

Chapter I

Introduction

The term, 'globalisation' is more or less, an open sesame calling forth go-ahead shifts in various sectors. In fact, the term, no longer describes international cash flows. The semantics of the expression has branched out to incorporate other dimensions as well: like employment, trade, education, culture and every orbit of human life. It has become an omnipresent phenomenon, ranging from the McDonaldisation of the world, ubiquitousness of CNN, and penetrates all that is suisable. Nonetheless, it is a style mark of a revolutionised present and a more lustrous prospect.

In the wake of hi-tech encroachment and supercharging world, globalisation has been acting as an erasure effacing the dividing lines and precincts. This erasure has not only bridged the oceans and mountains, but also the gulf between the marginal minorities and the mainstream majority. The communities, cultures, and nations which have been under marginalised inertia, remote from the centre, appear to be moving nearer towards it. Migration along with multiculturalism has been acting as a pulley, bridging gulfs and drawing decentralised communities into the centre. This centripetal movement from the margins towards the centre evokes inquiries into numerous facets.

The literary domain, undeniably is capable of dissolving such inquiries by means of critical approach and theoretical framework. Literature has been a memoir of human existence encapsulating various transitional phases from time immemorial. As the globe is a cauldron of various ethnic groups, cultures, races, nationalities, languages, so is literature varied with many compartmentalisation according to the place and time of origin. Uma Parameswaran in *South Asian Canadiana* articulates:

Art and literature do not rise fullblown like Venus from the sea. Their creation is a slow and cumulative process. This is especially true of immigrant literature; it starts off as a transplant, with its major referential points centred in the original homeland, and whatever it says is implicitly or explicitly comparative at this stage. (15)

Literature is a gateway leading to several trails, converging on to a panoptic point. David Damrosch in *How to Read World Literature* states, "Reading world literature gives us the opportunity to expand our literary and cultural horizons far beyond the boundaries of our own culture" (46). Minority culture and decentralised communities, though overlooked, comprise an integral part of the global cultural system. An analytical study of such culture or community is essential to comprehend various consequential phenomena, viz, colonialism, immigration, multiculturalism, acculturation, communal living, and so on. In addition, this yields functional ideas, propositions and premises for all-inclusive fortification. This calls forth minority writing, immigrant writing, multicultural literature and other such literatures which are in a straight line and related to the relevant trends.

The last few decades have been a time of rapid social and cultural changes for the western world in general, America and Canada in particular. The waves of immigration, encouraged at first, viewed with diffidence later, soon turned into open hostility altering dramatically the ethnic and social composition of cities and whole countries. Diversity has become a dominating feature of modern life, whether it is valued for its contribution to a truly supranational society, or opposed for its undermining effects on national identity. Toronto shares an affinity with other cities in the world that have large immigrant populations, each of them a microcosm of the world at large.

Diversity of cultures, ethnic groups and trends has given rise to the emergence of varied literatures, the most vibrant and noteworthy being South Asian Canadian literature. It constitutes the works of writers which illustrate South Asian sensibility or their writers maintaining a distinct South Asian identity. New immigration legislation in the 1970s opened Canada's borders to a larger number of Asian immigrants, whose impact on Canadian writing started surfacing in the mid-eighties, in the journals such as *The Toronto South Asian Review* and in the works of individual writers.

The people referred to as South Asians trace their origin to South Asia, which encompasses India (from where 44% of immigrants have come), Pakistan (8%), Bangladesh (1%) and Sri Lanka (9%). The first South Asian migrants to Canada arrived in Vancouver in 1903 and the majority of them were Sikhs who had heard of Canada through British-Indian troops in Hong Kong. Many Asians were attracted by the prospects of high wages, luxurious living, and a chic prospect. It is a well-established supposition that all South Asians now living in Canada did not come directly from India, Pakistan or Sri Lanka; many came from India, via Africa or the Caribbean, where their ancestors had settled in British colonies either in the nineteenth century or the early twentieth.

There are approximately more than 3, 00,000 Canadians of Asian origin, including those who have settled there from Europe, Africa and South America. Emigrants from South Asia usually speak English in addition to the South Asian language of their origin. They have their own distinct values and a heritage which has been enriching the mosaic of tapestry of the Canadian culture. Hence, immigration experience finds expression in the works of the writers. Whilst these are the voices of change, they also speak of their love for Canada, and issues like racial discrimination and the process of acculturation. Their literature seeks to serve as a bridge

between the white Canadians and their own selves as also among ethnic groups themselves, to help develop understanding and multiculturalism.

There emerged many South Asian writers in Canada like, Bharati Mukherjee, Saros Cowasjee, Rohinton Mistry, Harold Sonny Ladoo, Michael Ondaatje, Iqbal Ahmad, Reshard Gul, Yasmin Ladha, Hiro Boga, Cyril Dabydeen, Neil Bissoondath, Surjeet Kalsey, Lakshmi Gill, Uma Parameswaran and a few others. Among these writers, there are some who directly migrated from Asia and there are the others who by lineage are Asians but transnationalised and immigrated to Canada for the second time from Africa and Caribbean Island. Harish Narang in the book, *Multiculturalism: Canada and India* elucidates:

The Indian identity question of Canadian writers is not so simple. There are identities within identities. While it is simple with writers like Rohinton Mistry and Hiro Boga who fulfil the conditions of a 'continuous passage' —as was once demanded of the very first immigrants—there are others like Moyez Vassanji, Yasmin Ladha, and Ian Iqbal Rashid who acquired another identity en route—African. Similarly, Cyril Dabydeen, Neil Bissoondath and Ramabai Espinet had a Caribbean cruise before ending up in Canada. Lakshmi Gill is perhaps one of a class having come via the Philippines. Then there is Reshard Gul whose Indian origins were mediated twice—his people went to South Africa from India but he was born and brought up in England. Then there are those who came to Canada, saw and left—Bharati Mukherjee and Suniti Namjoshi, for instance. (72-73)

Evidently the racial, religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity of these people, accented by immigration patterns and the various waves of the diaspora, make for a heady mix. Culturally, religiously, educationally, and experimentally, South Asian Canadian writers are a remarkably

varied assembly. Regarding their potentiality, Diane McGifford, in the introduction of *The Geography of Voice: Canadian Literature of the South Asian Diaspora* observes "They do not come tabula rasa nor with begging bowls in hand, ready to be re-fashioned as Anglo- or Franco-Canadians, but as vibrant, talented people, schooled in the literary forms of their indigenous and adopted languages, in the vernacular forms of English, and in the traditional forms of English literature" (IX). South Asian Canadians with their culturally affluent heritage, ancient civilizations and long-lived traditions, endeavour to make their inheritance part of their Canadian writing.

