

Chapter 6

The Dangling Immigrant Seeking His Belonging

The In-Between World of Vikram Lall

The Indians in East Africa, not all of them, are the indentured labourers, and their descendants, who were brought in from India to get the Kenya-Uganda railways constructed. This railway system and other projects of the British Empire in Africa tempted the Indians from across the ocean, for they needed work to earn their livelihood. The British Empire in Africa offered them many more opportunities of making fortune and they took advantage of the situations prevailing there. In other words, the colonial order in East Africa provided the Indians with congenial conditions for their settlement in spite of the challenges posed by the harsh weather and terrifying terrain around. Their history in Africa has been aptly described in an article entitled “Asians of Africa,”

A combination of famines in India and plentiful opportunities for work in Africa prompted thousands of Indians to immigrate to east, central and southern Africa before the end of the nineteenth century. It was the British colonial interests that provided the opportunities for Indian immigration, particularly the building of the Uganda railway. Local African labour was considered unreliable, so the British government brought in about 32000 indentured labourers from India. The majority either died of diseases such as, blackwater fever or returned to India, but 7000 settled in East Africa. During the construction of the railway, some Indians began to come in as merchants and to establish *dukas*, which initially catered for fellow Indians. After the end of the railway construction, merchant immigration from India continued until the 1920's, by which time the entire retail trade of East Africa was monopolised by Indians. (everyculture.com)

It is a fact that the Indians of East Africa are not all railway coolies and labourers and their progeny. However the construction of the railways had been a significant temptation for Indian immigration to Africa. In the hinterland, particularly, the Indians worked as traders and small retailer shopkeepers. They also worked at many other posts in the colonial administration. They financed some of the projects of the Europeans in East Africa.

About the railway construction in East Africa during the British colonial rule, historical sources endorse the fact that such projects of imperial expansion and assertion in that region highly depended on the Indian labour. For instance, J. S. Mangat quotes Sir Winston Churchill in his book *A History of the Asians in East Africa: 1886 – 1945*: “It was by Indian labour that the one vital railway on which everything else depends was constructed. It is the Indian banker who supplies the larger part of the capital yet available . . .” (61). While laying railway tracks through semi-desert terrain, the highlands of central Kenya, the Great Rift Valley, swampy plains and across many water bodies, the Indian coolies had to suffer in plenty. They were struck by strange deadly diseases of tropical Africa and preyed by formidable lions of the forest. The lion stories so liked by the children in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* are the legacy of these labourers. It had been the lions of Tsavo who killed their pioneers to this land while building a railway bridge across the river. With all this loss of life and suffering, the railway line to Uganda was completed in 1903. As such, the soil of Africa also contains the blood of the Indian immigrants: it is red with the Indian blood also.

Vikram Lall and his family have been in Africa for three generations, not counting his own children; and the pioneer immigrant, his grandfather Anand Lall, originally from Peshawar of North West Frontier Province, now called Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa, in modern Pakistan, has stories of affiliations and emotions associated with the grand railway system of East Africa. These stories of labour and sacrifice have become integral part of the local culture of these Indians. And through these family anecdotes they negotiate their in-between identity and belonging in Africa. Exactly like components of culture, these historical and mythical narratives get transferred and come down to the succeeding generations. They form a ground in the history and culture of Africa where the Indians claim their (African) space. The Punjabi signatures engraved upon the iron channels of railway tracks laid in East Africa by Indian indentured labourers give way to that strong culture based on myths of belonging and association. Punjabi is originally an Indian language spoken in north-west India. Scripts in this language in Africa show the making of home in a far off place by these Indian labourers. The protagonist-narrator says, “We always believed in the story in our home. Our particular rail, according to my *dada*, was the one laid just before the signal box, outside the station. He had used acid and a nib of steel wire to etch his name. There was many a time during a visit to the station when we would stare in the direction of that rail, if not directly at it, in that very significant knowledge central to our existence” (15). The fact is that the Indians always looked toward the labour, sacrifice and suffering they bore with in the making of Africa. They have recourse to the work they did for developmental projects concerning economic, social and political sectors of the land, to negotiate their belonging and African identity. The immigrant has two facts to rely upon: the labour he has done for his new home; the time he has spent in his new home. The more both of these are, the stronger the immigrant’s claim for his new home is. Both of these factors are indicators of the immigrant’s labour, effort and strife that he has done in the ‘making’ of his new home. The narrator says,

The railway running from Mombasa [coastal Kenya] to Kampala [Uganda], proud “Permanent Way” of the British and “Gateway to the African Jewel”, was our claim to the land. Mile upon mile, rail next to thirty-foot rail, fishplate to follow fishplate, it had been laid by my grandfather and his fellow Punjabi labourers...the cast of characters in his tales was endless and of biblical variety – recruited from an assortment of towns in northwest India and brought to an alien, beautiful and wild country at the dawn of the twentieth century. Our people had sweated on it, had died on it: they had been carried away in their weary sleep or even wide awake by man-eating lions of magical ferocity and cunning, crushed under avalanches of blasted rock, speared and macheted as proxies of the whites by angry Kamba, Kikuyu and Nandi warriors, infected with malaria, sleeping sickness, elephantiasis, cholera; bitten by jiggers, scorpions, snakes and chameleons; and wounded in vicious fights with each other. (15–16)

The epithets “Permanent Way” and “Gateway to the African Jewel” contain the discourse of the importance and significance of this railway system. This 576 mile long line beginning at the coast of Kenya and going through “desert, bush and grassland into the lush fertile highlands of the Kikuyu, then through forest down the Rift Valley and back up to a height of eight thousand feet, before [descending] . . . gently and finally to the great lake Victoria-Nyanza” (16). This railway line opened the interior of Africa to the world; it connected the hinterland with the coast.

There are some questions to be answered and explored, like:

1. What was the prime motive of constructing railway line up to Uganda?

2. Who did actually the railway benefit in Africa?
3. Does Anand Lall represent the whole of the Indians in Africa?
4. Were the Indians in Africa all descendants of railway coolies?

As laid down in an article, 'Construction of the Kenya-Uganda Railway',

The British government was more interested in controlling Uganda. Exploitation of River Nile, whose source is Lake Victoria, was one of the major development plans laid down by European powers, Britain, France and Germany at the Berlin conference of 1886. Uganda being a landlocked region made it a difficult territory to administer. The British government needed a 'modern' means of transportation link to carry raw materials out of Uganda; manufactured goods from Britain back in, and generally ease access to this territory. The strategic reason behind construction of the railways was a means for the British to link Mombasa with her protectorate of Uganda. (enzimuseum.org)

Logically and convincingly, this could have been the prime motive for the construction of the railway. It must have been a grand strategic project of imperial and colonial expansion in Africa. It did facilitate the colonial powers to reach the inaccessible hinterland of Africa more easily and draw cotton and coffee out of it. And, that way they held more firmly their grip over the region; their stronghold expanded. It had been an extensive investment of colonial designs.

This is the point of view of the Africans that they use to counter and diminish the Indian claim for the land. Godwin Siundu contends in his research paper entitled 'The Unhomliness of Home: Asian Presence and Nation Formation in M. G. Vassanji's Works',

I hope to advance the view that unlike many other groups, the East African Asians find themselves in a situation where invoking history is more likely to undermine than strengthen their claims to East African countries as homes. Partly, this is due to their perceived privileges during colonialism which is essentially pegged to their contribution to the enrichment of colonialism in the region. But it is also because of the shifting meaning of home as defined and understood by the majority of East Africans, those widely seen as indigenous to the place. In other words the East African Asians' claims to the region as home are subject to the politics of marginality and centrality, as well as to other related forms of dialectics. (Siundu 15)

Godwin Siundu takes on the Asians very forcefully and considers them to be visible compatriots of colonial forces. He considers all of their ventures and enterprises to be in their own interest and in the interest of colonialism as the Scramble for Africa. According to him, "The completed railway line provided Britain with a key tool with which to assert their political and economic hold on the region and at the same time promised brighter economic prospects for the Asians who had taken part in its construction" (17). Godwin takes the argument further and holds that the Asians helped imperialism extend in the region and developed physical and economic infrastructure of colonialism. He says,

From the very beginning, then, the Asians played a role in the process of colonising the East African region from the point of view of the coloniser, notwithstanding the fact that they were themselves colonised peoples from other parts of the British Empire. With time, their position became precarious because, try as they could, they would

neither attain the authority of the colonising British nor the experience of extreme colonisation of the black Africans; thus acting as the very visible agents of imperialism. (17)

However, one can assume, or, at least, give thought to the point that indentured labourers from a colonised place brought in to construct a railway under the supervision of the colonising power, and of whom most died and returned home, would not have any strategic plans for future exploitation of the area. If the railway anyway benefited those labourers who stayed back in Africa, it would have been by chance, not by design. Yes, by all means, it was the colonial power that planned the railway route from the coast to the interior to develop infrastructure for further expansion of colonialism. And, the Indian labour helped it execute the plan.

