Chapter – IV

Fictional World of M.G. Vassanji
As it is believed that the writer’s individual talent should be rooted in the tradition of a particular society and culture but the fact remains that the real strength of the modern literary imagination lies in its evocation of the individual’s predicament in terms of alienation, immigration, expatriation, exile, and his quest for identity. Thus the feeling of culturally and even linguistically estrangement as the individual feels about himself is reflected in the immigrant writers. The questions of his social, emotional, ethnic or cultural identity assumes mystic proportions in the works. When such writers try to identity differences within a culture two things happen. Firstly the difference serves to invigorate a culture, keeping it alive and secondly the difference simply preserves a static distribution of social power. The first opens opportunities for change; the second operates as catalyst for keeping cultures a part in the name of tradition, but with the effect of validating one tradition over another. Such dilemma of identity finds its articulation in many contemporary novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vassanji.

Moyez Ghulamhussein Vassanji, a Canada based novelist born in Nairobi, Kenya in 1950, was raised up in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania and left for further studies in United States. He completed his doctorate studies in Nuclear Physics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T). He later settled with his family in Toronto. At first he served as an expert in Nuclear Physics and from 1990 he engaged himself as a full time writer. He has won the prestigious Giller Prize twice for his two novels *The Book of Secrets* (1994) and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003). Vassanji has also bagged the 1989 Commonwealth Prize for the Best First Book *The Gunny*
Sack (1989) has one more work *No New Land* (1991) to his credit. A memoir and two collections of short stories as well as a biography of the late novelist, Mordechai Richler. Vassanji is Gujarati and English speaking writer. He writes about the frustrating experience of the East – Asian Africans, who were forced to migrate to the USA and Canada due to the anti-Asian movement of Idi Amin in Uganda. In all the novels Vassanji describes the immigrant experience of some Gujarati speaking people whose ancestors went away from India to East Africa and who themselves have been uprooted from there and presently settled in Canada.

In *No New Land* Vassanji is presenting a fictional account of the cycle of migration actually experienced by his own family. Nurdin Lalani, his wife Zera, daughter Fatima, and son Hanif, are forced to leave Dar-es-Salaam in the wake of the Idi Amin Crackdown on the Ugandans of the Asian origin which had its repercussions in the neighboring states of Kenya and Tanzania. By the lure of the safety and heavenly peace the Lalanis are drawn to Toronto. They are turned away from London following an immigration check at Heathrow airport. They tried their level best to adjust the new environment in Canada but it was not as simple as they thought earlier. This ordeal is borne in the heart of Nurdin, the head and protagonist of the novel. Initially he applies for scores of jobs but each time he was rejected on the base of lack of Canadian experience. He has wide experience of business of shoes at Dar as it was his family business. But in Canada he was rejected on the plea of being over experienced. In this way the dreams of the new Land are shattered.
Nurdin is haunted by his old – old values. Failure to find a decent job adds to his misery. He is even shocked to know that he is being implicated for assaulting a girl. At the end he manages to come out clean of this stigma. Ultimately Nurdin has to reconcile as a marginal man whom fate has decreed to live in two worlds. These worlds are not different but having antagonistic cultures.

This novel specifically is about the ethnic/ immigrant minority group of tenants at Sixty-nine Rosecliffe Park Drive in Don Hills. Their lives present the ironies the pathos and the hardships of having to live between two worlds neither of which promises hope of stability and happiness. As the narrator comments, You try different accents, practice idoms, buy shoes to raise your height, Deodorize yourself silly. (NNL 1992: 2)

One can find persistent memory of home on double level. One is when, Haji Lalani, Nurdin’s father and Missionary fondly recall as they sit on a bench in Dar and gaze at the Indian Ocean. And the other is the recurrent sense of futility captured in the epigraph, a quote from The City by C.P. Cavefy:

There’s no new land, my friend, no New Sea, for the city will follow you, In the same Streets you’ll wonder endlessly. (NNL 1992: 2)

The novel is concerned with the past as well as the present. The flashbacks dealing with life in Dar, the patterns of repetition of similar situations make this novel realistic. Haji Lalani being slapped for looking intently at a
German woman in Dar and his Son Nurdin Lalani later being accused of raping a woman in Toronto fuses the past and the present. Similarly Nurdin’s brother Akbar’s attraction for Sushila and got punished by his father is juxtaposed with Nurdin being tempted by Sushila in Toronto. The narrator aptly comments:

We are but creatures of our origins and however stalwartly we march, paving new roads, seeking new worlds, the ghosts from our pasts stand not far behind are not easily shaken off. (NNL 1992: 59-60)

Haji Lalani’s religious fanaticism, and blind adherence to an iron – discipline instilled by the colonizers which terrify the children and compelling them to leave home or to internalize a sense of guilt represents the past. Nurdin is tormented by his repressed guilt his marginalization in Toronto is in part a consequence of his past. Missionary’s Ishmael figure from Dar and a repository of communal wisdom took to exercise Nurdin’s past, heal his bruised feelings and give him hope for the future.

After the charge of rape was withdrawn and Nurdin’s – innocence was proved he thought more of his family and his job. He did not feel embarrassed now. He was a metamorphosed through this experience and became resolute to face the odds bravely. He became aware of his own potential. Now the CN Tower goads him on to the new path of his life – in the new culture and country. Now he does not want to return to the old idea
of home he is now aware of the new realities which he has to accept and change according to the need of time.

As compared to Nurdin Fatima Lalani his daughter has no qualms about her native place in Tanzania. She is ambitious of creating a commercial career in Canada. She wishes to be rich as quickly as possible. She waits eagerly for the admission letter on a Canadian, university so that she can determine her future life. Her parents are not deeply interested as they were not ready to get their daughter influenced by the corrupt western culture. As presented in the novel the mother in not ready to lose her son. ‘Their daughter they had perhaps lost already, but she would never lose Hanif No, not him’ (NNL 1992: 82)

The reason is people of the Asian origin in Canada do not want to lose their true identity, which is a mixture of Gujarati, Indian and Tanzanian. Vassanji here remarks aptly.

We are but creatures of our Origins, and however stalwartly we march forward, paving new roads, seeking new worlds, the ghost from our pasts stand not for behind and are not easily shaken off. (NNL 1992: 179-180)

The emotional attachment of the Tanzanian based Indian is another aspect revealed in this novel. The incident of two elderly men in Dar-es-Salam, at the Oyster Bay grazing at the Indian Ocean thinks
The expanse in front of them and what lay across it the land of their birth which they had left a long time ago, to which even the longing to return had been muted, although memories still persisted. (NNL 1992: 128)

Vassanji excellently merges history in his novel. In Uganda General Idi Amin overthrew an elected government. He claimed that Allah told him in a dream that the Asians in Africa were exploiters who did not want to integrate with the Africans, and, therefore, they had to go. Perforce, they left Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, and wound up in Canada and the United states. In this novel Haji Lalani founded Tanzania as a new country for his off springs but shortly after his death his son was forced to leave Tanzania in search of a new land. Firstly they wished to go to London from where they were turned down. So they reached Canada. Here all the immigrants’ dreamt of foreign goods and the high standards of living and got attracted towards the brightly shining city Toronto. But on reaching and really experiencing the dreams are all shattered into pieces. At the end they realized that Canada is similar as any new land which is populated by the people of French, English, African West Indian and Asian origins.

Vassanji is concerned with Indian living in East Africa and their further migration to Canada in this novel. He is also concerned with how those migrations affect the lives of his immigrants. Same way he presents the vivid differences in the climatic changes the immigrants feel. In Canada the winter is very severe and harsh for the African – Asians. There is a big atmospheric difference in Dar it is 40° C in summer and in Toronto it 20° C in winter. It
takes time to get adapted to the new climatic differences. Still the Tanzanians admire the first snowfall they witness in Canada.

And when it’s showing there in the nigh, softly, silently, whitely, you wonder if it’s not a childish Christmas card you are dreaming. (NNL 1992: 33)

The embarrassing incident of Esmail, a Tanzanian immigrant from Dar, who got violent beating by three white Canadian boys reminds of racial discrimination prevailing among the natives and the immigrants. Nanji who witnessed the whole incident silently thought of insecurity in spite of their struggle to get adapted to the new land. But their helplessness is such that they are to stay still there. The change in the food habits is another grave problem they face. Tanzanian Muslims are not supposed to eat pork. One day Nurdin unknowingly took a bite from Romesh his fellow worker’s lunch. Through the general attitude of the Muslim immigrants in Canada Vassanji comments.