The Asians immigrated for a variety of reasons—economic deprivation, ethnic rivalry, political victimisation or sheer physical insecurity. Many of the Asians were compelled to relocate themselves from Africa due to many of the trade policies of independent states, whereas, some of the second generation Asians were expelled from some East African nations. As Frank Birbalsingh says, "Whatever their reasons, since many of these Indo-Caribbean or Indo-African immigrants were the children or great-grandchildren of Indians who had migrated from India, they could be regarded as migrating for a second time, becoming thereby doubly displaced from India" (154). In this regard, it is worthwhile to make a note of Harish Narang's observation from his article entitled "Wayfarer Look Back: Problems of Multiculturalism in Vassanji's *Amriika*":

If one were to look for a single epithet to describe the last century, it could be described as the century of mass migrations, what with the unprecedented upheavals caused by the two world wars and related consequences of displacements caused by the 'development' of the first world through cheap human resource - both skilled and non-skilled - provided by the underdeveloped third world. Thus Africans - Algerians, Ethiopians, Ugandans, Kenyans,

Somalians, Nigerians and Senegales -joined their Asian brothers -Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Malaysians and Indonesians - to populate most West European nations, the United States of America and Canada. Added to these are multimillions from Central and South America, the Caribbeans and the Middle East. (42)

Rohinton Mistry and Anita Rau Badami are two of the few writers who represent the first category of Indo-Canadian writers, who have directly arrived from India. Rohinton Mistry, a Parsi South Asian Canadian writer is internationally renowned for his extraordinary fictional narratives. His reputation as a writer has been established with the interlinked short-stories of *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, a collection of eleven tales, which deals with the lives of tenants of an apartment building in Bombay. It appears to be a work sharing empathies with the writer himself, dealing with the most sensitive and intensely personal themes. Taking its title from the apartment building in which most of the principal characters live, this short story collection scrutinises the nature of communal and personal identity. Moreover, some of the characters appear more or less, in all the tales rendering an interpersonal tone and familiarity to the overall narration.

The stories' thematic concern with personal and communal identity is extended in the treatment of the Parsi community in his first novel *Such a Long Journey*. The novel effectuates a compelling interplay between the kismet of its miserable protagonist and the history of Indian subcontinent. Analogous themes are explored in his second novel, *A Fine Balance* as well where Mistry concentrates on the implausible friendships of four dissimilar individuals who are brought together to live silhouetted against the turbulent times of Indira Gandhi's Emergency sway. The personal struggle to earn sustenance commingled with the urgency of survival underscores the

thematic framework. The political backdrop sets an appalling tone in the novel encapsulating gory activities like, amputation, castration, murder and so on.

Family Matters is Rohinton's Mistry's third novel excogitating on old age maladies flanked between communal and political turmoil. The novel focuses on a Parsi family accommodating an aged man who is at the mercy of his children. However, similar to his three preceding works, this novel delves into the visitations of an Indian family coping with events that swirl around them.

Mistry's works penetrating the political, communal and personal tension leave an ineffaceable impression on the readers. His imaginary characters live in realms of Mumbai; nonetheless, their charm is wide-reaching. Peter Morey appreciates Mistry, "For Rohinton Mistry, writing forty years later and interested in the vast pattern of interconnections between individuals and communities and between times, in the form of memory, and spatial location the image of a quilt, representing the inter-linked stories of his central characters, acquires almost talismanic significance" (167).

Although, Mistry lives in Toronto, his fictional works are principally established in his native Mumbai. It is palpable that his backdrop is always integral with the plot rendering an efficiently furnished tenor. He juxtaposes his direct natural style with simple descriptions articulating poignant tales of human tragedies. His focus is somehow on the quotidian lives of his characters against the transforming political and social scenario. The feeling of being alienated from the cultural mainstream is inimitably reflected in the way Mistry's characters are displaced consistently probing for a new identity.

Anita Rau Badami is another writer representing the first category of Indo-Canadian writers. *Tamarind Mem* is Anita Rau Badami's debut novel, unfolding personal reminiscences

which are all interrelated. The two protagonists, Kamini and Saroja embody two polar ideas and compartments. Kamini standing for modernity and younger generation is a sharp contrast to her mother Saroja who represents tradition and the older generation. It invites a critical inquiry into relationships, especially, mother and daughter. One of the underlying themes of *Tamarind Mem* is the responsibility of culture and tradition in shaping an individual's identity.

Badami's second novel *The Hero's Walk* has been an enormous triumph and one of the most bestselling novels. The narration surcharged with poignancy and pragmatic contexts leaves an indelible mark on the readers. Fairly, similar to the prior work, this novel explores the entangled network of human relations contained by the perimeter of domesticity. These relationships are defined in terms of love, resentment, anger, betrayal, and disappointment. An individual's ceaseless exertion to cope with one's familial remits is foregrounded in the novel alongside the theme of women repression.

Badami's third novel, *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* encapsulating the period between 1926 to 1985, girdles around the geographically remote India and Canada. Yet again, it is modelled on the burgeoning genre of intermingling political history with personal lives. Badami relates some ordinary lives enduring the extraordinary tragedy of political affairs. Pursuing the same vein, Badami's attempt to capture the invisible forces which engender apprehension in human relationships is exceptionally achieved in her most recent novel *Tell it to the Trees*. Undoubtedly, the immigrant stereotypes constitute the cast of the narration; nonetheless, the immigrant experience is juxtaposed with psychological insight. All Badami's works have been extensively read and turn out to be an imposing fraction of the Canadian writing. Predominantly, her novels delve into the maladies which are innate in human lives as a result of archetypal gender chauvinism and emotional perversion. In addition, the East / West

confrontation or the difference between tradition and modernity defines the impulse steering of Anita Rau Badami's fiction.

Cyril Dabydeen and Neil Bissoondath represent the second grouping of the Indo-Canadian writers who have arrived in Canada circuitously passing through Caribbean Islands and Guyana unlike the former category. They are the doubly migrated immigrants carrying along dualism in culture, heritage and ethnic group. His creative literary accomplishment consists of eight books of poetry, five books of stories and four novels. His novels include, *Drums of My Flesh*, *Dark Swirl*, *The Wizard Swami* and *Sometimes Hard*. Dabydeen's chief short story collections are: *Play a Song Somebody: New and Selected Stories*; *Black Jesus and Other Stories*; *Berbice Crossing*; *My Brahmin Days*; *North of the Equator*, and *Jogging in Havana*.

Dabydeen's works principally contemplate on the truth of the many interwoven cultural processes that exist within Canada as well as on his Asian and Caribbean-South American identity. As Stringer observes, "His poetry and fiction display a recurrent concern with the tensions of displacement and adjustment in relation to the experience of immigration" (153). Having worked in race relations for a few years, Dabydeen's writing illustrates his profound dedication to Canada's ideals of tolerance and cultural plurality as expressed in his most often anthologised poem "Multiculturalism."

Neil Divendra Bissoondath, nephew of V. S. Naipaul represents the second consortium of Indo-Canadian immigrant writers. Similar to V. S. Naipaul, he is remotely connected with India; nonetheless, his inheritance of Indian descent is to be considered. His literary eminence illuminates him as a renowned fiction writer and a forthright critic of Canadian multicultural policies. He is an expert in carving personal strife inside a framework of political violence. He is the author of two short story collections, *Digging Up the Mountains* and *On the Eve of Uncertain*

Tomorrows, and six novels, *A Casual Brutality*, *The Innocence of Age*, *Doing the Heart Good*, *The Unyielding Clamour of Night*, *The Soul of All Great Designs* and *The Worlds Within Her*.

