CHAPTER - II

DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS
IN THE MAJOR WORKS OF
DR. SATENDRA NANDAN

But I have been to this house before
For a cup of tea, may be a little more;
Now deserted like a girmitt face
Memories are beyond the barbed wires of race. ¹

The loss of any ‘paradise’ is a sad and saddening narrative. Most of our people have become homeless in their home country, strangers among the familiar faces, lived spaces. They say exiles live in one place and remember the reality of another: one belongs where one cannot be, and one is where one does not belong. From that rupture the exilic journeys begin only to reimagine the past. Paradise exists only because they are lost. ²

Perhaps one way of possessing a stolen world for migrants is through the diasporic consciousness. I believe the diasporic experience is an ancient odyssey in modern history. Its psychological, cultural and narrative nature has suddenly acquired a special immediacy in my own experience. People are being emotionally expelled from their homeland or condemned to live in it as second-class citizens. ³

These evocative passages from the Satendra Nandan’s poems capture the poignant enigma of the exilic writer’s imagination. Estimated 20 million Indian Diaspora across the globe is a significant historical phenomenon. This
vitalizing force in the different parts of the world reflects the cultural, linguistic, religious and geographical diversity of India. But it is also a fact that living in different corners of the world their concept of nation and identity is full of enigmatic experiences. Commenting on the complex and ambiguous nature of the Indian Diaspora, Bhikhu Parekh remarks that Indian diaspora represents, “half a dozen religions… seven different regions of India…nearly a dozen castes”.

In their respective countries they are forced to experience social, emotional, political, cultural alienation, gender bias, problems of race, ethnicity, and space which results in nostalgia or diasporic consciousness. The diasporic writers compel themselves to express these traumatic emotions and experience in their writings. The writings of these diasporic writers achieve a unique stature revealing conflict between cultures, identity and countries. Employing their consciousness, they exhibit their cultural linkages or attachments by presenting the tales, traditions, rituals, dialects, ethics, and myths of their homeland. They also exhibit in their writing the concepts of space, exile, identity, homeland, dislocation, transplantation, alienation, etc. It is very appropriate to quote here Salman Rushdie’s comment that diasporic literature is “one of the richest metaphors of our age”.

The writer exhibits his problematic state between “home” and “homelessness”, his position as an exiled and uprooted person. Salman Rushdie further remarks in this context, “Literature is an interim report from the consciousness of the artist…Literature is made at the frontier between self and the world, and in the act of creation that frontier softens, becomes permeable, allows the world to flow into the artist and the artist to flow into the world”.

The word ‘consciousness’ derived from the Latin word ‘Sciare’ means ‘to know’. Thus, we can say that consciousness is a type of condition of being “with knowledge.” Thus, literature becomes man’s self-referral, self-identified quest to express his/ her own consciousness and experience.

Kenneth D. Wald and Bryan D. Williams writes in this context; “Diaspora consciousness as a term signifying the cognitive investment of members of a Diaspora community in promoting homeland interests in their
The contemporary structure and situation of Indian diaspora in Fiji is a distinct and phenomenal event in the history of Indian diaspora. It has created a new discussions and debate among socio-political circles. It is very crucial and demanding to discuss the problems and issues relating to Indian diaspora in Fiji. These issues pertaining to Indo-Fijians are necessary to discuss here, if we want to understand fully, the diasporic consciousness in Nandan’s works. In this sense, Nandan’s works explains and explores the situations, reasons and provides solutions for them. The Indian Diaspora in Fiji is a distinct and unique because although the Indians were the majority community here, contributed in the nation’s growth and prosperity, mingled with the indigenous Fijians, but they have been deposed not only from the political status but also from their social status. Their human rights were denied and their sense of nationalism was mutilated. This consciousness has immensely shocked, startled and shattered the literary masters of Indian indenture diaspora in Fiji. According to Dr. Vijay Mishra:

The Girmait Ideology and Consciousness’, and places it in’,.... the field or idea of Mother India as a controlling mechanism in the lives of the diasporic Indian...’ where ‘.... in the nostalgic transmission of culture the diaspora itself becomes a fossilized fragment of the original nation. ...the structural inadequacies of the fragment produces a psychology that leads to the construction of ghostly enemies – the colonial masters, the indigenous race generating a sense of threat which in turn necessitates the unity of the fragment iself.’

The Indo-Fijian writers like Subramani, Sudesh Mishra, Vijay Mishra, Brij V.Lal, have invoked indenture consciousness in their writings. Some critics like James Clifford, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and Robin Cohen argues that the cultural awareness or consciousness enables the Diaspora to connect themselves with both, host country and homeland. In the words of Soodabeh Salehi:
Diaspora consciousness involves the idea of dwelling here in the country of residence and a connection there in the homeland. Hence, diaspora construct their cultural identities in a dialogue between “there” and “here”, past and future, between heritage and politics.\textsuperscript{10}

In the writings of these writers, diaspora consciousness manifested itself in the significance of the home country. Although living in diasporic entities in Fiji, Nandan constantly and nostalgically aroused and imagined his place of origin in order to release the pain, anger and linking for a home that the host country could not offer. No doubt, he was satisfied with the Fijian people and culture, accepts the possibilities and life which it offers but there were always in his writings, we find those references and reminiscences of the Indian subcontinent, Indian ethos and values. Nandan’s home country, India from where his forefathers migrated is often referred, in his works, as a place where he wants to go in his mind. Nandan’s works become the outcome of his consciousness in which the feelings and longings for his motherland and a place of recognition in adopted land always finds a prominent place. His indenture past is the source of his diasporic angst. His writings confront different levels of nostalgia, anguish, assimilation, and betrayal. He notes:

Unlike some other diaspora, the Indian consciousness is not linked by a single region or transferred institutions, nor by colonial hierarchies transplanted, or by politics or economics or military considerations. Indeed not even by language. It is essentially and vitally one of cultural imagination.\textsuperscript{11}

Nandan sees himself in an empowered position that differ him from an immigrant writer, who tries to write about his own acceptance and rejection of an adopted land and his cultural bond with his motherland. But in the case of Nandan, who was born in Fiji, raised his future and reached to a highest position of an M.P. He is the third generation of his family in Fiji, in this sense, he has accepted the Fijian way of living and its constitution as his own motherland. But the unfortunate event of the coup of 1987 changed his bonds, emotions and relations with Fiji. His writings reveal both attachment and
rejection to a place where he was born and lived. In his poems *Two Waves* like
many of his poems, he depicts his closeness and rejection of Fiji, both at the
same time. He rejects the racism that corrupted the social-political fabric of
Fiji, after and before the coup. He argues that a true feeling of nationality
comes from the acceptance of each and every race. He further argues that:

Racism in Fiji was acceptable so much in our largest
neighbour was determined by its historical policies. The
indentured and their descendents were children of the lesser
gods…there was a warm at the heat of paradise; political
racism in a communally oriented grab of venal democracy.¹²