As for the construction of the railway track to Uganda, Vassanji invokes history as the Indian immigrant in East Africa, and not as a political entity, as Godwin takes the Asians. As mentioned earlier, the immigrant has not much to rely on in his new home; he takes recourse to the effort and strife he has made in the making of his 'new home' at a new place. So Vassanji asserts the construction of the railway line from Mombasa to Kampala by his forefathers and highlights their miseries and sufferings they underwent during this project.

And, it is also a fact that the Indians gained privilege in the colonial Africa because they constructed the railway line for the British. The favour they obtained pushed the Blacks to the deep bottom of the society. Apart from political independence, they had no way to rise back from that position. So, if the colonised African viewed the Indian with an eye of suspicion and regarded him as the ally of the

coloniser, his perspective and perception would not be contrary to the situation prevailing.

Anand Lall, a railway coolie from Peshawar, speaking Punjabi, cannot represent the whole population of the Indians in East Africa. This is what some online sources have to say about the heterogeneous nature of the Indian community in East Africa:

The majority of Asians are not descendants of the workers who were brought over from India to take part in the construction of the Uganda Railway, though it is a popular belief. Early Asian migrants to the Kenya/East Africa Coast came from Gujarat, Kathiawar, Cutch, Cambay and Sindh as part of the Indian Ocean trading communities. In the early 19th century, more were attracted there after Seyyid Said moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar. Baluchi mercenaries were also sent by the Omani Sultans to Mombasa to man the ancient fort built by the Portuguese. In 1897, 4800 Punjabi Muslim rail workers together with 300 soldiers were brought in for the construction of the railway. It is also a historical fact that the Punjabi speaking Asians of Kenya comprised Muslims, Hindus, Ahmadiyyas and Sikhs. (enzimuseum.org)

If Anand Lall and his descendants had claim on the land by virtue of the railways laid by him and his fellow Punjabis, on what grounds could the other Indians lay claim on East Africa as their home? The construction of the railways as developmental projects cannot be extended to businesses and trades which were more “capitalistic desires”, in Godwin’s terms, than ways of economic development of the area.

Whatever, both these phenomena, the construction of the grand railway line and establishment of businesses and trades in East Africa, happened in the shade of colonialism and flourished until its end. The privilege that the Indians enjoyed in the colonial order “spawned many (mis)conceptions about Asians during the colonial period; and yet the same stereotypes remain in place now mainly because Asians have never made much effort to show that they are false. Significantly, these preconceptions have in some situations been invoked when politicking about nations and homes and, specifically, where and how the East African Asians fit in the whole dynamics” (Siundu 17). Also, the Indians did not open their cultural borders for others, nor did they let them trespass. And, they did not enter others’ cultural realms. They maintained their own cultural identity and kept aloof of other cultural groups. This added to the formation of these stereotypes and preconceptions.

The immigrant has affiliations with the culture of his homeland. He practices it very keenly and always identifies himself with it. He also observes the exotic culture of his alien neighbour. Despite being exotic to him, he generally adapts to his new cultural environment and feels at home abroad. However, he sets up an in-between culture, a third culture of his own, which does not belong to his homeland, nor does it belong to his host society. It gets developed in the interstitial space where the immigrant falls.

The lion stories that *Dadaji* relates to his grandchildren – the third generation Indian immigrants – form a culture that falls in the space in-between the home and the host societies. This culture belongs to the world of the immigrant, emerges out of his experiences and interactions. The narrator says, “The lion stories were always the favourite, because they were scarier and so much more immediate and realistic than the Indian tales of Lakshman and Rama and Sita speaking with monkeys and devils in

the enchanted forests of a distant land” (18). These stories are more immediate and realistic, and, thus, replace the home culture, thereby giving a new cultural identity to the immigrant, that he is far more identified with than his home and host cultures. *Dadaji* and others perform these stories of lions taking away Indian railway coolies and relive these incidents to make them more real. So, these immigrants evolve a culture out of their experiences abroad and identify themselves with it.

By invoking the history of the construction of Kenya-Uganda railway line, along with so many incidents of plight of the labourers associated with this ambitious project, Vassanji describes the contribution of the Indians in the making of modern Africa. He thus gives a space to them in narrative discourses. However, this sort of role played by the Indians is controversial. Vassanji just appropriates the work done for the British Empire by these Indian coolies. Or, it can be said that he manipulates certain historical facts to create a discourse that counters the African stance and perspective. In other words, Vassanji desires it to be that way. Whatever, it is on Vassanji’s mind above all that the Indian indentured labourers recruited by British Government in India to work in East Africa have done a great service to the nation, and they were betrayed and paid back very badly after the political empowerment of the Blacks. And, if we say invoking the past undermines the Asians’ position in a scenario where the meaning of home shifts, as in post-independence Kenya, Vassanji’s appropriation of the historical facts of Indian indentured labour in East Africa cannot be underestimated. Though the project had been of capitalistic desire, the Indians were just coolies working in bad conditions where they lost many lives to wild animals and fatal diseases. As such, modern Africa with a railway system established with Indian labour owes a lot to these labourers from across the ocean.

The most important contribution of the Indians to the East African countries, especially Kenya, is that they thwarted the ambitions of self-rule of the white population. They developed a rivalry with them and countered their moves of self-interest on the political front. Unlike South Africa and Rhodesia, Kenyan people attained political dominance just after the British left. There was no powerful white minority to take the central position by sliding the majority to the periphery. It was possible only because there was a third power, more forceful than the Blacks, to counter the white hegemony.

As is imagined by the narrator, Anand Lall, the pioneer coolie who “stayed on in the new colony after his indentureship, picked Nakuru as the spot where he would live,” and got closer to Africa as a place (16). The narrator says, “I see this turbaned young Indian who would be my *dada* saying to himself. This valley has a beauty to surpass even the god Shivji’s Kashmir, and the cool weather in May is so akin to the winters of Peshawar . . .” (17). The immigrant negotiates his relationship with this new place. He makes space for the beauty of the Rift Valley and its climate in his consciousness. That way, he goes closer to it, accepts it as his own, and brings the relationship to a harmony and satisfaction. But how close does he go to the people native to this place? Does he accept Africa as a people? Such points will be discussed later.

The rebellion of Mau Mau is a very historical phenomenon associated with Kenya that Vassanji has taken account of, besides other writers. The point to consider is what treatment Vassanji has given to it, and how the Indians of Kenya were affected by this movement.

The narrative begins in the emergency years of 1952 – 1959 (exactly in 1953) when the Mau Mau were active in Kenya. It does not give any causes of the rebellion, nor does it trace its emergence from colonial repression. It also does not show how the movement was crushed so brutally by the British forces. It is concerned with the methods of operation of the Mau Mau, and how their actions affected the protagonist's life; his friend Njoroge's attitude toward the Mau Mau ; and how the African government treats the former Mau Mau. The narrative takes a middle path while treating this militant movement.

The Mau Mau murder the Innes family in their farmhouse. This incident shocks the settlers – Europeans as well as Indians. While going after the Mau Mau, the Kikuyu servants are easily suspected by the police; they are tortured and humiliated. Mwangi, an African servant in the Indian quarters and Njoroge's grandfather, is taken away many times and, finally, he dies of torture in a prison.