Bissoondath's opening book has been the short story collection *Digging Up the Mountains*. The title story is set on a Caribbean island which has lately gained its independence. His first novel, *A Casual Brutality* is again established in an agitated Caribbean nation. It is conspicuous that the cultural conflict of the immigrant is one of the subjects of Bissoondath's novels. It is adequately established in his second novel, *The Innocence of Age*. His other novels put forth the predicament of alienated individuals in antagonistic social and domestic construction. In his non-fiction work, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, Bissoondath criticises the 1971 Multiculturalism Act for emphasising differences rather than similarities amongst the country's various ethnic groups.

Bissoondath's writings demonstrate an amalgamation of the exotic and the familiar focusing on the themes of marginalisation and alienation. His writing characteristically concentrates on the lives of characters that are relocated by political violence. In addition to his interest in experience of immigrants and refugees, Bissoondath focuses on the lives of marginalised individuals as well, especially, the individuals who are marginalised in their own social order and alienated by their own culture. Besides, his language is commendable, as Stefano Harney Comments, "And Bissoondath is an obviously talented writer - sometimes stiff, but always in command of his language" (120).

Sofia Mustafa and Yasmin Ladha represent the third category of Canadian immigrant writers of Indian descent. Their immigration corresponds to the two waves of migration: first wave at some point in European imperial regime, from India to East African countries and the second wave stirred in later half of the twentieth century, from East African countries to Canada.

Sofia Mustafa (1922-2005) has been a writer and political activist of high acclaim. Her body of published work includes four books of poetry, three collections of short stories and several award-winning non-fiction works on East African culture.

Sofia Mustafa has authored *The Tanganyika Way*, a novel presenting forth the political development of Tanzania. She covers large international and national issues, which, coupled with the smaller personal details of her life, open a window into a time and an experience that are emblematic of a unique historical moment. In 2002, her novel *In the Shadow of Kirinyaga* set up in Kenya and Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), was published in Canada. The novel is an arresting narrative set in early colonial Kenya, told from the perspective of a Muslim family. Her writings centred on East African historical events offer a vivid rendition of the national and international political conditions.

Yasmin Ladha is an Ismaili, arrived from Tanzania to Canada. Her published works include the collection of short stories, *Lion's Granddaughter and Other Stories*, *The Chapbook Bridal Hands on the Maple* and *Women Dancing on Rooftops: Bring your Belly Close*. The last work is a book of short stories, documentary-fiction, personal essays and poetry. Her new book is the novel *Blue Sunflower Startle*.

An abstract investigation of the above furnished writers puts forth an overview of the Immigrant writers in Canada of Indian descent with passable particulars. It supplies a precise account of the writers, their literary artifacts, the underlying ideas of those artifacts, focal point of their writing and their standing in the literary sphere. Moreover, a proportional assessment of the writers and the branch of the writing, they belong to can probably be discerned as well.

The general characteristics of all these writers have been the subtlety of immigrant awareness. It is indisputable that any author's personal experience is in one way or other, an

inspiration for spelling out imagination. The persons and events which come into contact directly or indirectly appeal to imaginative thinking. Therefore, immigration and the bi-products of immigration are detectable in the works of these writers, wedged between conflicting cultures, the immigrant writers often dwell upon the themes of dislocation, survival and loss of identity.

However, there are other themes as well, besides the immigrant experience and its spin-off effects. Rohinton Mistry has been inquiring into a particular community in the context of political nuances. Anita Rau Badami's absorption with the psychology of human relations, and slices of ordinary life delivers an additional intricacy to immigrant Canadian writing. Similarly, Cyril Dabydeen and Neil Bissoondath probe into immigrant experience against the international transitional phase alongside political sadism.

Likewise, there are some more subjects which have been explored and cogitated by these writers. Twice migrated writers, more often than not, dwell in binary premises and so do their characters and narratives. For instance, Yasmin Ladha delineates either of her homes, her past and present paralleling each other. Some of her fictional terrains lie in past Africa and some are positioned in present Canada whereas, Sofia Mustafa's writings appear to be restricted to Tanzania, her past, which perhaps had a moderately influential role.

A kaleidoscopic icon of 'immigrant Canadian writing' is created, taking into account all these wide-ranging rudimentary aspects. However, there is another built-in visage to be measured by accommodating Moyez. G. Vassanji, who belongs to the third category of the immigrant writers in Canada. Twofold migration, marginalisation, intercontinental events and cultural nuances accentuate his course of literary stream.

M. G. Vassanji is one of the most distinct literary celebrities of South Asian Canadian literature. Vassanji (born in Nairobi, Kenya) has grown up in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania as a

member of the small Muslim Ismaili sect, which originally hailed from Kutch in Gujarat. After elapsing his betimes from East Africa, he went to America for pursuing his higher education in MIT and the University of Pennsylvania, where he specialised in theoretical Nuclear Physics. He earned a Ph.D. in Nuclear Physics from the University of Pennsylvania and worked at the Chalk River atomic power station. His self-exile persisted and he immigrated to Canada in pursuance of a career. From 1978-1980, he has been a postdoctoral fellow at the Atomic Energy of Canada and from 1980 to 1989, he has been a research associate at the University of Toronto.

All through this period he developed a keen interest in medieval Indian literature and history, co-founded and edited a literary magazine *The Toronto South Asian Review*, later renamed *The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad*, and began writing stories and a novel. In 1989, with the publication of his first novel, *The Gunny Sack*, he was invited to spend a season at the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa and that year was the culmination of his active career in Nuclear Physics. He considers his contribution modest, in algebraic models and high spin states. The fact that he was never tenured is considered a blessing by him for it freed him to pursue his literary career. His wife, Nurjehan (born in Tanzania) has been of immense support in his literary industry especially in his literary magazine. He lives at present in Toronto with his family and literary enterprise. However, he sometimes visits Africa and India.

Vassanji is the author of six novels, two non-fiction works and two collections of short stories. His work has gained international acclaim and has also been translated into a few other languages. Vassanji embarked on writing his first novel *The Gunny Sack* in 1980, which was published in 1989 and it is the first novel about Indians in Africa. The novel has won the Commonwealth Writers Prize, and established Vassanji as an important voice in the emerging

field of immigrant/minority writers. In *The Gunny Sack*, Vassanji acquaints the readers with the saga of four generations of Asians settled in Tanzania. He scrutinises the themes of identity, displacement and race relations and moreover, he attempts to preserve and recreate oral histories and mythologies that have long been silenced.

In 1990, Vassanji published *Uhuru Street Stories*, a collection of short stories that take place along the same street in Dar es Salaam. Many characters from *The Gunny Sack* reemerge in the short stories. This vibrantly well-knitted collection of short stories takes readers to the Asian community of Dar es Salaam, a port city on the east coast of Africa. It supplies a portfolio containing collective experiences of the individuals belonging to a particular place and a particular community.

No New Land written in the year 1991 is set in Toronto, and portrays a group of Indians from Tanzania trying to adapt to life in a new land. The novel manifests the preoccupation of the tenants of Sixty-nine Rosecliffe Park Drive in Don Mills with their past as their lives illustrate the ironies, the pathos and the hardships of having to live between two worlds. It is an insightful narrative juxtaposing man's ability to 'try and triumph' alongside 'adapt or perish'. Certainly, it is as well a sort of documentary rendering the lives of minority immigrants and Canada's multicultural policies.