Slowly the bestial traits – cruelty and promiscuity in one word godlessness –overcome you. And you became, morally, like them. The Canadian (NNL 1992: 170-171)

Nurdin Lalani, the protagonist, also encounters grave conflicts between him and the Canadian society. His difficulty ‘Negotiating (…) individual and collecting responses to dislocation and change’ (NNL 1992: 128)
Lalani who is confronted to the altogether different culture that of Asian and African has to define his hybrid identity Vassanji has used the character of Lalani to analyze the issue of the individual versus society. In the context of immigration, even it can be said that the novelist has split his books into two, one the old ethnic world and the other the experience of the community and especially Nurdin and his family in Canada.

Fatima, the seventeen year old daughter of Nurdin is brought up in Canada. She considers herself as second generation Canadian immigrant. She is the crucial character she wants to become rich and successful and wants to grasp all the opportunities the new land offers her. She is the character who is not caught between the two worlds.

Zera, the wife of Nurdin is another typical character though she is not caught between the two worlds, she rejects the mindset and influences of the host country and retains entirely the mindset and values of the homeland (Tanzania). She never chooses to acculturate into the foreign culture but she enjoys her traditional and religious private world at home and among other conservative members of the Shamsis of Toronto.

The one who stands in between the two worlds is Nurdin Lalani. His life is cradling in between Dar es Salaam and Toronto. Dar is the places where his ethnicity and traditions are anchored. And Dar is the place where he married Zera in a traditional, religious Shamsi way whereas Toronto and its neighborhood of Don Mills is the Place, of modernity and cosmopolitanism. Canada as a place of multiculturalism as its state policy is full of challenges.
Many issues such as racial discrimination and other forms of prejudices hinder the immigrants and ultimately work against their optimism.

Migration to the western world is always considered as a step towards success and prosperity in life. This seems the main theme of Vassanji in *No New Land*. Nurdin Lalani is the example who has to suffer humiliation as he searches for a job. He is repeatedly asked for Canadian Experience. Even racism plays its role in acquiring the job. Because of this and many other social challenges the protagonist steadily descends into depression. His inner conflicts increase, He started to question. And doubt himself and his personalities ‘When does a man beings torot?’ (NNL 1992:134) He continues with menial jobs to survive and to keep up his family. In this struggle he is edged to the edges of society, feeling useless, depressed alienated and humiliated.

At the end of the novel Lalani himself became a victim of a false racist accusation that highlights the hostile atmosphere he has experienced in the new land. He is accused of having attempted to rape a Portuguese – Canadian woman. Though Lalani has not even touched the girl he is immediately got arrested and even suspected of other crimes that were prevailing in the city. His colleagues, natives of the country, shows that their image of the post colonial immigrants is one based on stereotypes:

I’m not going to serve this rapist! She said, turning away. I thought in this country a man was innocent until proved guilty, said Romesh, to no one in Particular. Where he comes from,
both his hands would have been chopped off announced Mrs. Broadbent. (NNL 1992: 180)

It is clearly and importantly suggested through this incident that the acts of racism are not targeted against Lalani as an individual rather it is to the immigrant as a figure, a community of post-colonial immigrants. There is a high amount of stereotypes and prejudices of all sorts that are aimed in the Canadian Society, against a racially different and visible minority represented by the likes of Lalani. So while immigrant, Culture, Isolated and minimized the individual who embodies it becomes marginalized.

Shamsi Community plays very vital role in Lalani as an individual. Community plays double role one side it is very useful to its members by providing help lines and social structures. But on the other side it is hindering the necessary process of negotiation with the host culture. It is even stated that

In the novel the community almost suffocates the individual and Nurdin never really appears in front of us. (NNL 1992:152)

Lalani is constantly influenced by a modern and secular lifestyle and this affects his personality and behavior as a man of Shamsi and African upbringing. His external challenges get internalized and this marks the degeneration of his character. He even feels that he cannot reconcile with his religious beliefs he gets caught in the inner psychological turmoil. This was
doubled by his wife’s hostile attitude and Nurdin’s strict and conservative upbringing.