Vikram loses his childhood friends Bill and Annie in one year of Mau Mau emergency. Deceived by their African servant, Kihika, who takes the side of the Mau Mau, the Bruces are killed in a gory incident at their lonely farmhouse in the darkness of night. This incident affects Vikram tremendously and he never makes a friendship as strong as with Annie. In other words, he fails to build strong relationships in life after this incident. He bears a grudge against the Mau Mau, particularly for this very incident.

Knowing about the gory incidents committed by the Mau Mau, the Indians compare them with "*daityas*" of Indian Hindu mythology. The narrator says, "The Mau Mau are devils, I said, echoing my mother. Her term was "daityas" from mythology. Krishna had slain many daityas, even as a child. Rama had slain the ten

headed Ravana, and Mau Mau were like that wily daitya, changing shapes at will in the forest, impossible to defeat” (25). There is no good associated with the Mau Mau and they are essentially evil as the devils killed by child Krishna. Also the narrator conveys the idea through Hindu mythology, eliminating history of the Mau Mau, and weaving a myth around them. The myth of Rama and Ravana is generally taken as an extended metaphor conveying the idea of the conflict of good and evil, where, in the end, good overcomes evil. This myth completes the mythification of the Mau Mau as it incorporates their dwelling in the forest also.

This myth making is further enhanced by the photographs and pamphlets disbursed by the colonial government to its non-African subjects in Kenya. Vikram’s father, before going out to guard his locality against the Mau Mau, goes through the pamphlet given to them by the colonial administration, describing the Mau Mau as heinous terrorists who are devoid of any rationality. The photographs of the Bruces, which Deepa shows to Vikram, enhance the (mis)understanding of the Mau Mau as brutal and inhuman, whose acts manifest some bestial savagery, or some psychological disease. Mau Mau oaths, as the one that Njoroge makes Vikram take in their childhood friendship, add to the savage nature of this phenomenon.

In the narrative, the Mau Mau is shown as a white-black clash. The Kikuyu Mau Mau kill the Europeans. However, the general historical fact is that the Mau Mau killed over 30 Europeans, mostly farmers living alone far from their neighbours, and over 20 Asians, mostly in Nairobi. But they killed over 1800 Africans, mostly the Kikuyu chiefs. In the narrative, the victims of the Mau Mau are the European farmers; the Indians guard against them; and some Indians like, Mahesh Uncle, do support them by providing them with supplies and weapons in the forest in the dead of the night.

The other myth related to the Mau Mau is that it had been just a conflict between several ethnic groups of Kenya and by no means a freedom struggle of the nation. Vassanji describes the Mau Mau as a Kikuyu group with Jomo Kenyatta as its chief. It is Njoroge, however, who believes in the political character of the nationalist movement. He is hopeful that Jomo will take his people to freedom, and have all lands and animals given back to them. The narrator does mention ethnic conflicts between the Kikuyu and the Masai. He says, “Occasionally, the Masai and the Kikuyu came into conflict. Governments, the British in the past and the more recent ones now, have found it expedient to exploit this rivalry . . .” (36). The exploitation of this rivalry by the British hints at the theory that the Mau Mau had been an ethnic clash and no uprising against the misrule of Britain. And, Joseph, son of Njoroge and the young Kenyan nationalist, belonging to a group called ‘the sons of the Mau Mau’ is not ready to attest this myth for it goes against the nationalistic stance of the Mau Mau. Further, the exploitation at the hands of the more recent governments run by the Blacks themselves is the continuation of colonial methods and strategies, which eventually lead to colonial repression and hegemony – tools of internal colonialism and pitfalls of national consciousness.

Making myths out of the historical phenomenon of the Mau Mau in Kenya is to engage in colonial discourse as it negates its historical value and nullifies its nationalistic character. Good Rama destroys evil Ravana as the British eliminate the Mau Mau. That way the forces of the Good are with the colonial set up in Kenya and the rebellion against it is essentially evil. Eventually, the misadventures of the empire in Africa get easily ignored, instead, the ‘savagery’ and ‘primitiveness’ of the Kikuyu comes to the fore. The Kikuyu are so conditioned to ‘primitiveness’ that they do not tolerate modernity and civilisation in Africa, and commit brutal acts which manifest

their war instinct. This colonial stance undermines decolonisation, and, instead, makes firm the hegemony of colonial forces through the apparatus of consent. We can say that the Mau Mau is equal to the forest. And, it must be tamed and modernised. As such, there is no need to remember the Mau Mau now. It is not history. It is not significant and must be forgotten. That way the African (Kenyan) resistance and war of independence cannot get any space in history. The narrator remembers it in his own way and forgets it in his own way.

After gaining independence, the African government continues with the colonial legacy of denouncing the Mau Mau. Very awfully African nationalism fails here. Independence appears to be just a transfer of power, and no regard is given to the freedom fighters of the nation – the forces of decolonisation are simply rejected.

The Mau Mau took arms against the colonial government; the same way they raise voice against the African government, gather to protest and represent themselves. They are helpless against this government. However, it culminates in the making of a group called ‘the sons of the Mau Mau’ that rises against the corrupt administration in Kenya. They are the new Mau Mau against neo-colonialism (internal colonialism). The narrator says, “There was grudging respect but not much sympathy for Mau Mau who sought compensation and recognition as heroes of the nation; this was a time of reconciliation and progress, we had been told, a time of forgetting the past, not picking at it” (165). It is Kenyatta himself who urges people to forget the Mau Mau as it had been a disease. The politicians of free Kenya call them outlaws and bandits as the colonial government would call them savages and terrorists.

Njoroge is sympathetic toward the Mau Mau. He is the true nationalist who has always the nation on his mind. And, Mahesh Uncle is the Indian who favours African struggle. He helps the Mau Mau by giving them arms and food. He takes part in African freedom movement. That way he recognises the Mau Mau as a nationalist movement doing killings in the interest of the wider nation.

Betrayal is a refrain in the narrative. The Mau Mau are simply betrayed by their people. They are denied respect and position. No measures are taken to improve their deteriorating condition. People even refuse to give them a room on rent. Njoroge, who is sympathetic to the Mau Mau and is a critic of government policies, is assassinated. Political dissent and corruption prevail in the country. Thus the new political set up betrays the nation and the aspirations of nation building. The Africans pay badly to the Indians for their services done to the nation. Mahesh Uncle, who fully supports the freedom movement of Africa, is not given permission to enter Kenya when he is in India and his communist leanings are confirmed by the Kenyan agencies. There are some betrayals in love also. Vikram, the protagonist, is betrayed by the African politicians in the government. Betrayal appears to be an offshoot of colonialism. It is in consonance with the colonial strategies and tactics.

One of the major thematic preoccupations of the writer is political dissent and corruption in postcolonial states of East Africa, and that is virtually heinous betrayal to nation making. This betrayal on the part of the African politicians can be compared to the contribution made by the African-Asians to nation making. Who can really claim Africa as their home? Who make the modern nation?

The narrator, at the very beginning, describes himself as “one of Africa’s most corrupt men, a cheat of monstrous and reptilian cunning” (1). He has taken away a

large part of his troubled country's treasury. However, his narrative raises questions on the nationalistic character of the African governments and the political systems prevailing in postcolonial East Africa. The processes of nation-making and nation-building after the colonial order is over in East Africa are not much different than capitalistic projects of colonialism.

As put forth by Frantz Fanon while describing the pitfalls of national consciousness in his *The Wretched of the Earth*, "History teaches us clearly that the battle against colonialism does not run straight away along the lines of nationalism," (119) the writer gives the history of post-independence Kenya where the politicians and administrators of the newly independent state gain power just to carry on those practices of colonialism through which they obtain unfair advantages. Corruption is prevalent all through the administration. Jomo Kenyatta, the president of Kenya and formerly Mau Mau leader, is also engaged in accumulating wealth through corrupt and unfair means, and in maintaining power through political dissent of the meanest sort. Paul Nderi, Vikram's boss, who holds a key post in administration, through whom black money gets circulated in the country, is a visible icon of corruption. The narrator says, "Bribes were extorted, offered, paid until they became casual as handshakes" (33). Plenty of money given by foreigners to serve their interests, wealth and properties taken away from the settlers, donations taken in the name of nation-building, and other bribes taken for doing favours to people are some manifestations of corruption.

