shorter so the term Diaspora has lost its original connotation, yet simultaneously it has also emerged in another form healthier than the former. At first, it is concerned with human beings attached to the homelands. Their sense of yearning for the homeland, a curious attachment to its traditions, religions and languages give birth to diaspora literature which is primarily concerned with the individual's or community's attachment to the homeland. The migrant arrives 'unstuck from more than land' (Rushdie). he runs from pillar to post crossing the boundaries of time, memory and History carrying 'bundles and boxes' always with them with the vision and dreams of returning homeland as and when likes and finds fit to return. Although, it is an axiomatic truth that his dreams are futile and it wouldn't be possible to return to the homeland is 'metaphorical' (Hall). the longing for the homeland is countered by the desire to belong to the new home, so the migrant remains a creature of the edge, 'the peripheral man' (Rushdie). According to Naipaul the Indians are well aware that their journey to Trinidad 'had been final' (Andse Dentseh), but these tensions and throes remain a recurring theme in the Diasporic Literature.

III. Indian Diaspora

Indian Diaspora can be classified into two kinds:

1). Forced and 2.Voluntary

Forced Diaspora: Migration to Africa, Fiji or the Caribbean

on account of slavery or indentured labour during the 18th or 19th century.

Voluntary Migration: Voluntary Migration to U.S.A., U.K., Germany, France or other European countries for the sake of professional or academic purposes.

According to Amitava Ghose - 'the Indian Diaspora is one of the most important demographic dislocation of Modern Times' (Ghosh,) and each day is growing and assuming the form of representative of a significant force in global culture. If we take Markand Paranjpe's perceptions we find two distinct phases of Diaspora, these are called the 'Visitor Diaspora' and 'Settler Diaspora' much similar to Maxwell's 'Invader' and 'Settler' Colonialist.

The first Diaspora consisted of dispriveledged and subaltern classes forced alienation was a one way ticket to a distant diasporic settlement. As, in the days of yore, the return to Homeland was next to impossible due to lack of proper means of transportation, economic deficiency, and vast distances so the physical distance became a psychological alienation, and the homeland became the sacred icon in the diasporic imagination of the authors also.

But the second Diaspora was the result of man's choice and inclination towards the material gains, professional and business interests. It is particularly the representation of privilege and access to contemporary advanced technology and communication. Here, no dearth of money or means is visible rather economic and life style advantages are facilitated by the multiple visas and frequent flyer utilities. Therefore, Vijay Mishra is correct when he finds V S Naipaul as the founding father of old diaspora but it is also not wrong to see Salman Rushdie as the representative of Modern (second) Diaspora V S Naipaul remarkably portrays the search for the roots in his 'A House for Mr. Biswas' to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one has been born, unnecessary and accommodated. (Naipaul, 14) similarly Mohan Biswas's peregrination over the next 35 years, he was to be a wanderer with no place to call his own' (ibid. 40)

In the same manner, Rushdie's *Midnight Children* and *Shame* are the novels of leave taking... from the country of his birth (India) and from that second country (Pakistan) where he tried, half-heartedly to settle and couldn't." (Aizaz Ahmad, 135)

Nandan's book of poems entitled *Lines across Black Waters* characteristically charts out the diaspora history of the girmityas, the tragic consequences of 1987 coup and post-coup events, and the postcolonial politics of exile. Determined to express the truth of his experience, the poet expresses the intensity of pain and anger of the ancestors. The Girmitya poetic discourses of leaving home cast out their shadows throughout this poetic collection, and the exile into indenture experience configures very prominently in them. His diasporic experiences as an Indo-Fijian exiled writer in Australia textures both his works and his constructs of national consciousness. After the two Fijian coups, thousands of Fijian-Indians left the country for other lands with the feeling of betrayal and the hurt of history. And this banishment became the defining moment for a writer like Nandan. In his book of essays entitled *Fiji: Paradise in Pieces*, he writes that the exiled writers' fate is very painful because he has to create a country of his own.

The long titled poem is based on a narrative entitled "The story of the Haunted Line" by a girmit man named Totaram Sandhya who was taken to Fiji in the early 1890s. He was the only girmitya who wrote about his experiences in Fiji assisted by an Indian journalist named Benarsidas Chaturvedi. The accounts of Totaram are a rare and moving narrative of suicide, atrocities and survival and diaspora, and Nandan has attempted to give it a new rendition in this long title poem.

The coolie background life of Nandan is no doubt, a major text. And it takes on more meanings when Nandan says in his autobiographical writing *Requiem for a Rainbow*: "One's life is, in the final analysis, the ultimate text". It is not out of place to mention that Nandan's grandparents had indentured themselves from India and had come to Fiji in the 1890s. His parents and all his seven brothers and sisters were born in Fiji and knew no other country until Nandan left for Delhi in 1958 for study. Then comes the fatal Fijian Rabuka's coup of 1987, which evoke the tragedy of Nandan's birthplace.

"Lines across Black Waters" is caught in the hinges of indenture history and powerfully evokes its nightmare journey across the black waters. Nandan is conscious of the ironic stroke with which the approval of the paradisiacal dreams of the coolies was falsified on the sugar plantations of the island. Sugar and slavery go together. Nandan ironically comments: 'Sugar and slavery are the Siamese twins of many colonized islands'. The coolies who were brought from the Indian sub-continent to work on the plantations appear in a variety of poetic tropes as ancestral memories of colonial brutality. Such tropes of the coolie experiences are readily grafted on to the girmit consciousness and its psychology.

Nandan's exposition "Truth is what you know and do not know" evokes the voices and the concerns that specify the body of his work. In his poetical and fictional writings he has looked into the intricate connections between indenture history and the forces that determine its direction. When Nandan speaks of the truth of his exile he refers to the recollection of his homeland as part of his personal history. It can be pointed out here that Nandan's pursuit of exile, in a sense, goes in line with that of Edward Said. As a critic, Edward Said has theorized much of the phenomenon of exile and its configurations.

Throughout Nandan's poems and prose work are his homeland's heard and unheard accounts of voices that recall and confront his childhood, family, nation, coups and exile. Nandan's *Requiem for a Rainbow* suggests a basic motif of Nandan's life and work in which the truth of girmit and the socio-political history are linked. Nandan writes: 'politics and personal lives are as intertwined in the immigrant and the indigenous as history in destiny'.

Conclusion:

The problem of national representation in diaspora has long preoccupied Nandan. The steady deterioration of the socio-political scenario in Fiji-the coups and violence-have exerted tremendous impact on him and it is one of the central subjects of his work. Integral to this concern is the diasporic consciousness through which Nandan attempts to possess the stolen nation of the twice-banished people. Diasporic consciousness, for Nandan, is an ancient odyssey in modern history and its cultural and psychological constructs have gained in the diaspora context a significant immediacy in the writer's own experience.

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