The Book of Secrets published in 1994, featuring a minor character from a story in *Uhuru Street Stories*, won Vassanji the first Giller Prize that same year. In this novel, Vassanji traces the histories of people who possessed the diary of a British administrator, 'the book of secrets'. 'The book of secrets' is the 1913 diary of a colonial administrator in East Africa named Alfred Corbin. More than half a century later, the diary comes into the hands of Pius Fernandez, a

retired school teacher, and his attempts to decode the entries of the diary unravel the history of the Indian community in the British East African city of Kikono.

Vassanji's *Amriika* (1999) is a noteworthy modern novel presenting a vibrant tale in the form of a memoir of an Afro-Asian immigrant in America. The narrations whirling around protagonist Ramji, who arrives at America in pursuit of academic prospects, depict the measured heterometabolous of an immigrant into Americanised recluse. The cyclorama of stentorian America from the perspective of Ramji is prolifically and intently interpolated in the narrative. Besides, the personal experiences of Ramji, the Anti-Vietnamese war movement and religious fundamentalism are underscored in the plot. Like Vassanji's other novels, such as *The Gunny Sack* and the Giller Prize-winning *The Book of Secrets*, *Amriika* is a story about Vassanji's own community Indians from East Africa who have immigrated to North America.

In November 2003, M. G. Vassanji won a second Giller Prize for his novel, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* written in the year 2003. Vikram represents the third generation Asians settled in colonised and independent Kenya. The grand father as a debentured labourer, father as a tradesman and Vikram's transformation into a corrupt politician constitute the convoluted backdrop of the narration. The protagonist's navigation in life from his boyhood to his manhood corresponds with the odyssey of Kenya from its colonial rule to its independent democratic regime. There are other important characters like—Njoroge, Bill, Deepa and Kenyatta standing for various major divisions of people and shaping the subsidiary narrative. Neil Ten Kortenaar points out, "The simplicity of the psychology is of a piece with the novel's allegorization of colonial relations" (182).

In 2007 Vassanji published *The Assassin's Song* about a Canadian professor who inherits an ancient family responsibility that forces him to confront his familial history in the Indian

village of Haripir. The novel was short listed for the 2007 Giller Prize. The novel spins the tale of Karsan Dargawalla, heir to the famous shrine of the medieval Sufi saint Nur Fazal at Haripur in Gujarat. The protagonist intending to rupture the button-down remand denies his inheritance of custodianship and embraces the normal routine of life. He abandons his mystical lineage including his motherland for a pretext of self-relocation and seeks asylum in America and Canada. However, he finds himself dislocated amidst the extraterrestrial people and apprehends a crash in his mediocre journey of life. He journeys toward atonement and reconciles his acquaintanceship with his kinsfolk after the demolition of his family in the Godra Riots. The novel culminates with Karsan reconciling with his destiny and the post-Godra Kand activities being commenced.

When She Was Queen is Vassanji's other short story collection published in 2005 and it was published as *Elvis Raja* in India. This short story collection has twelve stories set in Africa, US, Canada and India and for the first time Vassanji has presented the vista of Indo-Pakistan partition. Vassanji is a master storyteller, negotiating the in-between worlds of past and present, east and west, young and old. He portrays a world that is abundantly diverse, highly accessible, and fully enriching for all who travel there. Dorothy remarks, "Interweaving allusions to Hinduism, East Africa, popular culture, British norms, and Indian epics, Vassanji reflects on cultural and social translations of people, relationships, and events" (159).

A Place Within: Rediscovering India is Vassanji's most awe-inspiring memoir chronicling the writer's visit concurrently with ancient history of India. The account of Vassanji's visit to India relates many historical episodes which doubtlessly are unavoidable phantoms haunting India's present. Vassanji has edited *A Meeting of Streams: South Asian Canadian Literature*, a seminal volume based on the conference of writers of South Asian origin from the

Indian subcontinent, the Caribbean and South East Africa in the year 1983 by TSAR. In 2009, he has also written a biographical work *Mordecai Richler*, on the Late Canadian author Mordecai Richler.

Vassanji is the first Canadian writer who has won the Giller prize twice. Besides, these two Giller Prizes, Vassanji has been eulogized and esteemed with many other vouchers. In 2005, Vassanji was made a Member of the Order of Canada. He has also won the Bressani Literary Prize, and the Harbourfront Festival Prize.

Imagination is a reverie procreating precious and incredible ideas. It is the most substantial capital invested by the writers who through their domain of fiction extend inevitable impendent prospects and decode messages from the past. It is capable of regenerating both pleasant and repulsive inspiration. There have been many imaginary lands, terrains and communities created by writers in order to render the touch of real experience and self-awareness. May it be the 'Xanadu' of Kubla Khan, the 'Malgudi', of Narayan or the 'imaginary homelands' of Rushdie; the ultimate object has been to visualise the imperceptible visions, ideas and awareness.

M. G. Vassanji is one such writer conveying social consciousness stimulating ideas through his fictional Shamsi 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 supplying a descriptive invoice of events influencing the affairs of nonages. Accommodating fictional characters in historical premises and recreating history has been his forte. Germination of new ideas through the process of dismantling and reconstructing history is an excellent approach in literary ambiance.

Textual construction is one of the most effectual approaches of communication deciphering opinions, impressions, ideas, concepts and facts. Most especially, the fictional texts which mingle imagination and impression transmit substructure pragmatism alongside the fictionalisation. Imaginary and creative artifacts surcharged with enormous imagination protract ideas and thoughts lying underneath the writer's consciousness. This modus operandi of engrossing the readers who are the recipients of communication from a particular text with engaging imagination and summarised thematic nucleus is attainable by a writer. To be precise, imaginary tales enshrouding numerous themes render retrospective inquiries and responses possible.

The role of a writer can be recognised as imperative and activist in simulating opinions. It is perceptible from many instances, that the ideas generating from the reading of a text are constructive, positive and facilitative. Some of the thematic topics inspired or provoked for contemplation are: human relations, self-identity, political ideologies, socio-cultural ethos, historical occurrences and so on. Ruminations on these concerns are prone to render more percipient understanding and potential solutions.

M. G. Vassanji's fictional works are such texts emitting significant and propelling themes carrying scope for evocative deliberation. These implanted themes render a reading and comprehension beyond the literary text. The fictional texts are embroidered with archives of historical events. Nonetheless, the events depicted generate interpretations contemporary to present scenario. This calls forth a succinct and yet, illustrated analysis of the writer, his fictional texts and the underlying themes.

The fictional artifacts, besides rendering an immigrant experience, suggest a neutral faith canopying Hindu legends and Islamic practices. Vassanji believes in religious tolerance and

disapproves of the Hindu Muslim divide. His belonging to the Khoja community and the community's communal protocol positively influences Vassanji's discernment of Hindu Muslim dissection. In one of his mail correspondences, he acknowledges the sway of ginans on his liberal approach and religious convictions, "Because of the ginans tradition I was brought up in, I refuse to subscribe to the Hindu-Muslim divide."

Vassanji's novels are abundant with both particular as well as universal implications and plethoric with historical vistas. His discourse on the larger imperial issues such as pre-independence and post-independence aura of East Africa are on a wider canvas, mostly issues as part of the larger issues dealing with the enhancement of third-world countries and their political instability.