While saying about his experiences in Kenya and Tanzania, Vassanji describes unfair rule in these countries in 'I Was a City Boy, a Soft Asian'. He says,

If socialism facilitated bureaucratic corruption in Tanzania, a counter example was neighbouring Kenya, which was capitalist and a darling of the West as long as the Soviet bloc lasted. In Kenya, although the small scale corruption was also present, more money was in circulation and massive corruption was possible in the upper reaches of government and big business. Partnerships in ‘businesses’, acquisition of land, smuggling ivory and other banned animal products, payoffs from multinationals. If that were not enough, there were instances of what could only be called banditry: a minister’s wife decides that she likes your business and will have it, for a small price; or else.” (*New Internationalist* 9)

That is how he describes corruption in higher ranks in Kenyan administration. And, that is also what the narrative incorporates to form a discourse of post-independence Kenya. Jomo Kenyatta and Paul Nderi like people are engaged gathering unfair advantages. Mother Dottie is the figure involved in the smuggling of ivory with government backing. She also coerces the Asians to sell their businesses to her for very small prices. And, foreign based multinational companies also play their bit in this massive corruption.

Vikram, the Indian immigrant in East Africa, proves to be useful in converting foreign currency into the local one. He also facilitates corruption by providing the Kenyan minister Paul Nderi with banking facilities. Basically working as a railway official, Vikram’s position is exploited by Paul Nderi who attaches him with his office. The narrator-protagonist says about him, “Mephistopheles-like, he introduced me to the path of power and corruption, and he dropped me when he needed a scapegoat and I was no longer of use” (358). The Indian immigrant is vulnerable and

can be deported or prosecuted very easily. As Fanon has described, national consciousness in a Third World country does not cover the innermost hopes of the whole people, nor is it the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilisation of the people. Eventually, when some politicians of a young independent nation come in power, “the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the state” (119). And, that is what Vassanji has rendered in his narrative. Jomo Kenyatta, the Kikuyu leader, maintains the dominance of his ethnic group and his political party. Other ethnic groups and the emerging communist party are not given any space in the political milieu of the country. However, after Kenyatta’s death, the hegemony of the Kikuyu comes to an end. And, the most vulnerable group in all regimes proves to be the Asians. The Kenyatta government gives Vikram easy access to the corridors of administration only to use his position; Paul Nderi assesses his utility and manages to manipulate his services for unfair ends. Vikram, the Indian in East Africa, finds himself between the devil and the deep sea, and flows with the current of the time, and is finally caught in the wicked design of Black politicking.

With the coming of a new government, the situation prevailing in the country does not change, as far as corruption and nepotism are concerned. We can say, a new tribe comes to power; another ethnic group takes its turn to take honey out of the national honey pot. The narrator says, “There are those who say that if the Old Man showed greed, then those who followed under Patrick Iba Madola took that attribute to its zenith, squeezed the country dry to its rind and core” (361). So, it is not because the hegemony of one racial or ethnic group that the nation-building is in shambles; but these are the pitfalls of national consciousness in these newly independent African nations. The indigenous population itself thwarts national projects without realising and admitting the factual situation. Being hostile to the projects of nation-building, the

local politicians and administrators unwittingly carry on the imperial and colonial set up. The forces of decolonisation, the freedom fighters as the Mau Mau in Kenya, are utterly neglected and even demeaned and made little of; political power is used to render them absurd; their value is nullified. As such, the symbols of nationalism and national consciousness are erased and a cynicism is created that discourages every step taken toward nation-building and national integrity. Frantz Fanon describes such a stance in these terms, “The local party leaders are given administrative posts, the party becomes an administration, and the militants disappear into the crowd and take the empty title of citizen. Now that they have fulfilled their historical mission of leading the bourgeoisie to power, they are firmly invited to retire so that the bourgeoisie may carry out its mission in peace and quiet” (137). And, the Mau Mau in Kenya, forces of decolonisation and African nationalism, are never given credit, instead, they are called ‘bandits’. The petty politicians do not keep their promises of giving land grants to them. All politicians betray them. And common people detest them. They do not give them any space to live. The Mau Mau movement is made to be forgotten. It is not given any space in the national history. It happens in the same way as colonialism denies the native cultures. We can say these governments act on the lines of colonialism.

In such a scenario, where does the immigrant find himself? How much can he be taken into account for helping colonialism spread in the region? The Asians in East Africa are the settler immigrants from India who found East Africa congenial for their living, and where they could make some economic progress. They maintained distance from political, cultural and social realms of the place. They worked with the then administration, occupying a neutral position. They maintained their own cultural identity. As a result of a clash of interests, the Africans became their competitive

rivals, and the Europeans set up many challenges in their way. They were given many epithets which described their essential nature like, ‘blood-suckers’, ‘Shylocks’ and ‘collaborators of colonialism.’

When the political power fell in the hands of the Africans, the Asians found themselves in a position where they did not have a foothold to rest their feet on. To continue their presence in East Africa, they had to be politically correct and often work for the government. But they were not accepted as belonging to the soil, however, their utility to the regimes that were up with the projects of neo-colonialism-with-consent was realised, recognised, sought and fully obtained. In the end they were betrayed in this relationship also as the colonial order of Britain, in a sense, had betrayed them when the British ‘gave away the country’ to the Blacks. Vassanji writes,

The middle class in my youth consisted to a large degree of Asian shopkeepers and businessmen, a nervous lot brought up on the social and economic freedoms that colonialism had allowed them, and prone to attacks by any petty demagogue accusing them of being unpatriotic. The bureaucrats, on the other hand, were mostly Africans, anxious to reap the benefits of independence and climb up the social ladder. The restrictions of Nyerere’s socialism, inspired partly by Maoism, provided the perfect opportunity for the government’s low salaries to be supplemented, to bring upward mobility to those who had never even had a whiff of wealth. The bureaucrats turned on the screws; the middle class Asians believed they had no choice but to pay.” (I was a city boy 6)

That is true of Kenya also. In Kenya, ‘the upper reaches of government and big business’ were the major sites of ‘the great procession of corruption.’

Vikram, the Indian immigrant, is caught in this whirlwind of corruption and carried away by the wind. He says, “The Gemstone Scandal became public knowledge and a symbol of corruption; its audacity provoked outrage. Consequently, when my name became reviled as the Fu Manchu of corruption and the King of Shylocks...my life seemed, at least in the initial months, cheap to all those I had offended . . .” (374). He is persecuted more intensely than his compatriots in corruption, only because he is an Asian, the other, the marginal. He is so vulnerable as to be called very easily ‘the Fu Manchu of corruption’. And the real Fu Manchu of corruption, Jomo Kenyatta, is adored with all his vices and wickedness. He and his ministers are ahead of Vikram for they belong to the centre. They skin their people and cause economic collapse in the country; still it is Vikram who is ‘the King of Shylocks’. Vikram is not really the harbinger of corruption in the country. He says, “I long believed that mine were crimes of circumstance, of finding oneself in a situation and simply going along with the way of the world” (371). Joining the procession of corruption is necessary for him to continue his presence in East Africa, and leaving the country for Canada, rather running away from it, is important to save his skin and life. It all happens because he is an ‘Asian’ and not an ‘African’. As such, there emerges a grave crisis of identity and belonging for the Asian who develops relationships with the African only to belong, and the African betrays him, taking him for an alien living at the far off margins of the society.

Njoroge has strong faith in Jomo Kenyatta since his early childhood. He compares Kenyatta with Moses the Saviour. Imagining an alternate history based on his belief, Njoroge tells Vikram about Kenyatta, the harbinger of their freedom,

“Jomo was the one who was in jail in Kapenguria; when he came out he would take his people to freedom; all the lands of the Kikuyu...would be returned to them; all the cattle and sheep would come home to graze. All the white people would go home to England” (48). Fighting hegemony and oppression of colonialism in Kenya, Kenyatta, the Mau Mau leader, becomes a symbol of decolonisation, freedom and self-determination. He represents the resistance of African people against colonial powers operating in his native lands. And, perhaps, that is why his people install him after independence as their national leader to sustain and maintain their freedom. This trust turns out to be false. On the contrary, the Indians are not trusted at all.

