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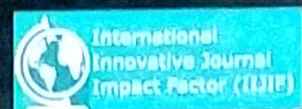
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Indo-Fijian Diasporic Literature and Satendra Nandan

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Abstract:

Recently, Diaspora and Diaspora literature have been at the centre of discussion in contemporary literary scenario. Diaspora possesses its own dynamic structures and synthesis, growth and formulations, expression and expansion. In the postmodern context, the term has assumed and acquired a variety of views and connotations. Because of globalization and capitalism, Indians migrated to various countries. India is a country having the second largest Diaspora in the entire world. Estimated over 25 million overseas Indian community is the strongest side of Indian culture and heritage. Diaspora or expatriate writing occupies a prominent place in a country's literary traditions. Fiji, the island country also possesses a large number of overseas Indians, who poured their blood to build their identity. This paper focuses on the traumas and struggles of the Indians in Fiji. Satendra Nandan, the poet and politician, captures the Indian sentiment in his poetry and novel. [Key words: Diaspora literature, Transnationalism, Indo-Fijians, Identity, Exile, trauma, race]

Introduction:

In recent times, the word *Diaspora* has been used to categorize peoples and communities existing or ever expanding away from their country of origin. Diaspora possesses its own dynamic structures and synthesis, growth and formulations, expression and expansion. In the postmodern context, the term has assumed and acquired a variety of views and connotations. Nowadays, the term emerged as a new discipline of transnational studies, providing new subjects of inquiry and implications. These communities emerged and evolved as a global power, making numerous success stories in their respective countries; are now a vital and regenerating force of a country. Nowadays, diasporic studies and communities have become an integral part of human civilization. In this very context, the word suggests situations in which a large number of caste and communities shares one common aspect of national, religious, or ethnic identity, despite their existence as a distinct minority living in a host society or country. Diaspora, the word also applicable to those dislocated group of people who cut off from their motherland or geographical centre of origin and relocated in one or more nation states or countries. It represents people of ethnic population forced or induced to leave their original ethnic abode/ homelands; being dispersed throughout the other parts of the world and the resultant developments in their dispersed state and culture.

Diaspora: The Term Defined:

The word *Diaspora* is originated from the Greek term, '*diaspeiro*'. The word is a combination of two different words, '*dia*' which means 'between', 'through', or 'across', and '*speiro*' means to sow, scatter. Historically, the word *Diaspora* was first used by the Greeks for the citizens of the Greece, who "migrated and settled in the newly conquered territory. But this changed its original meaning when *The Old Testament* was translated into the Greek language and it began to refer particularly to the Greek-speaking Jewish population exiled first from the Judea in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians and then from 136 A.D. by the Romans."¹ In *Sociology of Diaspora: A Reader*, the word explained as:

Diaspora is derived from the Greek word *dia* (through or over) and *speiro* (dispersal or sow) originally associated with the dispersal of the Jewish people in 6th century B.C. The word 'diaspora' over the years acquired a more expanded meaning beyond the original connotations of violence, catastrophe, alienation, loss, exile, and return. Ordinary usage of the word today would include reference to a common ancestral homeland, voluntary or involuntary migration, and a sense of separateness and marginality in the country of residence.²

Subsequently, the word became associated completely with the Jewish history. As a sociological and theoretical ideology, diaspora has its roots in ancient Jewish exodus. Thus, the word is related strongly with the Greek-speaking Jewish people in reference to their exile and expulsion from the holy land and consequent dispersion. Thus, we can say that the word itself was first become prevalent to suggest the traumatic experience and subjugation of the Jews who were rendered homeless especially after the historical Babylonian conquests.