He writes that communalism and political racism sharpened in Fiji and the
descendents of indenture labour were given minimum importance. His writing
comprises his own cartography of landscape, place, culture, identity and
belongingness. Nandan is a truthful poet and novelist of diaspora and a twice-
banished writer of Indian origin. In his writings, Nandan attempts to analyze
the diasporic consciousness, existential dilemma, and search for place for the
Indians in Fiji. In this kind of problematic state of despair and dilemma the
writer bravely tries to find some remedies and to find a meaningful space in
alien surroundings. Nandan grew into a brilliant writer from the exiled and
diasporic Indian community in Fiji, but he carved his niche through his
sparkling verse, realistic essays and autobiographical fiction. In the star studded
galaxy of the literary personalities of the day, Nandan stands supreme because
of his truthful account of the coup and the plight of the girmiitiyas. He
publically exposed the evils of the coup, the brutality of the Rabuka regime and
anarchy that prevailed in Fijian society. He tried his level best to invoke public
awareness through his speeches and articles. He bravely opposed the
unconstitutional and undemocratic ways of the coup. He vehemently rejected
the political demarcation and negligence of the Indians in Fiji and advocated
multiculturalism. Also, he is a twice banished writer and politician by his ancestry, Fijian by birth and Australian by adaption. According to Syd Harrex:

Satendra Nandan’s prose, fiction and poetry belong together and speak to each other like members of one family who share common pursuits, goals, and visions. They address the same large themes of India, Fiji, Diaspora, exile; they map the same interesting vectors that affect private lives and social conditions.\(^\text{13}\)

Rightly said by Syd Harrex, Nandan’s fiction, poetry and essays are like members of one family, having common themes of exile, trauma, ethics, nostalgia and search for space. Nandan’s works reconstructs the colonial and post colonial conditions of Fiji and presents violent upheavals and his personal nightmarish experiences from the point of view of the expatriate living there. Before we focus on the diasporic consciousness of the writer, it will be worthwhile to mention the short history of the indenture Indian labourers in Fiji. In Fiji, the Indenture labour arrangements started around in 1879 and continued till 1920. During this period around 60,000 Indians\(^\text{14}\) were brought to the various plantations on agreement which they called ‘girmit’ and lived under the cruelest and brutal circumstances. \textit{Girmit} is a vernacular word of Fiji-Hindi variant of the word ‘agreement’. By their indomitable will and hard work they changed the face of Fiji. In spite of immense suffering and exploitation they succeeded in creating Fiji, a multicultural-agricultural nation. But their relations with the indigenous Fijians proved fragile because of the effects of racial politics. The first coup in 1987 and the second in the year 2000 spread the poison of racism among them. As a result, many Indian had to migrate from Fiji. Nandan, who was an active politician at the time of the coup suffered betrayal and shock. The government in which he was a minister was overthrown. That is why in his works, he strongly advocates ethics, morality and values in politics. Today, in most of the countries the slave trade and indenture labour arrangements have abolished during the second half of the 20\(^{th}\) century, but still these countries are haunted by the ghost of racism and political fragmentations. These countries are replete with diverse problems of
colonialism, race and culture. In the age of post colonialism, these countries are suffering from economic backwardness, political upheavals, chaos, and socio-political disintegrations. In this kind of chaotic conditions, the diasporic people remains in the predicamental state of exile, and longing for a place of recognition. In this case, the uprooted and transplanted people immensely suffered from a sense of alienation, existential despair and nostalgia. William Safran says about the characteristics of the diaspora:

…dispersal, collective memory, sense of alienation, sanctity of the ancestral homeland and a belief in its restoration, definition of the self in terms of identification with the homeland are seen as the key characteristics of the diasporas.\(^{15}\)

William Safran wants to say that collective memory of the ancestral homeland is the key ingredient for a diasporic writer. Nandan depicts the feelings of loss and nostalgia simultaneously in his works which provides a base for his diasporic consciousness. In relation with his Indian heritage, Nandan captures a transcultural consciousness which gives him a benefit and capacity, not as an obstacle in his identity formation in the Diaspora. He uses the Hindi Fijian words which clearly reveal the hybridity of his identity. Nandan’s oeuvre presents the predicamental state of the girmitiya, their indenture history and the factors that shapes the history. He gives truthful account of their exile, remembrance of India and his own personal confrontation with this past. Sudhir Kumar in one his brilliant essay, reveals the core of Satendra Nandan’s diasporic consciousness:

The des-pardes-axis, which is so conspicuous in Nandan’s poetry, is an important coordinate of the hyphenated diasporic (Indo-Fijian) identity. In fact, both the signifiers “des (the motherland)” and “pardes (the host nation)” are deconstructed in the diasporic consciousness –as what is initially constructed or imagined as “des”, after crossing the seven seas- spatially and culturally, becomes “pardes”.\(^{16}\)

He further argues that the process of assimilation involves immense dislocation, transplantation and sacrifices of the girmitiyas and thus the process always becomes problematic for the diasporas. This problematic state of the
Indo-Fijians is the chief constituents of diasporic consciousness in his writings. Satendra Nandan minutely captures the different facets of the diasporic consciousness of these girmitiyas into his poems and prose. Nandan in his thought-provoking essay, *The Politics of Dispossession and Exile* says in this context:

> You wake up to the harrowing fact that you are excluded from the imagination of the nation. The condition has now gone beyond history and geography; it has seeped into the loneliness of the spirit where the spatial becomes the spiritual. The so-called *bh miputras* (sons of the soil) had forced one out of one’s *matrabhumi* (mother country).

Vijay Mishra analyzing the ideological framework of the Indo-Fijian Diaspora applies the term ‘Girmit Ideology’ for the representations of the diasporic consciousness in the writings of the Indo-Fijian writers. This girmit ideology or consciousness provides zoom lens to the writer to see the past in his memory. Nandan’s writing goes beyond the traditional frontiers of a country and identity and involves multiple nations and identities. Nandan emphasizes his roots and emotional connection to his land of birth as, “Leaving Fiji has been painful. All I can say now is: while I may be drying inside...” His writing is surrounded by the local villagers, Indians, deaths, rituals, and pathos. He exhibits his Fijian identity as, “soon the neighbours came and the sound of yaqona being poured in Father’s bure was a most comforting sound.” By describing Fijian way of life, Nandan destroys the demarcations between the native Fijians and the girmitiya ancestors and their descendents. The gathering of neighbours and serving yaqona suggests the harmonious social structure of Fiji. He takes refuge in the world of his forefathers and their lives. Recollecting his childhood days he writes two famous short stories, *The Guru* and *A Pair of Black Shoes*. It is his experiences of childhood, politics, academic services and journalistic writing that form his personality as a writer and politician. According to Nandan:
The memories are multitudinous, the loses of home are infinite and intimate. And writing the future is filling these blank spaces of the heart and breathing words on the blank pages of your note book.