There being severe pitfalls in the African national consciousness, these African leaders fail to maintain their self-determination and indulge in gaining unfair advantages, bring about political dissent in the country, thus carry on the strategies of colonialism and betray their people and nation. These leaders do a heinous power politics in the nation. They ban any opposing political forces; crush their emergence by using government machinery; commit crimes of murder, fraud and mass violence. That way they clear way for the neo-colonial forces to gain foot in their postcolonial nation.

Njoroge, the true nationalist of Africa, is disappointed. He realises that the Mau Mau have been betrayed. Nation-building is still a fancy in the Third World. This also proves that it is the Mau Mau movement that is the real and true representative of African freedom and nationalism, and not the political leaders like Kenyatta. That means, the common people and the governments in postcolonial spaces are not on the same side; they are opposite forces. Or, at least, the governments do not represent the people. They are busy sustaining their power and imperial forces

help them. In return to the favours done to these governments, the imperial forces get easy access to the resources of the nation, and that is a modified form of colonialism.

So, is it the immigrant who helps colonialism take roots in East Africa? Or, is it the essential pitfalls of African nationalism? Njoroge is murdered while being with Vikram's sister Deepa in her shop by the agents of the Kenyatta government. Kenyatta takes his people to a "malformed freedom"; he does not return the lands of the Kikuyu to them. The white people do go home to England. And, the Indians disperse all the world over, for they do not have a world of their own. Consequently, the settlers that stay behind get pushed to the periphery with the coming of independence. The once dreaded Mau Mau become a starved mouse in independent Kenya. Joseph, Njoroge's son, the young African nationalist, along with his group 'the sons of Mau Mau' does rise against the corrupt regimes; he is detained in Nairobi. Nationalist forces are too weak to give the all important factor of self-determination to the recently gained freedom.

And, the backlash on the Asians as a revenge on the collaborators of colonialism, Africanisation of all positions, taking away of properties of the settlers and harassing and blackmailing of the immigrants cannot be called nationalism. They are practices of corruption, betrayal and misuse of power. What the Asians had established and built up in Africa, the 'free' Africans grab it anxiously as their bounty. That cannot be revival of African culture and power. Such are practices of neo-colonialism and suppression of marginal peoples.

With the going away of the colonial order and coming of African empowerment, how does Vikram negotiate his identity and belonging? British colonialism favours the Asians to a great extent, and the African neo-colonialism

snatches all privileges from them and pushes them to the far off periphery of the society and nation. The immigrant is always vulnerable; so he finds out bits of support and ways of survival with every dominating force, whatsoever it is. His stance mostly remains apolitical.

In the colonial order, the Asians enjoy a privileged position as compared to the Africans. On the pyramid of racial hierarchy, they have an upper hand over them. They occupy the middle position between the Europeans and the Africans – the browns between the whites and the blacks. They have managed to carve out their own world with their own cultural identity, looking backward to India for maintaining their identity and originality while living in ‘the country of the Blacks’, and looking forward to England as their Ark of Noah for future prospects. They find colonialism in Africa and the compartmentalised society developed by it congenial for their settlement. The narrator says, “. . . and we stood up in silent accompaniment to the ode to her nobility and grace, lines that we would never be able to forget. How proud we were to be her subjects then, to belong to the mighty empire” (74). How seductive and pleasing it is to belong to the mighty empire. With migration the immigrants, in a sense, reject the place they leave behind as their home. It is this act of losing their home that makes them vulnerable to all sorts of hostile forces, with a deep sense of essential homelessness. Though in their hearts the Indians belong to the mighty empire, they ignore the demeaning attitude of the whites, or at least, do not mention it in their discourse. When Vikram’s mother echoes in an ironic tone the Queen’s calling the colonies as “possessions”, her husband does not pay an iota of heed to it, he rather tells her to be quiet and listen to what the Queen says. Vassanji also does not mention the hostility of the whites in East Africa, particularly in Kenya. It is actually the Europeans who created many challenges for the Indians; they played a major role

in making devils out of the Indian '*dukawallas*' and made them repulsive to the Africans. And, the British government and colonial administration in Kenya took many measures in favour of the white population in Kenya like granting of the Highlands only to the Europeans. A clear discrimination in favour of the whites emerged. As such, belonging to the mighty empire had not been without setbacks. Then, where did the Indians exactly belong to?

The immigrant's identity and belonging is not absolute and certain. This is true, at least, in case of the Indians in Kenya. The Europeans have England to rely on. The Africans have their Kenya. And, the Indians are in chaos and confusion. When Njoroge predicts the going away of the Europeans after Kenyatta brings them independence, in his thoughts Vikram does not want to go back to India. He does not recognise it as his home. He says,

And would the Asians go home to India? I didn't want to go to India, to the tumult and the dust and where you stepped into shit even in a posh taxi, as Papa described it. Not even to the enchanted forests of Rama and Sita, as Mother would have it. I knew of no world outside my Nakuru, this home, this backyard, the shopping centre, the school; this town beside the lake of flamingos, under the mysterious Menengai Crater where we sometimes went on family picnics, passing the European area on the other side of the tracks. (49)

Vikram, the third generation Indian in East Africa, does not recognise India as his home. His father and mother have their own discourses regarding India. He himself is familiar with the land of his birth and upbringing and does not know any distant worlds. However, the possible political independence of the Africans is likely to put

him at cross-roads where he may find nowhere to go. He develops relationships of belonging with the Africans in the alternate history of his fantasy. He says, "I have even fantasised that Dada perhaps sought comfort with a woman of that people, perhaps she had his child and I have cousins in some of the manyattas of the plains. There is no proof anything like this ever happened – and my fantasy has partly to do with desperate need to belong to the land I was born in – but it is not impossible either" (61). Vikram's having black cousins, in his imagination, is an attempt of racial mixture that may dismantle the borders of racial and ethnic determining factors. Belonging is determined by race and ethnicity. And, political independence of the Africans is a racial revolution for them; eventually they trample other races that do not have power. After independence, lucrative farms and businesses of the Europeans are taken away and many stores of the Asians are also snatched. Because of the political situation in Kenya, the Asians flee from the country. Frantz Fanon also describes this sort of situation in postcolonial countries in the aftermath of their independence, where the properties of the settlers are taken away forcibly and race and tribe are above the nation. Vikram is no less affected by the taking over of the Africans. He says, "Here I was, a young Asian graduate in an African country, with neither the prestige of whiteness or Europeanness behind me, nor the influence and numbers of a local tribe to back me, but carrying instead the stigma from a generalised recent memory of an exclusive race of brown "Shylocks" who had collaborated with the colonisers. What could I hope to achieve in public service? Black chauvinism and reverse racism were the order of the day against Asians" (253). For a long time, he does not get any job in the new administration. It is only when Njoroge helps him that he finds a job in the railways. He finds his job interesting; then suddenly Paul Nderi, the African minister who introduces him to corruption and

influence, realises his utility as an ‘Asian’ and attaches him to his office. Vikram cannot refuse to perform Nderi’s tasks for he, as an Asian, has no other opportunities of work. All government jobs are reserved for the Africans. That is the effect of Africanisation. However, the tasks that Paul Nderi gives him to perform cannot be done by any other person; and Kenyatta calls this “an important service to the nation”. At first Vikram does not know the real nature of his new job for “[t]otal corruption . . . occurs in inches and proceeds through veils of ambiguity” (291). He has the foreign aid and donations converted into local currency and provides banking facilities to Paul Nderi. He becomes notorious in the country with the Gemstone Scandal. Though he is not any more guilty than Kenyatta himself and others in the African administration, he rightly understands that he is an easy disposable commodity, and stealthily runs away to Canada to save his life.