The contemporary global issues claiming attention are satisfactorily debunked in Vassanji's fiction. The dread of militanism, the rise of religious fundamentalism and need of religious tolerance, the expansion of spirituality in the West, the corruption settling down in the government of young nations, the rampant immigration to US and Canada for economic and other concerns, and the demise of the past are some of the present issues delineated in his novels. These issues are implicitly interwoven with the plot of the fictional episodes provoking opinions and rationales. Vassanji opens one of his recent essays thus:

The condition of the world today brings home to us—those of us who had forgotten—the pervasiveness of smaller ethnic, communal, or sectarian identities and the tenacity with which they survive. We have seen pluralism-based national identities—built on the idea that human equality and fraternity should ultimately override ethnic or other communal differences—disintegrate and these smaller components reasserting themselves, shaking off the old idealism and taking up

apparently where they last left off. Neighbours turn against neighbours, communities that once joined forces to fight colonial domination and conquest take up arms against each other to settle scores and gain points in a new struggle for power, definition, and survival. (111)

There are fictional terrains which can be roughly located on world map in East Africa, Northwest India and North America. Kikono, Matamu, Rosecliffe Park and Pir Baag are some of such imaginary lands accommodating the fictional individuals and their community. In addition, the East African coastal towns and major cities like Dar-es-Salaam are the vernacular milieus. Nevertheless, Vassanji's contribution to literature is less recognized in East Africa which constitutes almost a principal segment of his fictional backdrop. Foden corroborates, "M G Vassanji is one of the unsung greats of African literature" (38).

The historical figure of Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of independent Kenya secures a significant role in Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. Moreover, there is frequent reference to other historical and major figures like Idi Amin, Churchill and so on. However, the author is 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 fundis and the thieves and the mwendauazimus." His work shares some aspects with north America-based Indian writer, Rohinton Mistry. Nerula's views regarding such similarities are quoted extensively here:

M.G. Vassanji's *Uhuru Street* and Rohinton Mistry's *Tales From Ferozsha Baag* short story cycles that are similar in concept and scope. Both deal with people of a

certain community, sharing the same religion, culture, socio-economic parity, and the same psychology. . . . They are nostalgic presentations of familiar scenes and dialogues, a re-creation of an ethnic and regional world of immense significance to the writer. (73).

The characters representing Vassanji's imaginary work are all distinct and identical at the same time. The Indians settled in colonial East Africa constitute the major cast and the rest is formed by Africans, English colonizers, Indians in India, Canadians and Americans. The common trait of the character is discovered in their ability to adapt in new homes. Vassanji's works deal with Indians living in East Africa who are wedged between the oppression of colonizers and the hostility of natives. All his fictional works established with the setting of East Africa render an illustrated account of the ordeal of Indians in colonised Africa. Mini Kapoor rightly observes, "In between the tidy polarities of colonizer and colonized, between the passions that drove freedom movements across Asia and Africa and the regrets that weigh down many post independence assessments, lies M. G. Vassanji's terrain" (33).

Vassanji's novels, longer than a customary mediocre narrative, assimilate one more exclusivity. The narratives envelop a protracted period of time – a couple of centuries, generations together, historical epoch and so forth. *The Gunny Sack* covers four generations of a family, approximately, an entire historical era of European colonisation in East Africa. Vassanji employs narratives which run marathon across time and space, and this is very much apparent in his recent novel, *The Assassin's Song*. Kit Dobson observes, "M.G. Vassanji writes long books, epic in conception, and spanning, in this case, India and North America, from circa 1260 to the present" (165).

The writer's undertaking of producing ideas more than just texts is very crucial and its accomplishment claim many responsibilities. It is evident that Vassanji has been a writer with multifarious responsibilities of being a counter historian, cultural renovator and socio-cultural scientist. Salat observes, "In fact, so great was his inner urge to take upon himself the task of being the transmitter and preserver of his cultural inheritance that he gave up a promising career as a nuclear physicist and took to being a full-time writer" (70).

An individual is part of a whole system and the linkage between the part and whole is inevitable. This functions with a mechanism which treats the link as 'hyperlink' ; pressure thrusting on whole system exerts consequential effect on the parts. Vassanji very prolifically manifests how the individuals being parts of a whole system experience transformation with events taking at large scale. Arun P. Mukherjee in her review of *Amriika* animadverts, "Vassanji is keenly interested in probing the links between the individual, the community, the larger world, and how they impact on each other" (92).

A writer's fortitude and precision of attitude is as imperative as the text itself. A close reading of Vassanji's works illustrating the progressive ideas and human experiences corroborate his reinvigorating approach. This self-expression and profundity reassuring Vassanji's role as a writer and of which he himself enunciates in his editorial of *Canadian Literature*, "In this kind of convex reality, in which the world comes in, gets refracted and reimagined through Canadian writing, there is perhaps a place for writers such as I, who will always wash upon these shores" (13).

Right from the beginning, taking cognizance of his prolific writing Vassanji's works especially fictional pieces are continuously interpreted and analysed by the critics and the reviewers. His novels have been reviewed in various renowned reviews and journals and

scholarly study on his works have been published in many critical anthologies. His work is regarded noteworthy in constituting the canon of South Asian Canadian literature and Asian African writing as well. His facility to recreate the past in fiction is singular and exerts a pull on the critical reception of many scholars. The aspects like diaspora, displacement, and rootlessness present in Vassanji's works is scrutinised by the critics in particular.

Sudha P. Pandya in "Voyage of Self Discovery: Some Immigrants Writers in Canada," attempts to scrutinise the fictional works of three South Asian Canadian writers -Moyez G. Vassanji, Rohinton Mistry and Neil Bissoondath who are Toronto based and whose roots can be traced in India. Pandya 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). She also observes, "All these writers are preoccupied with their pasts and their effort is to recreate the life of the community native to them" (89). Pandya considers Vassanji's concerted interest in the history of the Asians Muslims in East Africa and equates him with Rohinton Mistry who demarcates the Parsi's community in Mumbai.

Arun Mukherjee in an article, "Writing from a Hard Place: African Fiction of M. G. Vassanji" in *South Asian Canadiana* reaffirms that Vassanji's fiction renders a delineation of Indian life particularly Bania community in East Africa. Mukherjee observes Vassanji's expertise in masquerading the Afro-Asians and comments, ". . . he writes about the distinct ethnic groups, of the Arabs, the Mangati, the Swahili, the Masai, the Khoja, the Goan, the Bohra, the Bhatias and on and on the list goes" (68).

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 states, "M.G. Vassanji, in

his writings, endeavours 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).

Vassanji's first novel, *The Gunny Sack* has been immeasurably triumphant in provoking different critical receptions all over the world. Michael Bucknor in his diagnostic assessment of Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*, illustrates various gradations stranded in the novel. Challenging the novel to be a postcolonial narrative rendering an account of the past predominantly the evolution of Asians in East Africa, Bucknor demands that the motif of migration constitute the nucleus and tries to brand the novel categorically. He observes, "*The Gunny Sack* may be said to be a 'Canadian International' text by virtue of the fact that the writer is Canadian, or it may be classified as a 'South Asian International' text because of its Asian perspective, but for me it is more 'African International,' since the very sensibility and felt experience of place is African" (26).