Change in Nurdin is visible after he got a stable job at the hospital with the help of a cosmopolitan and liberal immigrant friend Romesh. A Muslim by faith tries pork in a Hot Dog not willingly but that of his friend’s insist, this is the first get of many to come signifying a changing Nurdin. He is haunted by the thoughts of the piece of pig inside his body as per the saying Eat pig and become pig. This signifies that the protagonist who had retained the values and mind of his home country was now slowly, unwillingly changing in the new environment He started consuming beer, visiting sex peep show shops and ultimately starts an affair outside his marriage with another woman. Here one can recall the emotion of the protagonist when they flew over Egypt ‘Felt a certain foreboding; felt vaguely that he was making a crossing, that there would be no return’ (NNL 1992: 35)

Paradoxically although all the immigrants’ characters depicted in this novel face many hardships in Canada and have deep memories of Dar they never thought of going back to East Africa. Only one character the baker Esmail the victim of racism, moves back to the old city and finds its peace there. The Shamsis form a microcosm of their Tanzanian community at the Don Mills – Rosediffe Park Complex. Maintaining their ethnic identity these small group of immigrants continue to live like in their former countries and form their own heaven, separated from the outside world. Here in this part of Canada the Shamsis as a Community attempt to cling to their old style of living, to their old world, and have thus
Recreated their community life in, Toronto; the mosques, the neighborhoods, the clubs and the associations (NNL 1992:135)

In *The Gunny Sack* M.G. Vassanji tracks the lineage of small Cutchi speaking Shamsi Community.

The title suggests is a delightful pot pourri of several narratives and characters of mixed antecedents. According to the Indian literary discourse for traditional Diaspora:

The gunny sack means with memorabilia like a first fu soil of their homeland and their religious texts like the Ramacharitmanas or Hanuman Chalisa as a Mirror (Singh 2007: 152)

The gunny sack when opened bought out traces of the old land and also there realization that new land is no new but fraught with problems, pressure and perils of existences. It also involves journey from one point to the other from point of origin to that of destination.

The novel is the repository of the collective consciousness of several Asian African such as Dhanji Govindji, Ji Bai, Kulsum and others. Initially Vassanji thanks to the Ontario Arts Council and Multiculturalism Directorate (Canada) for assistance in publishing the novel. In the second place the non – English words, mostly in Swahili and Cutchi – Gujarati, are
intended to be integral to the text. Thirdly, the keynote of the novel is struck by W.B. yeast’s line form *Vacillation* ‘Let all things pass away’

The author very intelligently chooses the word *sea* to describe the novel as this novel though it maintains the tradition of the European realistic novel it relates to the Indian epic tradition of the Mahabharata and the Kathasaritsagar. Here Kathasari Sagar means sea/ocean of stories by mingling of several streams of narrative. Vassanji’s novel conforms to that description as it mingle the Indian–Gujarati strains with the Zanzibari–Kenyan–Tanzanian elements of African origin. Then this cocktail was further added with Toronto mixture a major centre of immigrant cultures in Canada. The novel offers a skilful blend of tragedy and comedy that everything comes to the reader unexpectedly.

The novel is a collective memory of a small overseas East–African Community in Canada, the Shamsi. The Shamsis are originally the Gujarati followers of Shamas Pir. He promised his disciples that a savior from the west will come to save them.

Now it seemed to some that he had come, not a pir, but a Pierre, Trudeau of Canada, promising a cold El dorado in the north. He will take us, they said, as he took the Ugandans, leave it to Pierre True-do (GS 1989: 248-49)

This collective memory of the central Shamsi family is held together by Ji Bai. She comes here as a teenager from a remote village in Gujarat to
become the matriarch of a wide – spread clan in East Africa. Memory, Ji Bai said, is this gunny sack. (GS 1989: 5)

She carried her gunny sack wherever she went. And after her death the flow of narratives pour out of the mementos preserved in the sack. Ji-Bai is the narrator – protagonist and the chief inspiration of Salim Juma. He calls him endearingly Shehrbanoo – Shehru for short. This novel also describes the logic behind the long list of names among the descendants of Dhanji Govindji. He came to the land of Zanzibar across the Arabian Sea aspiring for wealth and success. Vassanji writes of him.

Dhanji Govindji. How much lies burned in a name…. Dhan, wealth2, Govind, the Cowherd. Butter thief gopi – seducer, dark Krishna. A name as Banya in its aspiration for wealth as Hindu; yet gloriously, unabashedly, Muslim. For the esoteric sect of the Shamsis there was no difference (GS 1989: 73)

Sona, the scholarly brother of Kala (Salim Juma) discovers among other things in Ji Bai’s sack, three pad – locked books in Devangari, of which the Gujarati script is only one example. Thus emerges the spicy mass of memory.