Do the Africans accept him? No, not at all. He is always believed to be an outsider. He is addressed as “you people,” “you Asians” and “you Wahindis.” A binarism of “you” and “we” always stands there in his relationship with Africa. He says, “. . . I told myself how desperately I loved this country that somehow could not quite accept me. Was there really something prohibitively negative in me, and in those like me, with our alien forbidding skins off which the soul of Africa simply slipped away?” (325). When Kenyatta himself turns him out and Paul Nderi does not help him, he is knocked out of the game of money – the neutral facilitator – for “this Muhindi would never belong to your [Kenyatta’s] games” (356).

Vikram does not belong to Canada either. Though there is Seema with him in Canada, he does not develop a long term relationship with her. Instead of staying with her, he decides to go back to Africa and reconcile with that land. He says, “Do I belong here – in this wonderful country where the seasons are orderly, days go past

smoothly one after another? This cold moderation should after all be conducive to my dispassion? No, I feel strongly the stir of the forest inside me; I hear the call of the red earth, and the silent plains of the Rift Valley through which runs the railway that my people built, and the bustle of River Road; I long for the harsh, familiar caress of the hot sun” (371). He rejects Canada for Kenya; goes back to scorching heat of the tropical sun and shakes off the orderly seasons of Canada and other temptations. In his heart, it is Nairobi where he belongs. As such, he returns to reclaim Africa as his home.

About Njoroge, his African friend, Vikram says, “I had always realised that Njoroge and I were essentially different; yet we belonged to each other, we had been nurtured in the same soil” (353). Njoroge is essentially African and genuine in his identity. And, Vikram is a third generation Indian immigrant. By coercing him to take the Mau Mau oath, Njoroge brings Vikram closer to Africa. However, with the death of Bill and Annie, Vikram detests the Mau Mau and does not give much regard to Njoroge’s national consciousness.

Njoroge’s son Joseph is the young African nationalist. He has joined a group called ‘the sons of Mau Mau’. This group stands for African nationalism and against corruption and political dissent in Kenya. Vikram being notorious as the most corrupt man in Kenya, Joseph declines his every step to develop a relationship with him. Vikram says, “I was deeply humiliated at this instinctive rejection...I chided myself as I closed the door. You are still an Asian” (369). The two never come closer as “too much history, too much of the past stood between [them]” (369). Joseph also does not accept him.

Vikram returns to Nairobi to meet his destiny. His homecoming is a sort of return migration where he rejects Canada and reclaims Kenya as his home. His lawyer reveals some stunning facts to him. The African politicians, mainly the opposition, realise his utility “as a wedge they can use to topple the government.” That is not new to Africa where people come to power with coups. Sohrabji, his lawyer, tells him, “You were the perfect scapegoat, an Indian without a constituency, whom they could hold up as display to the World Bank and the Donors as the crafty alien corruptor of our country” (394). Vikram’s being without resources is manipulated by the corrupt African politicians, which is the weakness of African national consciousness. These ‘black politicians’ are themselves very corrupt. They betray African freedom movement, Mau Mau, and the hopes and ideas of making Kenya a great nation. The immigrant only cannot be held responsible for any corruption in the country. He is always at the margins and is treated accordingly. He can contribute to nation-building of a modern nation, but not to its fall and decline on his own. History endorses the fact that local politicians have always been responsible for economic collapse in Africa, and the immigrants have proved to be pivotal for economic development.

With Sohrabji’s help, Vikram reaches an agreement with the government. Meanwhile, he hides at a faraway place where mostly Muslims live. His urge for belonging somewhere is so deep and strong that he offers Muslim prayer without knowing how to do it. His efforts for reconciliation and making peace with his world get thwarted. Though the commission set up for the enquiry of the Gemstone Scandal and the like agrees to what Vikram offers to them, the Anti-Corruption Commission is declared illegal and is disbanded. With that a chance to start anew is lost. His predicament continues persistently, and now he has no way to go along.

Marginality is a major issue in this narrative. Vikram is finally left dangling. There is an internal crisis of belonging in his consciousness and an outer one. While trying to follow the motions of the Muslim devotees, he loses trace of his own self and says, "Once again I do not know what is happening to me, perhaps I simply long to belong somewhere" (399). He floats adrift laden with the heavy load of his past. Though the immigrant strives hard to belong, the alien environment that surrounds him does not accept him so easily and completely. During the colonial administration, the people living in Kenya get accustomed to a compartmentalised social set up. They have their own social spheres, and their interests get restricted to the boundaries of these spheres. The narrator describes this situation along with its effects in these words' "To the African I would always be the Asian, the Shylock; I would never escape that suspicion, that stigma. We lived in a compartmentalised society; every evening from the melting pot of city life each person went his long way home to his family, his church, his folk" (286-87). These walls and barriers of racial prejudice hurdle the Indians from belonging to Kenya after the independence of the nation. The colonial order does not last long, and with the coming of the Africans in power, the immigrants have to bear the brunt of ethnic and racial differences. This is a conversation between Njoroge and Vikram: "I used to be frightened of Asians, if you have to know. I protested: how could we have seemed frightening? You were in with the whites, so you had power over us. And you are so alien, more so than the whites. We never know what you think. You are so inscrutable, you Indians" (92). So, in Kenya, race is a determining factor of cultural interactions and flexibility.

Striving so hard to belong, Vikram is finally left dangling in a limbo where he has nowhere to get to. He can neither go to India nor to England. His departure from Seema is final and absolute. Nor does Njoroge's son Joseph acknowledge him as his

own. And his wife has separated from him and gone to England. His mother is dead; his father has an African woman to give him comfort. His lawyer Sohrabji is helpless and can do nothing for him. Finally, the building he is staying in catches fire and is burnt absolutely to ashes. The staircase is on fire; Vikram is upstairs. It is not known whether he manages to come down.

However, Vikram believes Kenya to be his home. His forefathers have lived there for a long time. He was born there, nurtured in that soil along with his African friend Njoroge. His men have built the railways and his people own stores and businesses. His sister Deepa is in love with Njoroge. His uncle Mahesh helps the Mau Mau with supplies and weapons. He is not familiar with distant India and its myths. He knows Kenya, its hot sun and cool breeze, its Rift Valley and forests. As a result of racial, ethnic and cultural differences, derogatory epithets, stereotypes and preconceptions make the general discourse of the Africans that sets the Indians apart as a group of aliens. Eventually, most of the Indians flee from Kenya. Vikram gets dislocated to Canada. He asks rhetorically at the beginning of the narrative, “What makes a man leave the land of his birth, the home of those childhood memories that will haunt him till his deathbed?” (17). This time the relocation of the Indian immigrant is not “wanderlust”, instead, he is caught in the situation.

Having stayed sometime in Canada, Vikram understands his self. He finds ‘time and seclusion’ in his ‘clement retreat’, away from the political situation prevailing in Kenya, for delineating his self-identity. This narrative draws a portrait of his belonging to Kenya, his roots and origins. He says, “One more thing for which I am grateful to this hideaway is that it has brought me in touch with the sky and the earth, and through them, with myself” (354). And, there, in the self-portrayal there are tinges of essential homelessness for this on-the-run immigrant. It is this realisation

that he decides to face his destiny and reclaim Kenya as his 'home'. He finds some of Africa in his self and goes to own it back. And, this is how he reclaims it: "There is something immeasurably familiar in the feel of the cool Nairobi night that tells you you are home, that for better or worse, this is where you belong" (382). His self-portrayal takes him to make peace with his world, his gods and his self. That is how he negotiates his belonging and identity. In other words, his confrontation with the past enables him to accept his belonging and identity. He negotiates his present with the past, and finds the past in the present. The invisible load of his past that Vikram carries along is indicative of his immigrant self. And, that is the actual 'home' of his – his legacy, his heritage. By reliving his past, he revisits his home in Africa.

To prevent the past from slipping away and the untold stories disappear into the winds, Vassanji undertakes to narrate his story and that of his community. Through memory and retrospection, he walks those ways of his past once again which are otherwise closed for him and renews his familiarity with them. That way, by virtue of his narratives, he does a sort of return migration through intellectual means, generally termed as 'homecoming', and, thus, reclaims his home in Africa, and his roots and origins there.

Immigration itself is a manifestation of colonial history shared by the globe. And, as Vassanji himself says that his characters do not mean anything unless they have some history, Vikram's story is the narration of his life, his history and the history of his community. The narrative does explain him how he got caught in this situation, how he reached this predicament where he is left dangling with nowhere to settle.