Vassanji's prodigious skill of incorporating the past in present in his first novel, *The Gunny Sack* has been scrutinised by G. D. Killam in his article titled, "To Fight, To Hope, and To Dream". He has equated Vassanji's narrating chic with Ngugi wa Thiongo and Reshard Gul with particular reference to their works—*Matigari* and *Cape Town Coolie* respectively. In particular, Killam gauges the presumption that the historical perspective of Asians settling in East Africa as traders is intricately apparent in Vassanji's fiction. Michael Thorpe in *Literary Half-Yearly* reviews *The Gunny Sack* as a fictional authentication testifying the survival of Asians by means of accommodation in colonised Africa. W. B. Prathima, another reviewer of *The Gunny Sack* contemplates the fictional work as club between fictional lives and a documentary of Tanzania's historical record.

There are ample potentials for critical assessment of Vassanji's novels silhouetting against theoretical framework. Amin Malak proposes a new historical analysis of *The Gunny Sack*, "Since *The Gunny Sack* configures emblematically as the embodiment of the community's collective memory, one needs to investigate the criteria whereby the narrator chooses and displays the historical data. As the new historicists would affirm, the study of history is a process: selective and fictive. A narrativized history such as *The Gunny Sack* is no exception"(68).

Peter Nazareth in one of his articles published in *The Toronto Review* (1994) meticulously supplies an emblematic representation of the Asians in East African writing. Several poets, dramatists and fiction writers ranging from Jagjit Singh to Ngugi are quoted in order to equip the discussion with vivacity. He asserts his intention that ". . . my purpose in this essay is to look at images of the East African Asian experience as reflected in East African literature. We will see how East African writers have responded to the colonial stereotypes about Asians and how they have penetrated and exploded these stereotypes"(18).

Nazareth explains in his paper, how, all the mutually exclusive tribes or ethnic communities irrespective of hardly any reciprocal bond are perceived as one under the label 'Asians' by the East Africans. These Asians are looked upon with derision and loathing, to be exact, Khoja Ismaili, Bhora, Sikh, Goans and Patels, who live in individual communal groups undergo this ghettoisation. The colonial experience does not culminate for the Asians in East Africa and it persists in new and subtle forms.

Arguing along similar lines, Arnold Harichand Itwaru in "Fiction in History in Fiction" particularises Vassanji's dynamism in fictionalising the history in an abundant comportment. He considers that Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* unfurls a family and deals with the historical archives

of the Islamic Asians settled in colonial East Africa. He avers, ". . . it is . . . the story of four generations of displaced and wandering Asians in Africa whose hopes and hurts, whose dire cruelties and enduring kindnesses were compounded by the colonial encroachments of European greed and military might" (115). Andru Peek in his review on *The Gunny Sack* titled, "Fine Bag of Tricks" endorses the arguments of Itwaru and appends Vassanji's narrative proficiencies.

Ravichandra in one of his scholarly papers, puts forth some arguments treating Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* as a semiotic study on gender. His critical inquiries are focused on the women who are presented as fabricators and undistinguished, unlike their male counterparts who are icons of high aspirations and capital accumulators. He spells out, "The paper shall attempt to argue that even in such a complex, neo colonial process as immigration, implicated as it is under the sign of capitalism, where the immigrant exists as a marginal striving to centre stage himself, the woman is constantly under erasure" (193).

Plenteous literature is accessible on Canadian immigrant culture. There are several upcoming culturalists and multicultural enthusiasts considering and evaluating on the surge of this global phenomenon. John Samuel presents an exemplary and comprehensive paper on the impact of international migration on culture. He brings forth an impeccable analysis of the facts and practices flanked between statistical data and other references. He reasons out, "Immigration has changed Canadian culture, and return migration and improved communication facilities have influenced the cultures of the countries from which South Asians came" (22).

Some reviewers have branded Vassanji's works as immigration literature and Chelva Kanaganayakam is one such reviewer. His review on *No New Land*, titled, "Don Mills and Dar es Salaam" crams the immigration aura in the novel. The trend of immigration of the Asians settled in Africa to America and Canada; the travails of the migrants in acclimatising themselves

in new land; their pursuit of fiscal sustenance are reckoned as underscoring ideas according to him. He says, "If one were to speak of what the novel is 'about,' it is about the immigrant population in Toronto, forced to begin a new life in a strange and often unwelcoming land, confronted with obstacles, prejudices and disillusionment" (57).

Pursuing a similar vein, Arun Singh in his paper, "Vassanji's *No New Land*: Exploding the Mosaic Myth", substantiates the predicament of migrants in multi-cultural Canada. The racial discrimination adverted in Vassanji's *No New Land* epitomise the ordeal of minorities in Canada and this pragmatic presentment explodes the myth of Canadian multi-cultural mosaic. He observes the fickleness embryonic in the pretext of migration to West in hope of better prospects, "The hedge beyond the fence seems to be more green and silky" (82).

Indira Bhatt in her review on Vassanji's *No New Land* titled, "M. G. Vassanji's *No New Land*: An Immigrant's Journey through Experience to Self-Awareness", attempts to examine how successfully Vassanji uses the oft-repeated motif of rape in apprehending reality of life and in fathoming the psyche of the major character in his novel *No New Land*. Bhatt probes into the protagonist's psychology to make plain the vacillating and excruciating awareness. The motif of rape and Forsterian situation is excavated in her critical scrutiny which in turn confers Vassanji's demarcation of immigrant's expedition from homeland to foster land.

Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets* has been classified as 'frontier fiction' by Shane Rhodes in a review entitled "Frontier Fiction: Reading Books in M. G. Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets*" in *Ariel* and according to him, "Frontier . . . should be understood as both the metaphorical border imposed between that - which - is - known and that - which - is -not - known and the actual, physical, and ever - moving border of colonial expansion" (179). Vassanji's novel fabricates a figurative stratum enwrapping a past which is engaged by a present and the novel particularises

the invariable erection and dispersal of frontier differences. Rhodes suggests that though the diary in the novel evidently renders glimpse in East African life, the diary excogitates an invasion into a private life. Shane Rhodes concludes that the novel divulges a correspondence underlying between historiography and colonialism, however, breaking down some of the binaries like present / past, civilized / uncivilized that operate between these mutual categories.

Vassanji's narrating sophistication has been a focus of critical study as well. V. Chandrika examines the narrative architectonics of M. G. Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets* in a review titled "Hero as Book". "M.G. Vassanji, one of the eminent South Asian writers of Canada, may perhaps be the first modern Canadian novelist to make a book its own hero" (Chandrika 37). Chandrika compartmentalises the fictional unfolding as—mosaic of the story, beginning, the riddle, and the end with specific prominence to the commission of the diary. Michael Thorpe in a review on *The Book of Secrets* puts forward the argument that Vassanji's attempt is splendid in translating the panorama of Swaheli community in the novel.

Janaki Venkataraman in a review on *The Book of Secrets* regards the plot of the novel as bewitching and extols Vassanji's enthralling fashion of story-telling. Venkataraman credits the appeal of Vassanji's narration to his integration of history in the fictional text and *The Book of Secrets* fascinates due to its amalgamation of history and mystery. Venkataraman enjoins, "History has the knack of catching up with one unexpectedly, taking one by surprise, and then drawing one, irresistibly into its own theatre. The cue could be a snatch of conversation, an old photograph, a line of a song, or the pages of a long-lost diary, as happens in *The Book of Secrets*" (5).