African experience confined to the East – African coastal regions like Zanzibar, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya is also included in a large slice in the novel. Along with the real life locations looms the dark and mysterious presence of the vast continent. In Africa the British and the Germans are
shown fighting for possessing the land. The native people are the useless once get trampled upon, but they are persistent and keep growing and proliferating. Salim Juma who is a school going boy at Dar-es-Salam perceives the subtle changes that come in the sleeping continent. Even the curriculum changes From Charles Dickens and John Buchnan to Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. From a young boy’s point of view the definition of Independence is the replacement of flag i.e. the replacement of red, white and blue Union Jack by green black and gold flag of Tanzania.

The game of *Antakshri* that the women play in leisure, reverberates in the Muslim prayers, the Hindu bhajans of Mad Mitha, etc are the portrayal of the transplanted Indian Gujarati identity. The Hindu concept of Karma, soul and its in carnations, its rebirth and cycle of sins and merits etc are the memories of the Gujarati – Muslims of Tanzania. Ji-bai the daughter in law of Dhanji Govindji and the daughter of Gujarat, left her native as young bride to follow the footsteps of her husband. She has the gunny sack of her colourful memories to preserve for posterity the record of what she and her descendants go through in Africa. Salim Jumas Mother Kulsum, observes the Indian traditions when she gives birth to her first child a daughter named Begum, who was nicknamed *Victoria*.

Kulsum had gone without meat for the nine months, and not until every girl in the girls, school had been fed pilau and sweets, not until kulsum had gone to the mosque, placing coconut and shilling….. on very step as she descended and came home did she touch meat. (GS 1989: 185)
Hindu and Muslim traditions harmonized in an alien land. Kulsum even feels constrained to label the gods and goddesses orthodox and unorthodox. Ji-Bai learns her art of healing from her sister-in-law on the eve of Hindu Diwali and yet the prayers are all Ayats from the Quran. Along with such religious tolerance inter-racial matrimony is also advocated in the novel. Vassanji narrates: ‘When people of two races combine, beautiful children are born with the virtues of both races’ (GS 1989: 204)

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

I should have come with a small bag, a rucksack. Instead I came with ladoos, Jelebis, Chevdo, Toilet paper, A Woolen suit (GS 1989: 208)

Another incident where Salim Juma while doing his stint at the National Service was welcomed at the Indian Mukhi’s house in a village. He comments on this episode,

One takes the sweetness of Indian girls for granted – the playful even mocking, innocence that evokes tender feelings inside you and you forget how possessive you feel towards them. (GS 1989: 9)
Such examples of Indianness can be multiplied the transaction of US Dollar is referred to as *Ibrahim Bhai* just because it bears the picture of President Abraham Lincoln. A Son studying in USA writes to his mother a letter in Gujarati. The thugs in a godown in Nairobi resemble the Bombay film villains. The most typical of India the advice given by the parents to the daughter during the farewell;

Don’t let me down Ji Bai Do anything to bring shame upon yourself. Never walk out alone. Don’t speak of your home outside the four walls. Always cover your family’s shame. Don’t come back without your husband’s permission. (GS 1989: 52)

Along with the Indian consciousness important element of the novel is the immigrant experience in East Africa and Canada.

Governments may come and go but the immigrants only concern is the security of their families, their trade and savings. (GS 1989: 172)

One by one the new generation of young boys and girls leave for foreign lands in search of better prospects. When Yasmin, a cousin of Salim Juma departs for London someone said,

Okay. She’s gone, Good buy, Dar, Good morning, London, She’ll be there in the morning (GS 1989: 40)
It was the fate of most of the young generation of the Asians in East Africa. Finally the rise of Idi Amin in Uganda and the reign of terror among the people of Asian origin they went away from East Africa to England, to the USA to Canada. This is how the expansion of the Gunny sack a veritable cocktail is crated. Among the many immortal lessons of the novel the lesson that narrates that there are no heroes in history and politics is the most remarkable one.

The small stores of East Africa deal in identity management the clothes sold in these stores denote the tradition.

