

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN M. G. VASSANJI'S NOVEL NO NEW LAND

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Abstract: *The Diasporic literature has emerged as a rich area of research today. It has been inspiring new readers. They help us to know various cultures and life values of different parts of the world. Therefore Diasporic writings are the source of interest for the modern today's readers. Among all Diasporic writings, the Indian Diaspora has been growing with unique contribution to the world reading community. Like many other Indian Diasporic writers, M. G. Vassanji is one of the acclaimed literary members of Indian Diaspora. He is an Asian by Ancestry, African by birth, American by education and Canadian by profession.*

Key Words: *Diaspora, race, Racism, discrimination, identity.*

M.G. Vassanji was born in Nairobi, Kenya on 30th May 1950 to Gulamhussein Vassanji and Daulatkhanu Nanji. We know that his Family was a part of community of Indians who migrated to Africa. Emigration from India did not cease after the abolition of indenture and other systems of organized export of labour. Emigration to East African countries namely Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, South Africa, Burma, Malaysia and Fiji during the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries present a third pattern: 'Free' or 'Passage' migration. Under this pattern trader, artisans, bankers, petty contractors, clerks, professionals and entrepreneurs emigrated. This is the pattern under which Vassanji's ancestors came to Kenya from the Gujarat region in north-western India. He is a third generation diasporic. (Roy, Hareshwar. 22)

He has written nine novels and two short story collections and a biography. Diasporic consciousness, multiculturalism, nostalgia, language, history, Indianness, community, migration, alienation, memory, myth, quest for identity, exile, history, racial discrimination etc. are his major themes. They deal with Indians living in East Africa. Some members of the second generation later experience migration to Europe, Canada, or the United States. Like Jumpa Lahiri, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai and others, Vassanji also presents the theme of racial discrimination in his books.

No New Land is Vassanji's second novel. It was published in 1991. Here Vassanji elicits the Canadian immigrant experiences of the Indian Shamsi Community. This novel deals with the themes of immigration, in betweenness, racial discrimination, identity crisis, migration, community, quest for identity, exile etc. But in all these, we discuss about the theme of racial discrimination and its effects on the characters in detail. Before the analysis of the theme, it's proper to overview the concept of race and discrimination in brief. In the book, The Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies, Bill Ashcroft gives meaning and definition of race and racism:

'Race is a term for the classification of human beings into physically, biologically and genetically distinct groups. It is particularly pertinent to the rise of colonialism. Because the division of human society in this way is inextricable from the need of colonial powers to establish a dominance over subject peoples'. (180)

'Racism can be defined as :a way of thinking that considers a group's un changeable physical characteristics to be linked in a direct, casual way to psychological or intellectual characteristics,

and which in this basis distinguishes between 'superior and inferior racial groups.'(181)

In 1805, the French anatomist Cuvier postulated the existence of three major races: the white, the black and the yellow. From the colonial history it is observed that the European white people are superior race where as African Negroes or black people are inferior.(181) Race is first used in the English language in 1508 in a poem by William Dunbar and through the 17th and 18th centuries, it remained essentially a literary word denoting a class of persons or things .it was only in the 19th century that the term came to mean a distinct category of human beings with physical characteristics transmitted by descent .The colour became the means of distinguishing between groups of people.(182)

Generally the word 'discrimination' means recognising difference between one thing and other. In other words, it also denotes the determining mental ability of a person what is right and what is wrong. But in this context, the word discrimination is connected with the treatment of both races namely white and black. Here we find that these races have been differentiated on the basis of colour and physical features. In the history of postcolonialism, the races are discriminated. The white race is treated as superior and black or other races are called as inferior. Therefore The racial discrimination is the act of discriminating any group of people on the basis of their skin, colour or ethnic origin (Dayal, Deen 1).

This paper mainly focuses on the theme of racial discrimination in the novel No New Land. The novel opens with two important incidents. They are the results of racial discrimination. Nurdin's daughter Fatima gets admission in art and science instead of pharmacy, the popular one, and Nurdin, the protagonist is blamed of raping a white girl. Fatima accepts her condition and decided that art and science was good after all. But Nurdin has to face many problems in the family. The white lady Mrs. Broadbent refuses to serve him lunch in the Cafeteria. She stopped to serve him food. She further says, where he comes from both his hands would be chopped off. (180 NL)

In the African city Dar, Nurdin had to face painful racial discrimination. He was neglected therefore he had fairer complexion. He had realised that peons in Dar grew above him merely because of this black skins and in the promotion he was neglected. Even in Canada he faces the same crisis. In spite of being sufficiently qualified, as a shoe seller, he becomes unemployed for long period of time. He feels that the job market in Canada is only for a certain people of white community. This racial discrimination is at this following observation:

'I am afraid, Nurdin,' Mr. Rogers said, 'We gave the job to someone else'

Nurdin exploded, 'But my experience! I know shoes, I can give references.'