The history of the world is full of such events of mass migration, expulsion and exile. Nowadays, diaspora refers to the major historical movements or displacements, many of them involuntary such as forced expulsion of the Armenian people by the Turks in the 20th century and Africans by Europeans during 400 years of Slave Trade. In modern times, the same word can be applied to the displaced, dislocated, people who have been uprooted or exiled from their homeland due to variety of reasons. "Other dispersions of populations may also be called diasporas, even if the migrations were to some extent voluntary as in the case of Chinese diaspora."³ The word with capitalization is used for the migration of the Jewish people while the same word without capitalization refers the migration process of other ethnic groups and communities. *The Online Encyclopedia of Britannica* defines:

Diaspora, the word suggests Jewish communities scattered in exile outside Palestine or present day Israel. Although the term refers to the physical dispersal of Jews throughout the world, it also carries religious, philosophical, political, and eschatological connotations.⁴

According to Tololyan, the term Diaspora also includes people who left their land for variety of reasons. Stressing the classical and traditional aspect of Diaspora, Khachig Tololyan writes that the term diaspora, "was understood as a social formation engendered by catastrophic violence or, at the very least, by coerced expulsion from a homeland, followed by settlement in other countries and among alien host societies, and crucially, crapped by generations of survival as a distinct community that worked hard to maintain its old identity or to create new ones that sustained its difference from the host society."⁵

There are ample examples in our ancient scriptures and chronicles that Sufis, sages and monks have expressed their diasporic conditions in religious songs, *dohas* and *Pada*. In the Great Indian traditional epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, the major characters face the experiences of exile, struggle and suffering. Rama, the prince of Ayodhya with his wife, Sita and Brother, Laxman had to spend 14 years of his life in exile, while the Pandvas had to suffer exile for 13 years. So, Diaspora involves personal feelings where the person feels loss of home, and identity.

Indians in Fiji:

The indentured migration from India to many distant plantations and colonies was introduced due to the abolition of African slave trade in 1834. In 1874, when Fiji became a British Crown colony, Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon, Fiji's first Governor implemented the growing of sugar to enrich the Fijian economy. Therefore, he invited Colonial Sugar Refining Company [CSR] from Australia in 1882 to

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Fiji. But indigenous Fijians wanted to protect their culture and traditions, so they were not willing to work on the sugar plantations and thus prevent themselves from colonial exploitation. Before coming to Fiji, Governor Gordon had been the governor of Trinidad and Mauritius. In these countries, he had witnessed the success of the Indian labourers and the fruitfulness of Indian Indenture system. Therefore, he decided to implement the same to work on the Fiji's sugar cane plantations. The Indian labour was cheap, effective, and easily acquired. Gordon turned to India for a cheap and reliable source of labour and "on 15 May 1879, the *Leonidas* a ship landed at Levuka in Fiji bringing the first shipload of 463 labourers from India."⁶ These Indian labourers came under an agreement, which they called 'gimit' and those who signed it were termed as 'Gimitiyas'. The 'gimit' or 'agreement' was for five years, during which a gimitiya would have expected to work and perform various tasks related to sugar cane and agriculture.

They would return to India after the end of their agreement at their own expense or at the Government's expense if he or she complete another five years of work. When the Indian Indenture system ceased, some 60,963 men, women, and children had been transported to the Fiji Islands.⁷

Literature of Indo-Fijian Diaspora: The history of Indo-Fijian literature is a new phenomenon in the contemporary literature. The Indo-Fijian literature is around forty years old, which mainly constitute poetry, fiction, essays, and short stories. When Fiji became an independent nation, it gave birth to the rapid increase of written literature. Dislocation and displacement has forced these writers to emphasize a sense of fragmentation and nostalgia in their writings. In this sense, we can say that Indians have enriched the literature of the South Pacific region by their pen and pathos. Sudesh Mishra calls this category of writers "a subaltern knowledge category"⁸ which grows out of the indenture past.