In the case of diasporic writer, some kinds of linkages with the motherland are possible and these linkages can be their tradition, culture, religion, etc. Satendra Nandan’s novel *The Wounded Sea* is colossal work based on the writer’s consciousness of past history. It was published in the year 1991. The novel is a masterpiece and captures the truthful account of the coup and its consequences. The enigmatic nature of Fiji politics and resultant social-political crisis gets reflected in this novel. *The Wounded Sea* also can be judged as a socio-political text in which we finds a country’s tormenting and chaotic political-social upheavals. The theme of *The Wounded Sea* reaches to its height when the writer invents the third person omniscient perspective to dramatize and emphasize the position of the Indo-Fijians. Surrounded by the political and social uncertainties and turmoil, Nandan shifts in and out of his diasporic consciousness. He talks elaborately of an Indian family in Fiji whose forefathers were settled, established their home, a family which is very religious, hardworking, living harmoniously with the Fijians. Nandan is conscious of the cruel agony of the girmitiyas whose dreams of paradisal land were rejected by the colonial powers. And that is why he ironically comments, “Sugar and slavery are the Siamese twins of many colonized islands.”

He vividly depicts that how the multicultural texture of Fiji polluted by the racial practices by the few powerful men. It results in the exodus of thousands of Indians from Fiji. Satendra Nandan’s novel is an evidence that how an individual life gets diverted and disturbed by the epidemic of the coups. Being a twice exiled writer of Indian origin, he situates his novel in colonial and postcolonial situations and records the complexities and conflicts of the societies. He incorporates the colonial and post colonial history and thus gets the realistic picture of the Indians in Fiji. In his novel, he makes a humble endeavour to analyse the deep rooted Indian consciousness, irony of betrayal, freedom, and nostalgia. The novel is writer’s resolve to find a significant space
and meaningful status in this adopted country. It is indispensable to point out that Nandan was born and brought up as a writer and politician in diasporic Indian community in Fiji and thus he can poignantly expose the injustice, brutality and racial practices of colonialism of the Fijians. The novel is set in his childhood village, where he has spent childhood days of liberty and innocence. Narrating his days of leisure and freedom, he also highlights the events of the life of his girmitiya parents and grandparents. The hardships and struggle of his parents, socio-political anarchy and agony of transplantation all are very well depicted in the first three parts of the novel. The contemporary political developments and social complexities of Fiji are depicted through Nandan’s own life, in the last part of the book. He writes about his Indian roots:

My father was born in Fiji. His father had come from India - from a little, obscure village called Sultanpur near the Taj Mahal - under the indenture system…My grandfather, who never mentioned the Taj Mahal, had signed his girmit - he couldn’t pronounce ‘agreement’.22

He mentions fragmentary details about his origin in India and also about the girmit system through which his ancestors have arrived in Fiji. The whole story depicts the diasporic predicament of the Indo-Fijians and using the metaphors of The Ramayana, Nandan invokes the tragedy of the loss of motherland;

“Why was Rama sent into exile, Baba?”
“Because Kekeyi wanted her own son to be king of Ayodhya.” Baba paused before reflecting: “Exile, betu, is common. Valmiki wrote about Ram’s exile, so that we could bear ours. That’s how I have lived here. His voice faltered. I began to see things in perspective…in Ram’s story I saw our Fijian Indian lives mirrored.23

The language and the dialogues often look simple and innocent but using this simplicity, he narrates the saga and sufferings of the girmitiya ancestors. The memory of motherland and tragedy of his birthplace are described in apparent innocence, thus invokes powerful sense of hatred, anger and pathos. Satendra Nandan’s novel The Wounded Sea is a kind of parable which throws light on the contemporary socio-political conditions of Indo-Fijians in Fiji. We can
quote Homi Bhabha in this context “It is never quite an act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.”

The imaginative quality in his writings comes from the distant girmit experiences and using it he creates a world of blood and bones in which the girmitiyas lives come alive. Nandan in his novel satirises the colonial power for its inhuman treatment to the Indians. Using first person narration he jumps straight to the core issues of tyranny, tribulations and longing of the indenture people.

The novel provides us a kind of return passage into the world of darkness, and horror, the world which is often forgotten in the pages of history. His fiction is a living record which reminds us the expulsion and twice-uprootedness of the Indians first from their motherland, India and second from Fiji. His characters like Bisnath, Birbal Pundit, Kallu, Jagat Mahajan, Sukhi Ram all creates an air of Indianess in an alien land. He describes the Pineapple Lines-“barracks erected several girmits ago to house the descendents of indentured labourers who worked on CSR’s pineapple plantations…the temporary shelters of the fathers had become the permanent homes of their children, who accepted their lot with deepening fatalism.”

According to Vijay Mishra;

Nandan transforms his memorial reconstructions’ (since the memories are really of ‘texts’) through a strategy of polyphonic composition…As a consequence a plethora of voices invade Nandan’s text as the various utterances of the grandfather, the father, the son, the Fijians, the school master or the priest struggle for momentary ascendancy. In the Mahabharata such multiplicity of voices is marked by the use of Sanskrit verb uvaca (said or spoke) alongside the speaker to indicate his/her quite independent narrative presence.

The tales of exile from the great Indian epics The Ramayana and The Mahabharata provides structural solidarity and understanding to Nandan’s discourse. The tales of banishment, existence and survival is exquisitely
compared with the Fijian Indians’ fate and documented in *The Wounded Sea*. Vijay Mishra remarks in this context:

Satendra Nandan’s work expresses the agony of banishment…but the narratives are written against the backdrop of this primal banishment…A fossil retreated into its memories of a prior narrative which was itself an uncritical glorification of a mythic past…

The indenture consciousness of the writer, further aggravated by the fateful events of the coup. Throughout the novel we can find the nonnegotiable longing for the past and firm resolve to establish stability in present. These descendents of girmitiyas are now twice-uprooted because of the successive coups that took place first in 1987 and then in 2000. Like many others, Nandan also relocates himself in Australia and thus he can be entitled as the part of Indian Diaspora in Australia. They possess in themselves twice-banished identity of an Indian-Fijian- Australian. As the narrator’s vision shifts frequently, the narrative of the novel moves like a pendulum from past to present and into the future of the narrator’s experience and back again. This instability and uncertainty of identity is one of the key elements of Nandan’s diasporic consciousness. In *Antyesti Samskara* he reconstructs his lost space and his attachment with the Indian rites and sacred rituals, which is the embodiment of Indian sensibility. Nandan wants to emphasis that by nurturing the traditions, myths, tales, legends, customs, and social bonds, they are making distance from the present reality. He suggests through his short story *Mangoes* that the old man, who remembering the tasty and delicious mangoes of his village Sultanpur in India says:

> The Fijian mangoes, thick and fleshly, lacked the taste, the character of the fibre that made you suck the mango stone till it shone white like a piece of human bone. Mangoes in Fiji lacked the *mitha*s and the people were no different/ fruit and flower, fish and flesh reflect the nature of people in a place.