It is in Canada quite away from Kenya that Vikram confronts his past in seclusion and silence. He has Joseph with him. Too much of the past comes between them thereby preventing them from making a bond. Forgetting some of the past is necessary for the formation of this bond. But they fail to check history from coming in their way. That is also true of the situation back in Kenya. Those stereotypes and preconceptions which describe the Indians as ‘Shylocks’ and ‘collaborators of the coloniser’ also come from a shared memory of the past. Africa does not accept the Indian immigrant because of this discourse formed somehow and stored in the collective unconscious of the Africans. The truth is that the immigrant takes the middle position and likes to be neutral. That is also true of the failure of developing a relationship with Seema in Canada. As the narrator says that her idealism and his sins cannot go together, his departure from her is final and absolute. His past intervenes here also and stops him to advance in this relationship. Consequently, he does not learn to belong to Canada and does not make it a ‘new home’. The failure of his relationship with his wife Shobha also comes about because of his past. Annie, his childhood friend, is murdered in cold blood by the Mau Mau one dark night. After her death, Vikram fails to develop a relationship with any other woman. It is his past also that prompts him to return to Kenya and reclaim it.

Just like the exhibition, the Asian Heritage Exhibition, that the write mentions in ‘Author’s Note’, Vassanji’s narrative is an “acknowledgement of identity, history and heritage,” and it is designed to prevail for narrative forms a most effective discourse of one’s self-identity and belonging (402).

As for the structure and narrative techniques used, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* is not so much different than Vassanji’s other novels. There is no linear plot; it is a montage of memories which the narrator recalls without taking notice of

time. The events and incidents are given in fragments and pieces. The narrative begins in 1953, in the emergency years, and includes the history of Indian railway coolies in East Africa and shuttles between Africa and Canada.

Actually Vikram narrates his story in flashbacks, for he is hiding in Canada wherefrom he narrates his story of becoming and being. And, that is why the narrative is undercut many times with Canadian setting. At multiple places, almost at the end of each chapter, the setting shifts to Canada. In other words, we can say, Vikram's world is scattered through Kenya, Tanzania and Canada. These small narratives of Canadian setting cut his African world into many pieces.

Narrating the story at a distance makes a gap between the experiencing 'I' and the narrating 'I'. The narrating Vikram is in Canada with Seema and Joseph, and the experiencing Vikram was born in Nairobi, nurtured with his friends in the colonial order and othered by the Africans in post-independence period. However, the two converge nearly at the end of the narrative. There is a serious crisis of belonging in Vikram's being. By narrating his past, he attempts at negotiating his identity and belonging.

Vassanji does one more thing to make his narrative complex just like his protagonist's in-between world. He shifts the narrative tense at many places from the past to the present. Vikram links his present predicament with his past and finds his past and history everywhere in his present social and cultural transactions and interactions. The past is not dead. It is always there. The narrator carries along his past with him and he actually needs some forgetting of the past to belong somewhere and to settle. Shifting of tenses is shifting of time which in turn is shifting of spaces.

Regarding style, there are some statements, phrases and words which are striking. For instance, “distant land,” (18) “born in a faraway India in a faraway time” (63) and “an enchanted place in far-off India” (82). Here the narrator indicates his unfamiliarity with India. His family has been in Africa for a long time. He is the third generation Indian; and he has his children also. He was born and raised in that red soil of Africa. Although he is closer to Africa than India, he says, “But we Asians were special: we were brown, we were few and frightened and caricatured, and we could be threatened with deportation, as aliens even if we had been in the country since the time of Vasco da Gama and before some of the African people had even arrived in the land” (303). How weak has been his bond with Africa! Distant, far-away and far-off India cannot be his home now, and Africa is also slipping away. And he describes Canada as “this Canadian wilderness” (20). He does not make his self familiar with the orderly seasons of Canada; does not learn to belong there. His departure from Seema is final and absolute.

There are some stylistic elements showing the marginality of the Indians. For instance, “Hey you, son of a coolie, out! Go back to cowland, Bengalee Bastard!” (23) These words are spoken by a European shopkeeper to Vikram’s uncle Mahesh. To Europeans, the Indians are only ‘sons of coolies’ so, not as privileged as the Africans believe them to be. The choice of words in the following phrases indicates the miserable condition of the Africans and how much the Indians would keep aloof from them: “pathetic servants – ‘boys’ as they were called,” (32) “a primitive Masai,” (38) “Mau Mau owned this darkness,” (43) “Daitya for the Mau Mau. Bhut-lok for the Europeans. Ravana for Jomo Kenyatta” (113) and “raising half-breeds” (233). There are some phrases which show that the Indians and the Africans have been different. For instance, “as an Indian from India,” (47) “other African voices,” (77) “the Asians

of Africa,” (158) “Asians speaking Cutchi and Gujarati” (193) and “I said in the African manner” (296). These phrases indicate that to be African is one thing and to be Asian is something else. They are essentially different and cannot be identical. Though Njoroge and Vikram “had ritually mixed their blood”, they remain different, belonging to two different racial and ethnic groups.

Culturally the narrative seems to be more Indian than African. There are a lot of Indian words, phrases and idioms in the text. Words from Indian languages like, Punjabi, Hindi and Gujarati have been used in abundance. For example, words and phrases: *angrezlog, my dada, dadaji, baadshah, eka-do, tongawallahs, ay budhu, daityas, kameez, ek dum, chavani, two paagals, serikali, swastika, arre, bête, kismet, thali, bechara, desi, ullu-ka-patha, mai-baap, beti, samaj, salwar, dupatta, tawa, et cetera.*

Full Sentences: *badmash sale...kamine...neech...kambakht log (33); bauji, tusi vi kadii tempt hoge, na... (39); ha sahi achi to bolti hai, Dadi said (40); Accha mein jaunga (44); osnu andar aanta deyo (65); kadi esa vekhya hai? (66) Dekha hai esa tumhare desh mein? (112) Soyi ho na? (206) Tum hi bata do na (183); Is se ishq kehete hai. Heer ki tarah nikli, hamari beti (233).*

However, the text contains African words also. Words and phrases from Swahili and Kikuyu languages do appear there in the text, but they are not half the number of Indian words. The characters are both Indian and African. But the writer uses more Indian words than African ones. And it is the Asians who speak more. That means, the writer’s consciousness is more toward India and its culture.

There is a good number of words that name and describe Indian foods and dishes. For example: *phulki chappatis and daal; pakodas; bhajias, kachori and bhel*

puri; halwa and kheer; pakoda-and-chai; jelebi; masala tea with burfi; gulab jamun and sakar pada and chappati

Other words indicate some more cultural practices of India, like: “sad lyrics from Saigal, Hemant Kumar and Talat,” (25) “tilak mark,” (83) “gilli-dandi and naago,” (113) “anantakadi,” (124) “ruckus,” (189) “puja and bhajan” (190) and “Rakhi day” (57). Myth of Rama and Sita is cited a few times. The Mau Mau are compared with “daityas.” Jomo Kenyatta is compared with Ravana.

The African ritual mentioned is the oath taking of the Mau Mau which appears to be “savage and irrational.” The only African god mentioned is “Ngai, the God on Mount Kenya,” (36) but there are many Indian gods, goddesses and saints in the text. For instance: Rama, Sita, Lakshman and Lakshmi, (89) Vishnu, Krishna, Shiva, Parvati, Ganesh, Ganga, Radha, Amba Devi and Kali, (209) Gautama, Shankaracharya, Vyasa, Mira Bai and Guru Nanak (209).

Though the Indian community in East Africa has many sects and sections which are quite different from one another, Vikram, the Punjabi, marries Shobha who is a Gujarati; and there is no mention of other religious or cultural groups within the Indian community. However, the writer mentions many African tribes and ethnic groups, like: Kikuyu, Masai, Luo, Kamba, Nandi, Meru, Dorobo, Turkana, Boran, Somali and Swahili. This indicates how sharp the racial and ethnic differences are in Africa.