There are three Indian stores and one Arab. The largest is two stores in one, selling cloth on one side, general produces on the other. The cloth store appears dark from the brilliant, sunny outside. Inside rolls and rolls of cloth standing upright or lying on sholves; Khangas of all colors hang, neatly, partly folded, from wooden beams and pipes hanging from the ceiling; khaki and black shorts clipped to a board in two row a for display, frocks hanging from a rack, a clump of baby knickers and bras hand – sewn and brought in from the city. P.T. Samji says the Coca Cola board outside. (Sharrad 2004: 25)

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

Almost all the post colonial migrant to the First world are subjected in the new world to a set of racialized discourses of nation and essentially termed as Africans or Asian or Paki. Living in these physical and cultural ghettos they feel rootless or detached. Such detachment can be seen in the characters in *The Gunny Sack*. They are living on the fringes of the host society and dreaming of home, replete with intimate memories and feelings of emotional affiliations. The narrator sums up the lives of the Indian traders suggesting the amount of trading of immigrant peoples, loyalty to a land or a government, always loudly professed is a trait one can normally look for in vain. Their selfish motif of self-survival, self-survival, separations, depressions, losses are never written or narrated in any nationalistic politics but are recorded in the creative genius of the immigrant writers;

Rosemary Marangoly George considerers *The Gunny Sack* as work of immigrant genre having the characteristics of disregarding national schemes, the use of multigenerational cast of characters, a typical narrative tendency, full of repetitions and echoes and above all

A curiously detached reading of the experience of homelessness which is compensated for by an excessive use of the metaphor of luggage, both spiritual and material (George 1996: 35)
Migrancy and writing goes hand in hand particularly with the one-way journey and yet the journey must and somewhere. The narrator who is a weary traveler wants to be free from prison called house of the past and from the maze of the narratives. The Scheherazade must be made to sleep, forever. So at the end of the novel it is narrated.

She lies on the floor, crumpled, her throat cut guts spilled, blood on the floor... Thus the disposition of the past to be remembered and acknowledged in only party understood, without the baggage of Paraphernalia (GS 1989: 268)

The past now begins to haunt Kala Juma as a shadow. The letters of Aminas, the ex-lover and the daughter feels him with a feeling of reunion. Therefore Kala Juma Makes a poetical charge addressed to the daughter who has become now a mother.

The running must stop now, Amina. The cycle of escape and rebirth, uprooting and regeneration must cease in me. Let this be the last runaway returned with one last quixotic dream. (GS 1989: 286)

Here “return” signifies two things one’s a fictional gesture of negotiating multiple identities and also desires of oneself refracted through the divides of place and time. See and also suggests the arrival at “home” located on the fringes of the first world host society.
Simon Lewis here aptly remarks

The characters of Vassanji’s or those of the Zanzibari writer Abdulrazak Gumah’s fiction are people doomed to live either as alienated natives in East Africa or Marginalized aliens in the first world cities and that they are peculiarly vested with “a non–identity which renders their various flights ever away from but never towards homes. (1999: 15)

In the novels of M.G. Vassanji protagonists of Indian origin are uprooted from their moorings and are expatriated to alien countries. Both novels are tragedies of bicultural experiences in their gruesome aspects.

The flashbacks dealing with life in Dar evince that the novel is as much concerned with the past as the present. Patterns of repetition, Sucha as Haji Lalani being slapped for looking intently at a German woman in Dar and his son later being accused of raping a woman in Toronto coalesce the past and the present, the private and the public, Similarly, the incident of Nurdin’s puritanical father whipping Akbar for writing a letter to Sushila juxtaposed with Nurdin being tempted by Sushiila in Toronto (who, coincidentally lives in the same neighborhood as the girl who accuses Nurdin of molesting her) suggest a deliberate undermining of the realism of the novel. The synchronic structure, as Kanaganayakam (1991: 57) observes succinctly, steers the Novel away from the present to the past, to areas of experience that lie beyond the immediate referential context.
Thus one can say *No New Land* is a seminal postcolonial novel that foregrounds the voice of the margins without apology or rancor. Problematizing our perception of nation and identity, it compels a reassessment of the standards that govern our vision of what constitutes the canon.

M.G. Vassanji’s remarkable novel *The Gunny Sack* about immigrant experience belongs perhaps, more with V.S. Naipau’s *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *The Satanic Verses* of Salman Rushdie than with the latter’s *Midnight’s Children*. 
Reference


Paul Sharrad, Fabricating Community; Local, National and Global in Three Indian novels; Online Research 2004.


(The subsequent references to the novel *No New Land* are mentioned in the body of the chapter, abridged as NNL)


(The subsequent references to the novel *The Gunny Sack* are mentioned in the body of the chapter, abridged as GS)

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