For this old indenture labourer, the mangoes are still the emblem of his country, his ‘bountiful land’, India. He fails to accept the Fijian way of life
and customs. But during these years they have established their home, religion and tradition in a new way and thus made Fiji their second home. Nandan’s diasporic vision and version, sense and sensibility very well expressed in his essays also. His collection of thirteen insightful essays *Fiji: Paradise in Pieces* gives a deeper illumination of Indian life and its values in Fiji during the turbulent era of 1987 coup. Nandan’s work on the whole provides a sense of respect and empowerment in a society that denies the individual’s voice and exposes them to different forces like race, ethnicity, personal betrayal and violence. He reveals socio-cultural differences that exist between the land of the past and the land of the present by an ingenious use of his memory and capturing the past in the present and thus gives expression to his betrayed emotions. As far as the title of the book is concerned, it suggests that Fiji was a veritable paradise for the Indians but now it shattered into pieces, by the cruel hands of racism. The book *Fiji: Paradise in Pieces* contains Nandan’s speeches and selected essays, is an inspirational book which gives the courage of speaking what is right and what is not. In the book the fate and future of the Indian community is discussed with great tenacity and force. According to Anthony Mason, the editor of the volume says, that the present book is a kind of learning process. He says:

> Working on this book...has been an education, through not just about Fiji. I have also learned about having the courage of your convictions, about speaking up for what is right, about trust and truth and trauma, and about responding to anything life may throw with strength, integrity, and a sense of humour.  

The present work is the writer’s pathetic expression in which he compares the coup with an internal injury. In the very first essay of the book, Nandan describes in detail the past, present and future of the Indians in Fiji. In this thought-provoking essay, he expresses his concern for the fate of the Indians. He also suggests the prevailing racial politics will corrupt the multicultural fabric of Fiji. He says that Indians have sacrificed a lot and though they have maintained their patience, dignity and stature. Nandan says:
The legends of Rama, Buddha, Christ and Mohammed help us to live and bring deeper illuminations into our hearts so that we may not regard our suffering and sacrifices as the greatest. In the lives of great souls we see the realities of the human condition and accept our own.\textsuperscript{30}

The Indians have learned immensely from the great sages and thus derived the lessons of stoicism, struggle and fortitude in the chaotic Fiji. They survived because of the moral teaching which the sages provided through their lives. Giving the brief history of indenture labour in Fiji, Nandan expresses his strong aversion towards racial politics and discriminatory policies towards Indians. Nandan in this essay raises issues of leadership, ethnicity, race, politics and stability. He also narrates the deplorable condition of the Indians caused by the supremacy of the Fijians. In his essay, \textit{Indians and the War}, He says;

\begin{quote}
…the native colonial hierarchy is kept in power for the benefit of the few, by the few, for the few. Colonel Rabuka symbolizes those Fijians’ Pyrrhic victory. The battle of the moment is in favour of a few business firms who supply the immediate needs of the few in power.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

In another essay, \textit{The Politics of Dispossession and Exile} Nandan reveals the causes and consequences of the coup and the plight of the Indo-Fijians. He describes the exilic conditions of these people and their strength to survive from it. He also mentions the names of the few writers who expressed the traumas of the coup in their literature. He says, “One can understand the terrible intimidation caused by the gun wielding soldiers in the hearts and minds of many creative people in Fiji.”\textsuperscript{32} He quotes from Gandhi, Naipaul, Said and many others and gives truthful account of the Indian-Fijian experience. He elaborates:

\begin{quote}
Perhaps one way of possessing a stolen world for migrants is through the diasporic consciousness. I believe the diasporic experience is an ancient odyssey in modern history. It’s psychological, cultural, and narrative nature has suddenly acquired a special immediacy in my own experience. People are being emotionally expelled from their homeland or condemned to live in it as second-class citizens.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}
According to Nandan, in modern times a diasporic writer can possess his own world only through his imagination or consciousness because they are forced to live emotionless and nationless and even nameless life. For Nandan diasporic experience is an ancient odyssey, a legacy which affects their present. The Indians were neglected and expelled from their land, the land where they have sacrificed their generations. He talks on major issues pertaining to the Indo-Fijians like colonialism, race, identity, subjugation, exile, Indianess, coup, politics and so on. He advocates equality, freedom and social acceptance of the Indians. It is political-social criticism chiefly written from the point of view of a writer-in-exile. The exodus which took place after the two coups of 1987 and 2000 can be called a turning point in the lives of thousands of Indo-Fijians who left the shores of Fiji with a heavy heart, with the feelings of betrayal, loss and anger. Nandan writes, “…this fate should have befallen the grandchildren of indentured labourers is both tragic and ironic-tragic because they are the twice banished, ironic because of all migrant peoples they did most to preserve the indigenous way of life on the islands.”

The people who struggled hard to work, to live and to establish themselves, suddenly excluded from the society, politics and history of Fiji. Nandan’s writing paves the way for the future writers to write about this exclusion and hurt. According to Ken Arvidson:

_Fiji: Paradise in Pieces_ extends our understanding of the truth and drives home to us the urgency of establishing true democracy in Fiji. Nandan writes of the trauma inflicted once again on the Fijian Indian population with passionate clarity…an exceptionally well informed collection.

He tries to compare the Fijian culture, traditions, atmosphere, life with a veritable paradise in which both the community mingled with each other, before the fatal coup. But the horrifying developments of the coup of 1987 and 2000 mutilated the multiracial, multi cultural social structure of Fiji. First the Bavadra Government and later Mahendra Chaudhary Government were crushed under the tyrannical powers of racism. And thus the so called paradise shattered into pieces. The title of the book is very apt and suggestive, clearly
represents the prevailing conditions in Fiji. He writes in the “Author’s Note” of the book:

The first coup on May 14, 1987, had affected Fiji as a heart attack. The second on September 25 was like a stroke. Together they led to a fearful political paralysis and the internal hemorrhage continued. More than 77,000 Fiji citizens, who had known no other country, left for other lands with feeling of disgust, betrayal, shame and the hurt of history. You cannot judge the size of the internal injury by superficial scars.\\n
He also says that if you claim ‘Fiji for the Fijians’, you are excluding half of the Indian populations. According to him; “The Indian- Fijian has been a perpetual victim of race.” He tries to convey the sensitiveness and seriousness of the issues of racial discrimination and corruption in the Fijian society. It is waking call for the multicultural nation which slowly and gradually losing its balance. It invokes multitudes of questions among readers, politicians, literary circles about the political and social stability of Fiji and the Indians in Fiji.