It seems that the characters are far closer and more familiar with the Indian languages and culture than the African ones. However, the text is culturally a hybrid of African and Indian cultures. It is an interstitial space where cultures come closer and become less alien and exotic. Words from African languages are also used

liberally: *toka nje; ngoja, utaenda; mugeni amiaga mbirira; bana-kubas; uhuru; muthungu; ahsante; mundumugo; muhindi; umefahamu; shida; hongo et cetera.*

Full sentences: *nyinyi wahindi wenye adabu, kwa kweli, lakini... (308); ukiwa na udhia, penyeza rupia (333); sasa hivi, mpigie simu, mwambie ni kosa lako tu (336).*

There are many references and allusions from history proper in the text. Dates: 1953, 1897, 1944, 1948, 1965, 1955, 1954, 1942, 1949, 1968, 1920, 1952, 1963, 1950 and 1975. Whether the events associated with these dates are correct or not, using so many dates in the text highlights its historical connotations. People from history are also mentioned: Idi Amin, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, Julius Nyerere, Subhas Chandra Bose, Colonel Patterson, Florence, Sir Evelyn Baring, Corporal Bonafice, General Sir George Erskine and Jomo Kenyatta. These references from history proper enhance the historical dimension of the text. And, the writer manages to coalesce personal history and communal history. The autobiographical elements in the narrative also merge with the communal history.

Some of these figures belong to colonialism in Africa. Their mention heightens the experiences of colonialism shared by the Indian immigrants also. Colonel Patterson and Florence are associated with the railway construction in Kenya. Idi Amin invaded Tanzania and turned the Indians out of Uganda. Nyerere, through his socialism, victimised the Indians in Tanzania. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O went into exile when Kenyan government indulged in malpractices in the country. That is how so many people from history pop up and open windows to different historical events associated with them.

The narrator-protagonist, Vikram Lall, is the central character in the narrative. When the narrative begins in 1953, he is eight years old; old enough to observe and remember what happens around him. The novel is like a *bildungsroman* where we see Vikram grow into an adult person with European and African friends in colonial and postcolonial periods. We see how various historical events and incidents affect and shape his character. He says, “My life simply happened, without deep designs on my part. Perhaps this narration of my life will explain me to myself. Perhaps it won’t” (291). He finds himself between European racism and African tribalism and then what he calls reverse racism. Finally, it proves to be an *erziehungsroman*, a novel of initiation and education about immigration, for it leads the protagonist to an apocalyptic vision of immigration.

There are as many as five women around Vikram Lall. Annie, the English girl, is his childhood friend. He loses her to the Mau Mau. She influences him so much that he never forgets her in his life and hates the Mau Mau bitterly for killing her so brutally. And, it is this incident of her gory death that he fails to set up a long time relationship with any other woman. Yasmin is an Indian girl of Ismaili sect living in Tanzania. Because of communal conflicts within the Indian communities in Africa, Vikram cannot go much closer to her. Sophia is an Italian air-hostess. Vikram meets her in Nairobi; he spends some nights with her. She leaves him as her duty shifts to some other country and her ‘real’ purpose of being in Kenya fulfills. Seema is originally an Indian living in Canada. She does a sort of research on Vikram’s past; she goes closer to him. But he does not develop any strong relationship with her for he does not think her idealism and his sins can go together. Shobha is Vikram’s Gujarati wife. She is an alien in his Punjabi family. Vikram does not take marriage so seriously because Annie’s death has made him cynical about love and relationships.

And, eventually, Shobha goes away to England along with her children, separating from him. Association with so many women indicates the disintegration of Vikram's world. The historical phenomenon of the Mau Mau movement in Africa, that took Annie's life, has so deep and grave an effect on Vikram. He belongs to five women and finally to none.

As for technical devices used in the narrative, Vassanji is good at using metaphor, irony, allegory and magic realism. To convey the parameters of Vikram's in-between world, he gives a paradigm, "One day our daughter Sita asked her, as a test, what a figure with zero sides was called, and Shobha answered with a sweet smile, Darling, ask your father, he is one; paradoxically, he is also a man of many sides" (338). A figure with zero sides and one with many sides ensemble in Vikram as the Indian immigrant in Africa. He is originally Indian, born and raised in Africa, goes to Canada and returns to settle nowhere.

The Mau Mau oath taken by Njoroge and Vikram under a tree where they ritually mix their blood, the African and Indian, proves to be ironical. Vikram's fantasy about having African cousins is also of the same nature. With both these narratives, Vikram does not belong to Africa.

In the first section of the novel 'The Year of Our Loves and Friendships', the children, Njoroge, Vikram, Deepa, Bill and Annie, play 'the Mau Mau' and 'the Ramayana.' These plays function as allegories where, in a way, the writer brings the historical phenomenon of the Mau Mau movement closer to the Indian myth of the Ramayana, for later the adult Indians call the Mau Mau as "daiyyas" and Jomo Kenyatta is called "Ravana."

To the Indians, the Mau Mau are dark forces coming out of the forest to commit evil acts. Then it is the whole of Mau Mau that is Ravana with many heads, changing shapes in the forest. Besides other gory murders, it kills Vikram's Annie. Then, are the British Rama and the Indians Lakshman? Vassanji goes beyond this allegorical-figurative use of language; he mixes myth and reality through the technical device of magic realism. The lion stories related by the pioneer coolie are historical. But the coolies disappear suddenly in front of others and the frightened coolies say that ghosts take them away. The narrator says, "Myth and reality often got mixed up in our lives" (85). To convey the immigrant life of the Indians, Vassanji also blends myth and reality. The exile of Rama and Sita reminds Vikram's mother and uncle of their migration to Africa. Their home city in India, Peshawar, was lost to Pakistan as a result of partition in 1947. So, myth explains reality effectively.

Similarly, the demonic and devilish character of the Mau Mau is conveyed through the character of Ravana, and "daityas" of Hindu mythology. Magic realism, though not used so extensively, does appear in this narrative. Myths and historical content coalesce through literary techniques in this narrative.

Form and content are in agreement in this narrative. In other words, narrative functions as a theme. The fragmented narrative is in concord with Vikram's in-between world. The narrative itself falls between postmodernism and postcolonialism.

Vikram says about his desperately following the motions of the Muslim devotees in his hideaway, ". . . I simply long to belong somewhere" (399). This is true of the writer also. The narrative is certainly influenced by the protagonist-narrator's desire to belong somewhere, mainly to Africa, and it emerges out of his crisis in belonging. His narrating stories about his ancestors in India, the stories of railway

labourers, his friendship with Njoroge, fancy about having cousins in Africa, attempts at developing a relationship with Joseph, Deepas's love for Njoroge, returning to Kenya to make peace with that world – all are indicative of his desire to belong. In short, it is the protagonist's desire to belong somewhere that shapes the course of the narrative.

Striving desperately to belong, Vikram is finally sceptical of his world in Africa. At the end, he says, "I dream of cockroaches. They are crawling all over the floor and climbing up my legs. Some of them fly and there are a few in my hair and one in my ear I wake up in a sweat, my heart beating violently" (396-97). This dream that Vikram has in a hideaway in Kenya links his fears with his destiny. When he learns that the Anti-Corruption Commission has been declared illegal and it has been disbanded, he sees no way out of his predicament, and says hopelessly, "I have been left dangling" (398). The dangling immigrant with nowhere to go cannot hold immigration in admiration. He finds no prospect in such a phenomenon as immigration. The final section in italics is the most indicative of his dark vision of immigration. The building in which Vikram is asleep is on fire. Vikram hears some explosions at some distance. And, no fire engines arrive to combat the conflagration. The staircase is ablaze; he is upstairs. Does he manage to get down? The reader does not know it. This is how he describes the burning building, "Not only is this small extension made of wood, the products on sale are extremely flammable" (400). The same is true of immigration. The immigrant is always vulnerable and prone to prejudices on part of the host society. First, within the same society, he is relocated to the periphery; he lies on the edge of the precipice wherefrom he eventually falls onto some other such a position.

Vikram's desire to belong somewhere vanishes in his apocalyptic vision of immigration. Striving hard to belong, he sees himself finally dangling, without friends, partners and relatives. How long can he escape his fate?

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