Vassanji's fictional works are remarkable for their contemporaneous themes and one of such themes is communal violence and religious fundamentalism. Michael Thorpe, in a review

on *Amriika* delves into the instances of religious fundamentalism and religious militanism suffused in the novel. Thorpe opines that *Amriika* is a morally multifarious investigation of sensitising crucial issues of our time. Makarand Paranjape seconds this view and adds that Vassanji's *Amriika* is a vehicle against the political adventurism and all sorts of extremisms in America. He like so many other reviewers ascertains the diasporic elements in Vassanji's fiction and recognises the author's unyielding grasp on the past. Paranjape observes the dual movement in the fictional as there are two plots - political and personal inter-linked in the novel. Subarno Chaterjee observes, "*Amriika* yearns to be a profound reflection on immigration, displacement, history, memory, home, relationships, community, and the quest for fulfilment" (38).

Arun P. Mukherjee conceptualises, "Vassanji's fiction explores how the individual and the communal identities interact and how that interaction gives birth to action and reaction, in short, history" (87). He in his review titled, "Lost Frontier" examines Vassanji's fiction with particular emphasis on *Amriika*. This critical estimate accentuates on the infringement of past in present and communities delineated in the novel - Shamsi and Puritans. Mukherjee delves into further and point implicates that the ambivalent relationship between Indians and Africans is one of Vassanji's preferred themes.

The In-Between World of Vikram Lall has gained tremendous circulation among the readers and the critics. Homa Khaleeli in a review entitled, "Spitfires and Sita" on Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* engages in an in depth study of the Indian community settled in colonised Kenya, the freedom struggle in the form of Mau Mau rebellion, the political idealism following the independence of Kenya perspicuously limned in the novel. Khaleeli asserts, "This finely drawn novel explores the dark areas of Kenya's history by focusing on the country's Indian community" (20).

Mini Kapoor in the review entitled "Middleman" closely examines the predicament of Asians settled in East Africa; primarily estranged from their homelands they are for the second time alienated by the settled land. Kapoor appoints or in other words calls the protagonist as 'middle man' who represents the in-between plight of the Asians sandwiched between the subduing attitude of the colonisers and cynical approach of the natives.

M. Suppriya recommends Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* as a narrative of diasporic home coming. This critique on Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* elaborates the concept of immigration in present era with special orientation in South Asian literature. Suppriya musters in the biographical information from Vassanji's life pertaining to immigration. She suggests that Vassanji's past triggers off his imaginary accounts, "Vassanji's writings are an attempt to confront the ghosts of the past" (152). Vijaya Sree in a review titled, "The Entangled Narrative Lines", annotates on *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, "The title of M. G. Vassanji's novel may not create an instant enthusiasm among readers fed on postcolonial stuff as they are likely to mutter in exasperation: 'In-betweenness! Not again!' But once they start reading the book, the powerful narrative subtly manoeuvring history and fiction, tracing intertwining threads of personal and public histories, foregrounding the realities of the in-between existence of the Indian community in Kenya grips their imagination and when they finish they are left with a feeling that rarely has anyone ever told the story of in-betweenness as boldly and as compellingly as Vassanji has done" (25).

Vassanji's most recent fiction, *The Assassin's Song* has obtained huge reputation among readers and critical examinations. Giles Fodden, one of *The Assassin's Song's* reviewers congratulates Vassanji for dispensing the concern of communal violence and religious tolerance as a counteractive measure in the novel. Fodden regards Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song* a great

literature as its accounts for both particular and universal experiences. Sanjay Siphaimalani reviewing *The Assassin's Song*, following the same vein, studies the 'Sufi song' as an icon of religious tolerance. *Amriika* and *The Assassin's Song* are well-established contemporaneous literary texts remonstrating the repulsion of fermentations.

Rabindranath Maharaj in a review titled, "Finding Inner Peace in Outside World" in *Washington Post* contradicts the observations made by Sanjay Siphaimalani and Giles Foden pertaining to interpretation of religious tolerance in *The Assassin's Song*. Rather, Maharaj insists that Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song* is another novel highlighting the antagonism between traditions and modernity. Rabindranath Maharaj likens Vassanji's writing with some of his contemporaries, "There are echoes of Rohinton Mistry in Vassanji's lampooning of post-independent India's frenetic nationalism, of V.S. Naipaul in the insistence that solutions can arrive only from a thorough understanding of the past, of Salman Rushdie in the disclosure of a history composed of personal narratives and myths" (33) .

The above furnished reviews of literature exemplify that Vassanji's works have undergone several interpretations and critical analysis. However, M. G. Vassanji's focal point appears to be the experience of his fictional community accommodated in his imaginary territories. The succeeding declarative statement by the author himself in one of his published articles, inspires interest and inquisitiveness in the researcher to delve deeper into the fictional community. Vassanji pronounces:

My literary project . . . has been to trace the origins of a community, its development in a British colony, and finally its dispersal in the postcolonial era. In this way I look at the present century from the perspective of a simple community as it evolves and arrives at a metropolitan consciousness and loses a

large part of its traditional identity. One could say that such a community is acted upon by history, and thus enters historical consciousness. In all of this, however, the individual within the community is of central concern. And in a final reversal, even as my novels make the community historical—paralleling what the modern world has done to it— by fictionalizing the community, they have mythologized it. (18)

Moreover, there are traces of the Indian shopkeeper community in fictional works of some other novelists. However, the name, 'Shamsi' of the community is exclusive in M. G. Vassanji's fictional works, whilst, the other novelists have labelled the community in general terms as 'Indian Shopkeepers'. Ngugi, in his novel, *Weep Not Child* renders a sweeping glance of the Indian shopkeepers amidst the clamour of Mau Mau and other nationalistic movements. Similarly, Abdulrazak Gurnah has allocated some space for the Indians in East Africa as well. Shanti Moorthy ruminating over Abdulrazak Gurnah's writing quotes the following lines, "The real money was in the hands of the Indian merchants and creditors, of course. God has given them a gift for business but has denied them charity. They were the only ones who could afford to bring in the goods that were needed, which traders bought from them on credit, and repaid with interest" (Qtd. 88-89).

Taking into consideration, all these observations and critical interpretations on Vassanji's writing and germane materials: the researcher intends to make a close reading of M. G. Vassanji's select works and delve into the community confronted. The focus of the dissertation will be to implement a critical inquiry into the evolutionary history, ethnographic patterns and global standing of the specific community. The immigrant community delineated in Vassanji's

works appears to be modelled on Khoja Ismaili community, however, there is inadequate orientation and very little reference resources made available for either of the versions.

The objective of the present study is: to implement a critical inquiry into the origin and evolutionary history of the 'community'; to construe ethnographic patterns of the community life; to interpret counter history of the community against world events and to contextualise the community in past and present. On the whole, the aim of the study is to examine and interpret Vassanji's fictional community with both literary and non-literary references.