_Beyond Paradise: Rights of Passage_ is marvellously written essay collection by Satendra Nandan, published in the year 2010. It is written in seven broad segments which also suggest seven passages or journeys of the writer in different stages of life. It covers fifty years of writer’s life and his thoughts on varied subjects. These seven journeys represents writer’s search for truth, self-realization and self-discovery. According to William Zinsser;

_Beyond Paradise: Rights of Passage_ is a rich and perceptive harvest of memories- personal, political, professional and poetic. It may enrich your reading and inspire you to write your own unique journeys into life.

In this book he talks about his study, his stay in Australia, India, his reading, family and education. But particularly in one of the essays entitled, _A Return Flight to Paradise_ he describes in detail about his visit of his village in Fiji. Remembering his ancestors, he writes; “So I hurried to Nadi, the place of my birth, where my father and his father’s bones were burnt and buried and my mother still lived, aged almost eighty.”
Satendra Nandan’s another conspicuous work; *Between The Lines: Selected Prose 1978-2008* is a valuable record of his diasporic consciousness and his Fiji experience. It covers the period between 1978 and 2008, mainly contains his speeches, essays and poems which reveals the pathos and agony of dislocation under colonialism. The work proves a path making outcome for the many emerging writers, that is why Subramani, the prominent Indo-Fijian writer remarks; “Satendra Nandan showed that writing had a future in our country and through his effort prepared the way for the writers’ engagement in civil society.”

In this collection of thirty essays Nandan talks on a variety of topics like nation, politics, corruption, racism, values, Indianess and on Nehru, Gandhi, Wole Soyinka and Patrick White. The essays which it contains are autobiographical and refracting his diasporic consciousness. Essays like *Ancestors: Distant Mirrors, A sense of Exile, A sense of Identity, Healing the Wounds* contains Nandan’s views and memories of their forefathers. Nandan’s forefathers left India very early, but it has remained Nandan’s consciousness and memory. It is like an immortal source which lives and grows in his memory, keeps him alive, and inspires him to write. Nandan’s works are like wormholes or teleporters through which we can travel into the age of Indian indenture and girmitiyas. He makes us feel the trials and tribulations of these illiterate, gullible and hardworking people. His essays reflect a gradual transformation of his sense of identity and culture which he wants to express. His identity as an Australian after many years wants to assimilate with the present self. His original Indian consciousness tries to probing his roots and culture. His essays are written with a deep concern for the Indians, the native Fijians, humanity, diasporic relations and peace. His essay *Ancestors: Distant Mirrors* is a beautifully written account of the girmitiya ancestors’ journey and holocaust of the indenture period. Nandan writes with the purpose to commemorate the saga and sufferings of these girmitiyas for the generations to come. He took up this challenge to write these oral histories of his forefathers
and wants to immortalize their chronicles of dislocation, transplantation and exile. He says:

The girmitiyas in my memory have remained as the symbols of sacrifice and inspiration, as all pioneers and pathfinders are...for me, are the lives of these ordinary men and women who were truly the most extraordinary...No group of Indians had ever ventured this far in the Pacific...They wrought a sea change in more than their lives. History has hardly recorded the truth of their lives.\n
Nandan firmly believes that these indenture labourers from the ancient villages of India never harmed or killed anyone, never converted anybody and snatched his trades, they are the peace loving workers who believed in respect, dignity and hard work. Many of their generations worked on the plantations and suffered immensely but retained their Indian identity. He says, “It was the longest cultural journey of any community.”\n
He considers that the sacrifice of the girmitiyas is a valuable and inspiring motif for the future generations. Then he elaborately talks on exile, education, society, identity and politics. The diasporic consciousness provides an insight into the suffering and pathos of this girmitiyas and their concept of nationalism. Thus the writings of Satendra Nandan reveal the fragments of this indenture era. His prose and poetical works are a veritable voice of this landless, nationless and exilic Indian Diaspora of Fiji. The coolie or girmitiya background of Satendra Nandan itself becomes a forceful text, a vital source of his writings. The particular background of the writer enhances his vision, enriches his language and encourages millions of girmitiyas descendents to express their tales of trauma and suffering. For Nandan, his coolie background has great significance and that is why he writes in his autobiography, *Requiem for a Rainbow A Fijian Indian Story*: “One’s life is in the final analysis, the ultimate text.”\n
It is also very appropriate to mention here that Nandan’s forefathers were the indenture labourers from India had come to Fiji under the indenture system in the 1890s. They worked on the sugarcane plantations of Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR). His parents and all his brothers and sisters were also born and brought up in Fiji, connecting themselves with the cultural, social, and constitutional values of
Fiji. They didn’t have seen or heard much about India except in the tales of the great Indian epics. It was only in the year 1958, when Nandan left for Delhi for higher studies, their imagination and consciousness about India, reawakened. No doubt, the image of India was in their collective consciousness, but Nandan’s journey back to his motherland fills them with rejuvenated joy and memory of the past history. In one of the chapters of his book, *Requiem for a Rainbow: A Fijian Indian Story*, he writes, “I was establishing a rainbow bridge across the dark waters – *kalapani* – of the seven seas which they had crossed – links in the chain of injustice.”

Thus his writings, thematically and characteristically, points out the diaspora history of the indenture Indian labourers, the pathetic consequences of the coup of 1987, and post-colonial racial politics. Staunch to convey and communicate the reality of these people, Nandan not only expresses the intense anguish and trauma of these girmityas but also highlights the present political scenario of Fiji. *Requiem for a Rainbow: A Fijian Indian Story* is an autobiography of Satendra Nandan published in the year 2001. It is a record of his childhood memory, thoughts and reminiscences. The present work depicts his experience at different cities like Nadi, Delhi, Suva and Canberra. Nandan’s agitated and anguished mind always finds solace in the ancient Indian epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. These texts become a potent metaphor for him and he compares the exile of Rama and Pandavas with that of the Indo-Fijians. Indian mythology and tales inspires these girmityas and enables them to endure heroically the hellish affliction of the colonial power. According to Nandan;

> The India of my childhood imagination, that India which had seeped into my diasporic consciousness with immense force through her epics, songs, memories, of grandparents, films, pictures, of gods and goddesses, portraits of Nehru and Gandhi, posters of lord Krishna…

---

44

45
Nandan remembers his father and grandfather telling him the stories of these epics and episodes, and thus explaining him the concepts of exile, suffering and motherland. Nandan very minutely and exquisitely narrates his education at different places like Fiji, Delhi, and Canberra. He considers it a great moment when he receives the Government of India scholarship, because of three reasons; first, through this scholarship, he was going to India where no one from his family have ever visited, the second reason was in Fiji, very few students receives the honour of this scholarship and the third was, he was going to enter into a subcontinent from an island country. It gives him immense pleasure. Movements, afflictions, migrations and exile are the recurrent themes in this book. Among all the diasporic poets of Indian origin in Fiji, Dr. Satendra Nandan remains supreme whose poetic and prose work are the most sincere and truthful representation of his diasporic consciousness. Nandan’s forefathers came to Fiji as indenture labourers and they remained there for the rest of his life. Nandan was born in a small village of Fiji, far from India; but he could not dissociate himself from his Indian roots, his past, may be because he never wanted to forget the feeling which was based on a series of realizations of identity with Indian and Indian culture. This kind of identity or consciousness is formed historically, socially and culturally. Consciousness of a person forces him or her to connect him/herself with past experiences. This diasporic consciousness makes a solid bond between his past and his present. Nandan’s encounter with the coup and the feeling of betrayal, in the land where he was born, renews his consciousness about his indenture forefathers. In Nandan’s poetry, this bond between the past and the present becomes an integral part of his living, his survival and his literary corpus. Therefore, we can say that Nandan’s poetic and creative vision arises from his powerful
diasporic consciousness sharpened and strengthened by physical distance from his homeland, India. In the words of Dr. Vijay Mishra:

The major poems in all his three volumes of poetry are one way of by-passing the cataclysmic possibilities of the poetic fate...the imaginative world has a Wordsworthian quality about it...whatever else might be said about the Fiji Indian, the fact of indenture, the fact of bondage and displacement dominates Satendra Nandan’s discourse and explains why he writes the way he does...myths enable him to give form to memories which would otherwise disappear... 

Mishra further notes that:

In Nandan’s vision we become aware of a much more sensitive consciousness...Nandan’s verse is charged with urgency, filled with a demand that the country is as much theirs by ‘right of vision’ as it is theirs by ‘right of birth’. 

Nandan’s poetry reveals before us synchronous and interpenetrating processes of belonging and dislocation, his formative years in Fiji, Delhi and Australia, his political career and the consequences of the coup. The formation of his consciousness, its process and dynamics is penetrating and excruciating. The persona in the epigraph poem of his volume, Loneliness of Islands expresses a conflict and struggle between belonging and displacement working simultaneously. Nandan writes:

In the ancient shadows and twilights
Where childhood had stray’d,
The world’s great sorrows were born
And its heroes were made.
In the lost boyhood of Judas
Christ was betray’d.

Nandan remembers his land of birth where he was born and also where he was betrayed. For a diasporic writer, it is essential to keep a conscious distance from the adopted land, but Nandan, in his prose and poems, maintains an intense closeness with Fiji. This enables him to express his love, intimacy and a sense of identity with Fiji but also this very closeness underlines his betrayal and shock which Fiji gives. Seri I. Luangphinth gives fine explanation of his poem, Wailoaloa Beach: “A sign of change in
Nandan’s newer work is reflected in the lyrical disassociation with specific history and in his greater attention to the larger philosophical (and more universal) concerns regarding poetry’s role in comprehending moments of crisis. As Nandan’s poem makes clear, suffering for the Indo-Fijian comes in the form of an unceasing “persecution [that] is most abhorrent.” In turn, the soul begins to question faith in the divine: “I raise a prayer, salt water in my hand. / Will he come to rescue me again? / The Savior of my pitiless soul / From a desert, a healing fountain: Will he hear my call when dogs howl?” These questions lead to the greater problems of art in general in “Wainoaloa Beach.” This poem engages in a rendition of a famous Matthew Arnold poem (“Dover Beach”); like the narrator in that poem, Nandan enunciates, “The Sea is moving beyond my reach.” In the dark night, the only lights ascertainable are those of a funeral pyre and of a tourist boat – symbols of a “dead” link to the Indian past and of the kitsch materialism necessary for the tourism industry. Cognizant of these lesser illuminations and perhaps of the lack of a grandiose ontology, the poet confronts a painful truth: “What is human except human pain?”

He also expresses his constant longing for his roots in India. Remembering his early joyful days spent in Fiji, he tries to establish his identity as an Indian. It is a fact that there is no return passage is possible to the homeland but psychologically and emotionally he revisits the land of his imagination. In this sense his poems and prose are the reincarnation of the indenture era. He writes:

We remember you from a distant shore:
Across the seas you crossed is our flight-
A severed kite falling in a starry night
Breaking hearts for music heard no more.

Nandan, through his poems, pays homage to his great grandparents and other girmitiyas who crossing the Kala Pani / black waters after, undertaking marathon journeys, they all came to Fiji. They left their land for the land which they have never seen or imagined. He writes; “a yearning, this longing/ For a place that is/ no more.” He recreates the journey of girmitiyas in his poem, The Gifts of Girmitiyas:
So many endless nights at sea
So many dark days on the shore;
What and for whom was it all for?
Flung like stars into a blue eternity.

He depicts the dark alleys of the dangerous sea from which they have survived but they didn’t survive from the fate which was waiting for them on those islands. Nandan says that these ancient girmitiyas from India, after reaching the shores of Fiji have made the Fijian people their new brothers and sisters. They have made the strangers their relatives. They lived harmoniously with the native Fijians and made the alien land their own and established their new home. Nandan in his poems gives due importance and status to the struggle of these girmitiyas. With immense conflict and fortitude, they turned their tragedy into their achievement. Nandan appreciates and pays a great attribute to the strength, suffering and stoicism of the girmitiyas in these words:

You are our glory, our deepest grief
You are the poems of a living dead-
Giving meaning to every grain of sand,
And to every beloved tree, a green leaf.

Nandan’s poetry is a conscious struggle to overcome his diasporic tension and represent homeland through various metaphors, symbols and traditions. The poet uses these techniques and devices to recapture the motherland, which was left behind when these girmitiyas left the shores of the Indian Ocean. The linguistic essence of his poems exhibits a multi-facetedness made up of Indian and Fijian heritage, his identification with Fijian history of indenture, colonialism, banishment and migration to Australia. In his writings, we can find a conscious effort and attempt to contemporize the past and relate it with the present. Thus, he maintains a kind of closeness from the adopted country and consciously remains in this periphery of self. The theme and content of Nandan’s poetry is, to greater extent, Indian, possessing Indian sensibility. The central experience in his poetry is related not only to his forefathers but also to the contemporary Fiji. In his consciousness, India always remains in background. Most of his writings are intensely personal, even autobiographical.
but he has tried to universalize his experiences to reinterpret his concepts of history, identity, culture and consciousness. In his host country Fiji, he lived as a Fijian but he also wants to survive as a diasporic person so he marked his difference as an Indian. In the poem *The Journey*, Nandan makes use of various images and symbols and depicts the urban life full of hustle and bustle. Poet’s longing and solitude find expression in the poem;

Deep in my dreaming heart. This longing for a vision, a birth. In the solitude of the sea and a nun / my receding, redeeming earth, / Rising like an Easter Sun.\(^54\)

The poem *The Pen and The Gun* depicts Nandan’s anger and shock of the atmosphere of uncertainty and chaos. Describing the memories of the coup which gives him personal shock, Nandan says that, “The pen mightn’t be mightier than the sword / It’s lighter than the gun: mark my every word.”\(^55\)