The third generation or descendents of these Gimitiyas have written the records and chronicles of their anguished ancestors, emphasizing their different 'origins'. Their literary masterpieces gave rise to their rebellious spirit, their suffering, and above all feeling of exile and nostalgia. There is a class or group of writers, who are the fateful descendents of the gimitiya legacy and though living outside India, they not only remembers their motherland after a span of years but also expresses their feeling through words. Some new generation diasporic writers effectively expressed the tragedies of their ancestors, making it as the central narrative of their works. The great writers who expressed the deaths and lives of their forgotten fathers are; Totaram Sanadhya, Subramani, Sudesh Mishra, Raymond Pillai, Dr. Vijay Mishra, Dr. Satendra Nandan, Ahmed Ali, Brij Lal, Prof. Vijay Naidu. The Indo-Fijian literature is full of varieties; short stories, essays, novel, and poems were written in plenty by the prominent Indo-Fijian writers, using English or Fiji Hindi as their medium. Exile, nostalgia, and twice-banishment are the general theme of these writers. Dr. Viajy Mishra uses the phrase, 'Gimit ideology' to suggest the expressions and descriptions of the histories by the Indo-Fijian writers. In this way, the term gimit ideology suggests the self-consciousness of Indo-Fijian writers of their indenture past.

All the Indo-Fijian writers make their narratives on their past gimit history. Their ancestors' horrible experiences force them to make haunting expressions in which we confronts heart-tormenting episodes of exile, displacement, gullible tricks and temptations of recruiting agents, pangs of separation through crossing *kala pani*, savage life in dark lines/*bhut* lane, barbarity and cruelties of the Overseers etc. The deracinating Indian Indenture experience first received its formal expression in Totaram Sanadhya (1876-1947)'s work *My Twenty One Years in Fiji*. In this autobiographical book, Totaram who was himself a gimitiya, reveals realistically, the pathetic and deplorable conditions of the Indian Gimitiyas in Fiji, working there under the Indian Indenture system. This book can be

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called an epoch-making event in the history of the Indo-Fijian literature. The struggle for expression in Fiji produced many notable Indian writers. Dr. Vijay Mishra, Dr. Satendra Nandan, Subramani, Dr. Brij.V. Lal, Ahemad Ali, Vijay Naidu, Sudesh Mishra and Raymond Pillai are the best known and established writers of Fiji. Kamlesh Sharma, Mohit Prasad, Kavita Nandan, Anurag Subramani, Shalini Akil, Sunil Bhan and Satish Rai are among the emerging writers of Fiji.

Three predominant writers Raymond Pillai, Subramani and Satendra Nandan can be called three pillars of Indo-Fijian diasporic literature. Raymond Pillai and Subramani's short stories in English can be considered the first published works in Fiji, in early 1970s. These writers not only provided the theme of exile and suffering but also gave voice to the exilic experiences of the Indians. They also realistically presented the contemporary Fijian political and social life. In this sense, they can be called the moral monitors of the age.

Dr. Satendra Nandan: The Poet and The Politician: Dr. Satendra Nandan is one of the writers of Indo-Fijian literature. His contribution includes novel, poetry, critical essays, and articles. He is twice uprooted Indian diasporic writer of girmitya origin. He always provides great works, narrating themes of double migration and exile. He, through his magnificent works wants to thematize the basic problems of race, culture, identity, and exile in Indo-Fijian community. Satendra Nandan's poetical and prose works give voice to the predicamental state of nationless Indo-Fijian Diaspora. Dr. Satendra Nandan's works proved milestone in the history of Indo-Fijian literature. His prose as well as poems demands and raises questions of identity and status for the Indo-Fijians. Nandan's writing becomes a veritable symbol for the expression of the travails and trammels that people of Indian diaspora faced in Fiji. According to Vijendra kumar:

Nandan is a literary genius and master wordsmith. He writes with great passion and his powerful language is capable of moving one's soul. He is able to connect with the reader with the ease of a magician. The elegance of his language and the serenity of his thoughts are captivating.⁹ His prose as well as poetry is the cries for the restoration, recognition, and reestablishment of the equality and justice of the Indo-Fijian Diaspora.