New historicism is a burgeoning critical practice grounded on an emblematic interpretation. Therefore, investigation of such an unexplored and unscathed socio-cultural community is positively justifiable on the theoretical framework of new historicism. The study would be, in a way, a modest effort to assess M. G. Vassanji's select works, specifically, *The Gunny Sack*, *No New Land*, *The Book of Secrets*, *Amriika*, *The Assassin's Song* and *A Place Within: Rediscovering India*, as a paradigm of literary artifacts integrated with the theory of new historicism. The researcher has taken only these works because they deal with the community the research focuses on. Vassanji's other works like *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and the other two short story collections namely, *Uhuru Street* and *When She was Queen* are not taken as they do not deal much with the community taken for the study.

New historicism is basically an American practice stemming out of numerous credences and theories. However, in contemporary times, it has grown broadly, acquiring international recognition and multidisciplinary intervention. It is principally correlated with culture; nonetheless, it is pertinent and applied in some other disciplines as well. In fact, the composition of this theoretical practice is heterogeneous, counterbalanced by political ideologies, culture,

anthropology and so forth. The new historical practice renders ample scope for interpretation and drawn conclusions.

According to the new historicists, every form of art is performed in a cultural milieu and producing literature is consequently, a social act. Further, literature is a specific vision of history and not a distinct category of human activity. New Historicism mulls over works of literature as historical texts and, in tandem, key out literariness in the history. Castle endorses, "It is the task of the New Historicist to 'map' the various connections and relations between literary texts and the social and cultural contexts" (130). This conjectural approach proves to be particularly productive for exploring fictional reconstructions of history since it facilitates a reading of texts that locates fictional narratives in a broader cultural context. M. H. Abrams markedly distinguishes new historicism:

This is not simply a return to an earlier kind of literary scholarship, for the views and practices of the new historicists differ markedly from those of former scholars who had adverted to social and intellectual history as a 'background' against which to set a work of literature as an independent entity, or had viewed literature as a 'reflection' of the worldview characteristic of a period. Instead, new historicists conceive of a literary text as 'situated' within the institutions, social practices, and discourses that constitute the overall culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes. (183)

Stephen Greenblatt has coined the word 'new historicism' in 1980s, delving into renaissance literature and Shakespearean studies. Somehow, the practice turned out to be a special modus operandi for investigating the literary texts of renaissance and Elizabethan age. In

addition, the new historicists have attempted their practice in literary legacies belonging to romantic period. However, with the ontogenesis of this theoretical practice, modern and lately emerging literary texts have been considered for new historical construal as well. Virginia Mason Vaughan confirms:

Despite this array of critiques-or perhaps because of it-new historicism seems to have blended into the mainstream as the twenty-first century begins. The work of Stephen Greenblatt and other new historicists has opened up new topics for research and new ways of thinking. More important, the multidisciplinary thrust of their work has been widely adopted in literary and cultural studies in the United States. Literary scholars now avidly embrace texts and methodologies that would not have been considered appropriate to the study of literature twenty-five years ago, and they have broadened the canon to include works from a wide array of nationalities and ethnic groups that were previously marginalized. (109)

Lois Tyson, in *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide*, attempts a new historical reading of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, ruminating over the discourse of 'self-made man' in America. Narendra Tiwary and N. D.R. Chandra contributing to the *Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies*, carry out a new historical appraisal of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

The research methodology, theoretical corroboration and parameters set constitute the framework of the present study. *Practicing New Historicism* by Stephen Greenblatt and Catharine Gallagher, in conjunction with a few other chapters, like, "The History of the Anecdote" by Joel Fineman and "New Historicism and Cultural Criticism" by Lois Tyson on new historicism, supply a theoretical underpinning for the present dissertation. Particularly, the

theoretical devices, to be exact, anecdotes, thick description and juxtaposition of literary text and counter history comprise the paraphernalia to enforce the diagnostic investigation.

The researcher proposes to follow *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* for citation and documentation. The researcher intends to ascertain socio-cultural construction of the specific community through time and space manoeuvred by few patterns of new historicism practice. The present research integrates a parallel reading of the fictional works alongside some nonfiction and reference works in order to acquire potential findings on the fictional community which is modelled on an original community.

According to John Brannigan, "Literature can serve to persuade us of the justice of particular causes, or can police the dominant ideas of a particular time by representing alternatives or deviations as threatening" (171). In the present ambiance, there are numerous minority and doubly marginalised communities standing their grounds and making an effort to participate in the tournament of globalisation. Accordingly, attempting to locate a dislocated community and contextualise it in the past, present and future can be a utilitarian focus for a research.

The present study, entitled, "Ethnic Silhouettes: an Interpretation of the 'Community' in Select Works of M. G. Vassanji in the Light of New Historicism" investigates the evolution and existence of Vassanji's fictional 'community' which represents the minority, immigrant and displaced communities silhouetted against the facade of globalisation. The ethnic silhouettes are brought into focus in the light of new historicism by means of interpretation and contextualising literary texts. This literary interpretation of the community intends to spread out scope and ideas.

The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter of the study entitled "Introduction" furnishes a brief survey of South Asian Canadian writing with particular focus on

some Indo-Canadian writers who represent further subdivisions. It locates M. G. Vassanji incisively among these writers and presents forth an in depth account of his literary distinctions. The chapter supplies a thorough review of literature, followed by objectives, research methodology, proposed theoretical framework and thesis statement.

The second chapter of the study entitled "Recycling Anecdotes: Reconstructing Evolutionary History" implements an anecdotal analysis and construe the evolutionary history of Vassanji's fictional community which is referred as 'Shamsi' community through out the study. It deals with anecdotes in general and as a new historical device in particular. It provides with anecdotal analysis from Vassanji's works and the interpreted evolutionary history of the community. The chapter includes a concise review of the Khoja Ismaili community on which the fictional community is prototyped providing a parallel reading.

The third chapter of the study entitled "A Conjectural Analysis of Ethnographic Patterns" deciphers the ethnographic patterns of this community with the application of Thick Description. It opens with a comprehensive account of thick description, including, definition, significance, features and appliance. The chapter presents forth a list of socio-cultural practices and patterns of the Shamsi community interpreted by means of the thick description method.

The fourth chapter of the study entitled "Ellipses in the History" anchored on the new historical concept of counter history delves into the progress and trajectories of the 'community'. The chapter provides an elaborate investigation of counter history as an important component of new historical reading. It catalogues the historical world events like, European colonial rule, world wars and some others which design and manipulate the history of the community running analogous to it.

The fifth chapter entitled "Conclusion" culminates the study with observations, findings and recommendations. It substantiates that an inquiry into the fictional community of Shamsis, established on the theoretical framework of new historicism is constructive and generative with several progressive ideas. The chapter reviews the preceding chapters and corroborate the reliability of anecdotal and thick descriptive analysis alongside interplay of text and context as a means of interpretation. The observations presented forth in the concluding chapter make it obvious that the fictional Shamsi community is inspired by Khoja Ismaili community. One of the notable findings presented is the syncretic faith of the Shamsis—integration of Hindu ancestry and Sufi mysticism. These findings establish that Vassanji's novels are significant contribution to sociological and cultural studies. Shamsi community modelled on the Khoja community presents a diachronic perspective encapsulating the origin, the progress and the contemporary condition of a few alongside all. The early and recent history of this community in general and Khoja Ismaili community in particular furnish notable records leading to a new outlook and research possibilities.