His poems are strongly concerned with the poet’s own faith for Fijian culture and tradition but also the feeling of shock and betrayal which he received after establishing his home there. Nandan’s diasporic consciousness is clearly evident in his poems like *The Gifts of the Girmityyas, Lines Across Black Waters, Tota’s Tale, Easter’88, A Churning in Oceania, Two Waves, The Loneliness of Islands, Motherland, The Ghost*, and *The Second Banishment*. The two aspects, love for motherland or adopted country and feeling of shock and betrayal are meticulously juxtaposed in these poems. It is his personal memory and history, the collective girmity history and memories of his motherland and its people, the recurrent personal and social identity in an adopted land which suggests the process of assimilation and acceptance which although, remains incomplete and unseparated, however long he may live. Being a Fijian citizen he accepts its culture, tradition and people but the sudden stroke of the coup of 1987 reinforces his personal dilemma. He is still stick to his tradition which he has inherited through his forefathers. In this way, Nandan’s dislocation and exile are not only responsible for his sense of diaspora but it is the tragedy of the coup and racial discrimination in Fiji, which is more decisive and crucial.
His book of poems *Lines Across Black Waters* provides vivid description of the contemporary Fiji and the indenture history of the Indians. It is a remarkable collection of poems which presents the author’s diasporic anguish and longing for a better society. In other words his poems reconstruct the concept of nationalism, identity, and race by expressing the heart-wrenching sagas of Indian indenture labourers. The title echoes Totatam Sanadhya’s book *The story of the Haunted Line*. Satendra Nandan brilliantly incorporates history, imagination, tradition, myths, politics and reminiscences in his poetry and thus he tries to present the diasporic state of the Indo-Fijians. M.S. Pandey observes in this context:

> The Girmitiya poetic discourses of leaving home cast out their shadows throughout this poetic collection, and the exile into indenture experience configures very prominently in them. His diasporic experience as an indo-Fijian exiled writer in Australia textures both his works and his constructs of national consciousness.

The consciousness of twice uprootedness is the pivotal discourse of Nandan’s writings. The title–poem *Lines Across Black Waters* depicts the historical voyage of Indian indenture labourers and their stories of dislocation and uprootedness. The girmitiya history of exile and transplantation affects the writer’s consciousness. The poem, *Lines Across Black Waters* narrates the coming of the girmitiyas crossing the black waters to a dark and distant land where they confront with innumerable quarrels, grief, betrayal and bloodshed. Nandan realistically portrays the indenture life on an alien land where his ancestors suffered and survived immense physical-mental torture and trauma. He writes:

> *Kalapani*, black waters, a cross across the seven seas  
> With blood, betrayal, griefs, that never cease  
> A fragment, a shard, lay buried  
> In the heart: a bone, a stone or a mirror?  
> Sharpen your cane knives  
> We, too, have ancestors in our lives.
The poet’s emphasis in the last line of the stanza “We, too, have ancestors in our lives.” clearly shows us that in his diasporic consciousness he possesses great reverence for his girmitiya ancestors. In this sense the present poem is an important record which defines the writer’s bond with his Indian roots and it also shows us how this cultural heritage come alive in Fiji, particularly in the period of shock and betrayal. The poem also depicts the whole indenture process and girmit ideology, the living conditions and agony of their forefathers in Fiji. He writes;

They sailed the ocean
Stitched like blank pages in a book,
The ships couldn’t read the waves,-
Leonidas, Syria, Sutlej, Jamuna
Fultala, Chenab, Indus, Sangoa…
-Guided by the darkness between stars,
They had arrived: the ship’s sail
The shark’s fin in an epiphany.⁵⁸

Like blank pages in a book, these girmitiyas were not given their due respect and people forgot their contribution. They live and died but their identity shrouded in mystery. The poet further says that these “sixty thousand lives” came “From a little village to the dark lines” after crossing “Twelve thousand miles”:

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell:
The soil is bare now, nor can feet feel, being shod.⁵⁹

Many generations came, worked relentlessly and made their new home possible in this land. Nandan mentions the names of some of the places where they initially settled in the dark coolie lines of plantations. These places are – Rewa, Nausori, Wainbokasi, Nandi, etc. He notes that many of them lost their lives in their pursuit to establish themselves due to the cruel weather of the sea and cruelty of Overseers. The poet put stress on their struggle, hardships and toil which turned Fiji into a veritable paradise. He writes:
Plantation by plantation, they build a new world
Sugar sweet the slave crop grew
Elsewhere it had depopulated half the universe
Here my father’s fathers,
Sleeping on our mother’s breasts
Gave breath and bread to an island
And like islands in the ocean
Shipwrecked, trapped in history,
Without the grammar of grandmothers
They died in hope and dread.60

Nandan doesn’t fail to record that the labour and hard work of these girmitiyas provided bread to the people of Fiji. They laid down their lives and buried their bodies to give breath to others. He says that these girmitiyas are “coolies: in the chosen Shakespearean tongue/ Rama’s children, the Emperor’s banar sena/ Or simply my grandparents, God’s grandeur/Truth is what you know and what you do not know.”61 Nandan wants to say that whatever you may call these girmitiyas, coolie or the Rama’s army of monkeys, but they are simply his forefathers who established a home away from home and made aliens their relatives. Here, Nandan not only records the historical significance of the girmit era but also he reflects, in his writing, his diasporic consciousness of a twice banished writer. For this quality of Nandan’s writing M.S. Pandey observes:

*Lines Across Black Waters* is caught in the hinges on indenture history and powerfully evokes its nightmare journey across the black waters. Nandan is conscious of the ironic stroke with which the approval of the paradise dreams of the coolies was falsified on the sugar plantation of the island…such tropes of the coolie experiences are readily grafted on to the girmit consciousness and its psychology.62

Next poem, *Tota’s Tale* narrates the real story of hardships and suffering of Totaram Sanadhya, an Indo-Fijian labourer, who was in Fiji in early 1890s. It was he who brought for the first time; in a book form the harrowing and traumatic experiences of women, children and men, their hardships, suicides etc. His book *My Twenty-One Years in Fiji* is a realistic account of the girmitiya life. Nandan reveals the pathos of Totaram in the following words; “Homeless I had come in search of paradise. This house of hell was now all
mine.” The indenture experience, the sugar refining company’s tyranny, the nightmarish living conditions at the haunted coolie lines, longing for Mother India, faith in Indian scriptures, and food sharing among the fellow Indians all these reflects in this poem. His doubleness of consciousness continuously changes during his writing. He has always been looking at Canberra as the ideal and nearest place to settle, so, he is torn not only between India and Fiji but also between India and Canberra. This tripartite push and pull finds expression in his poems and fiction. His poetry is not only about himself alone and about his own generation, but he connects himself with his father’s generation and expresses his separation and exile from his motherland and also his forefather’s suffering. The wretched condition of the women is described in the following words:

I thought of Sati Savitri, Anusuiya,
Sita abducted to another island
Those Rajput princesses immolating
Life upon a pyre for dead men
Like trees in fire.
Here we wept and died
In the coolie lines of Phiji.
Pinjare ke panchi, tera dard na jane koi
Ships without sail, birds without wings,
Draupadi without her sari.