Dr. Satendra Nandan develops an abiding interest in the humanism and equality of races that assumes a powerful cogency and centrality in his works. Nandan's conviction in the Indian view and way of life doesn't veer in the vicissitudes of his life. From the very beginning of his career, Nandan had been a firm voice of Indian-Fijian equality in Fiji. In Nandan's formative years, he extensively read Naipaul, Rushdie, Patrick White whose diasporic writing not only shaped his diasporic consciousness but also from whom he is reported to have drawn his magnificent creative and artistic vision. Nandan's works and his life are so intermingled at every point that it becomes difficult to by-pass this haunting strain. A repeated sequence of influences of both Indians and Fijian way of life and writings of major diasporic writers transformed Nandan into a formidable and conspicuous voice of Indo-Fijian diaspora and its literature.

Satendra Nandan's novel *The Wounded Sea* is colossal work based on the writer's consciousness of past history. It was published in the year 1991. The novel is a masterpiece and captures the truthful account of the coup and its consequences. The enigmatic nature of Fiji politics and resultant social-political crisis gets reflected in this novel. *The Wounded Sea* also can be judged as a socio-political text in which we find a country's tormenting and chaotic political-social upheavals. His collection of thirteen insightful essays *Fiji: Paradise in Pieces* gives a deeper illumination of Indian life and its values in Fiji during the turbulent era of 1987 coup. Nandan's work on the whole provides a sense of respect and empowerment in a society that denies the individual's voice and exposes them to different forces like race, ethnicity, personal betrayal and violence. Satendra Nandan's another conspicuous

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work; *Between The Lines: Selected Prose 1978-2008* is a valuable record of his diasporic consciousness and his Fiji experience. It covers the period between 1978 and 2008, mainly contains his speeches, essays and poems which reveals the pathos and agony of dislocation under colonialism. In this book, I have tried to show that Diaspora and diasporic consciousness plays a significant role in the formation of a writer's identity, life, career and writing. Dr. Satendra Nandan, whose academic career and literary achievement can be seen as an indispensable part of the socio-political changes, it is also a part of a generation that had to suffer immense problems that resulted from racism and colonialism. The critical study of his diasporic consciousness in his works reveals how the diasporic sensibility or the trope of uprootedness can not only becomes a very useful tool for the self-expression but also becomes an exclusive analysis of the diasporic spaces, in Fiji. In this sense, Nandan not only describes his own personal saga from a village boy to a parliamentarian but also describes forgotten voyage of the Girmitiyas. The study of diasporic writers like Satendra Nandan shows us that how their life and literature are shaped and moulded by the socio-political changes of the time. For a diasporic writer, thus it becomes necessary to recreate his own home, space through writing. Along with Subramani and Raymond Pillai, he can be considered one of the pioneers of Indo-Fijian diasporic literature. He has immensely contributed to the breaking down the shackles of orthodoxy and racism. He liberated and inspired the Indian community to express their agonies, longings and love for a country. His poetry reflects his restlessness as a sensitive man residing in racial state. He will remain the champion who fought against the system for the cause of the Indians, their representations and identity. He raises his vigorous voice against the tyrannies of racism and inequality. He makes a skillful use of satire in his poems and prose, which becomes a potent weapon to fight against conservative political norms. The tone of hatred, resentment and anguish in his poems shows his deep sense of betrayal and shock. In this way, he can be rightly considered as a strong and vehement humanist and activist. He is a socially committed writer who tries to reestablish and reconstruct the social, ethical, and moral values in society. He advocates the Gandhian principles of peace, equality, freedom, and justice. He also believes in freedom of expression. He believes that one should express elaborately the struggles and traumas of life, so that, the next generation can see the importance of their sacrifice. Nandan openly challenges the socio-political disparities and racial demarcation of the Indians. He also stresses the need of revising the constitutional frame work and restoring democratic environment in Fiji. He strongly condemns and satirizes racial, communal or ethnic violence. He spreads, through his literature, the principle of equality for the reestablishment of harmony, security, and peace in the conflict-ridden society.

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