'I am sorry, there were many applicants.' I know I do not have Canadian experience,' he breathed hotly and with emotion on the phone,' but how I get Canadian experience if you don't give me a chance? I have sold shoes for eight years! Eight years- 'perhaps you were overqualified, sir' (48NL).

One day when Nurdin was wrapping up his work in the Ontario Addiction Centre, his hand forward for help but unfortunately he was arrested with the charge of sexually assaulting this white woman. Here we see that white woman is abusing a black. Therefore Nurdin feels inferior about his black race. At the same time he hates white people in Canada and said 'Mis shall i call a doctor?'(178NL)

Meanwhile the discrimination of race based on colour is also presented in the following lines:

'The Black kicked us out, now the whites will do the same ...

Where do we go from here?'(103NL).

This shows that Vassanji has presented racial discrimination in the above lines. Here the colour discrimination as black, white or brown is verily described. It suggests that the major characters are of confusion about their roles in an alien land. The African people are abused verily for their racial identity.

In the third chapter of the novel, the racial discrimination is well explained, when the Lalani's left for new land Canada. In the London airport, Lalani was interviewed and abused for he was not a white man.

therefore the protagonist throws out his anger by his words.

'This way, sir, madam....' and onto a departing air Canada plane. 'The bastards,' Nurdin sobbed 'The bastards the polite British, even when running a noose round your neck, you know how they addressed you back home. (34NL)

It is observed that Nurdin is badly treated in the airport for his black and brown race. But it changed when he reached the Canadian airport. It pushed to the great confusion of the treatment based on colour. The white ignored in London, but the white in Canada welcomed with politeness experiencing this crisis, Nuredin feels fear and distressed about his role in the new land. It is well observed in the following words of Nurdin:

'In Montreal, The immigration official smiled genially at them. 'Welcome to Canada!'

Finally, someone welcoming you, a white man welcoming you. (34NL)

After the death of Hazi Lalani, the political scenario changed in East Africa. It became independent. The black came into the power, therefore the age of white domination came to an end. As Indian people did not belong to either group, neither whites nor blacks- they were badly treated with discrimination. It resulted in the racial identity crisis of the Lalani's family. Since they were from India, the dominated black community sent out the Indians from East Africa. It is another consequence of racial discrimination.

The black and horrible face of discrimination is evident in the incidents that take place in the subway tunnel three white youths attack Ismail, an Asian immigrant from Dar esSalaam. They joyfully abuse him. Showing to the package of meat pieces, they shout 'what do you have there, Paki? Hey, hey? Paki-Paki-Paki.' (95-96NL) They punch him in the stomach. There are three youths force their domination over others. They have feelings of superiority, because they are born whites. They want that people around them should accept the superiority of their colour.

No New Land also describes the theme of racial discrimination in a few incidents. Nanji, Nurdin's neighbour and confident, faces racial discrimination on many occasions while going in a street car. No body from white community sits with him even when all the seats are occupied and some passengers are standing. Meanwhile, Nanji, a young immigrant professor, also suffers from racial discrimination. Often returning from the university by bus, Nanji sits alone on theseat. Many passengers stand but donot sit near him and all the way Nanji thinks about racism: 'Racism, the word kept intruding his mind and kept pushing it back on what basis racism? It could be my face, dark, brooding, scowling and cratered. (93NL)

The whole event involve attitudinal problem in the context. The whites in their false sense of superiority have come to believe that every Black is a coolie, a rapist. Every act of a black is suspected in their eyes. Nurdin sadly remembers:

'He had heard long ago that in America you didn't touch a person even if they were dying and needed help, why should Canada be different. He should have known better. (181NL)

Thus, the theme of racial discrimination is well explained and observed here. For those who migrated from Africa to Canada faced racial abuse with discrimination. Though the colonial history shows us many examples of such discrimination, the incidents drawn by Vassanji in this novel is with outstanding narration. It presents from the beginning to the end with racial discrimination on major characters. They have well illustrated superiority of European white peoples and inferiority of black and brown peoples with colonial background.

The effects of discrimination of race based on colour and physical features of people are well described and analysed by Vassanji in this novel. After the migration from Africa to the alien nation, these Black and Brown people knew that the alien land Canada is not a New Land for them. Because they experienced the same racial discrimination in the foreign land.

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