In the end of the poem, the poet shows his optimism saying that, “Darkness was breaking into another dawn” which provides further stimulation to survive in the midst of all adverse circumstances. In the poem A Bloodless Coup?, Nandan satirises the ugly racial political tactics. He writes:

The silence in the mouth of a gun
Echoes the betrayal seen on the masks
Of treachery on a postcard sun.

The present poem provides an insight into the reality behind the writer’s anguish in his writing. The poet’s tormented self finds veritable expression in his poems. The agony and pathos of leaving the country and friends, autobiographically mirrors in his writing. He also makes a scathing attack on the unjust policies of neighbouring countries, Australia and New Zealand.
According to Nandan shock and betrayal can be seen on the face of the soldiers who raised the coup of 1987. This is not the treachery with the poet alone; it is the treachery with the whole Indian race in Fiji. First the loss of motherland and now the betrayal in an adopted land is depicted through the image of ‘a postcard sun’. Here, Nandan poses a serious question that how a coup can be bloodless. In the whole proceedings of the coup, no doubt, there would be no killings and murders but the coup brings treachery, betrayal and shock which is greater than a cold-blooded murder for the Indians, who put their faith on the constitution of Fiji. The multiracial and multicultural government which the people of Fiji had elected, suddenly overthrown by Col.Rabuka. This gives Nandan an immense shock personally because of this coup he lost his faith in Fiji’s politics. Exploring and expanding the scope of diasporic poetry, Satendra Nandan exquisitely combines various Hindu, Christian and Fijian mythical characters, symbols and metaphors. In *Arjuna’s Anguish* the anguish and *Vishad* / despondency of Arjuna, echoes the pathos and anguish of the writer who is betrayed and disillusioned by the injustice and racism in Fiji politics. Here, Arjuna represents the Indo-Fijians who struggles to cope with the racial powers represented by Duryodhana. He again makes an ample use of symbols and metaphors in the poem *Easter ’88* which is dedicated to Timoci Bavadra, the Prime Minister of 1987 multi racial government. In the poem *Easter ‘88*, he writes:

```
I’ve travelled from an island
With a soldier’s wound in my side
(One who should have protected me);
Still I am alive, something precious remains.67
```

Nandan compares the fall of Bavadra government with the crucifixion of Jesus. He writes: “Crucifixion is a destiny rare in history.”68 The crucifixion metaphorically suggests the decaying and corrupt Fijian socio-political conditions. After the coup, Nandan settled in Australia but the pain of leaving the land of birth forces him to write:
I am leaving home:
Home?
My eyes are misty.\(^{69}\)

Satendra Nandan compares the pathos and agony of girmitiya descendent with that of Abhimanyu’s helplessness in *chakravyuha*. He writes: “I lie neglected, rusty / Useless to any chariot/ But throw not me away.”\(^{70}\) The writer himself is an Indo-Fijian so, he finds himself entrapped in the conflicting conditions. He makes a moving plea in his next poem *Siddhartha*, where he wants to follow the path of knowledge and intuition. Satendra Nandan marvelously employs the ancient Vedic myth of *Smudra Manthan* and compares it with the conditions of the coup in his poem, *A Churning in Oceania*. According to Sudhir Kumar;

Satendra Nandan beautifully weaves the *amrit manthan* myth involving the devatas and the asurs (though civilizationally different, both were Parjapati’s children—hence the comparative corollary for the Indo-Fijians and the ethnic Fijians) into the political context of the 1987coup in Fiji.\(^{71}\)

The word churning suggests the conflicting and tormenting conditions of the Fiji, the *amrit* / elixir suggests peace, recognition and identity, which is unattainable in the present condition. *My Father’s Son* is also an important poem which helps us to understand Satendra Nandan’s diasporic consciousness. Through this poem he pays attribute to the girmitiya ancestors and their memory. The survived father tells his children his story of struggle and perseverance:

```
The dark waters, the blind winds,
The landless sea forever raging.
It was narak; many died; I survived.
What retribution for leaving a loving home.\(^{72}\)
```

Nandan also highlights the pathos on the funeral of his girmitiya father “His grotesque loincloth like Christ’s; / I wandered if he, too, had paid the price/ for his children’s children?”\(^{73}\) *Voices in the River* is Satendra Nandan’s collection of poems, autobiographical in tone in which he depicts his childhood days and his upbringing as an Indo – Fijian. His views on his motherland, his ancestors,
myths, father’s death and people of his childhood days have been displayed
with acute correctness and compassion:

This was my father
Whose bones I dropped in the Ganga
His last wish.
Yet his father’s folded hands
Were part of the Nandi’s sands. 74

The girmitiya legacy or the indenture coolie narrative is the pivotal aspect in
Satendra Nandan’s poems of diasporic consciousness. The recurrent metaphors
of island and the sea represent the dislocation and transplantation of the
girmitiyas. Poems like Incident on the Beach, Ballet for a Sea – Bird, Sailing
Together, Between Two Rock, Gift from the Sea, Riders by the Sea, Two Waves
recaptures the images of his ancestors. The atmosphere of uncertainty,
insecurity and violence in the lives of the Indo-Fijians has been depicted
exquisitely in the following lines;

The waves swirl to reach evermore
The infinity of a blind, birdless sky;
Only in my heart the tiny gull’s cry
Sings as I scuttle from shore to shore! 75

In the next poem The Gift from the Sea the poet persona uses his memory to
connect himself with the sea and says; “I scrabble again over sea-shells / On
the beaches/ Of lost memories” 76 Again the girmit consciousness provides its
base to the poem The Ghost where a girmitiya old man pathetically remembers:

Youth I lost here, and grace
I gave to this island place.
What more than a man’s age
Can give to history’s outrage? 77

In his poem, The Ghost he moves from his own condition as an exilic
poet to the experience of the entire girmitiya generation. Depicting his own
trauma and betrayal, he also highlights the tribulations of the millions of
indenture labourers. Narrating the story of exilic wanderings of Pandavas in the
Himalayas and that of Rama from the ancient Indian epics The Mahabharata
and The Ramayana, Nandan wants to emphasis the agony and suffering of the
girmitiyas in Fiji. He narrates the exile of these noble characters and compares his own condition with it. The trauma of leaving one’s motherland very well expressed in these lines;

The Himalayas where the Pandavas perished
In my old songs I have carried
Centuries flow in my blood
Civilizations born before the flood.
I have lived this exile
More gloriously than Rama
And built kingdoms, you may find,
Nobler than Ajodhya,
In my ancient, eternal mind!  

In the present poem he describes Rama’s exile and his abiding longing for Ayodhya which makes Nandan think about his own motherland. He offers a comparative analysis of the themes of exile and nostalgia from the traditional Indian scriptures and in the process he also depicts his own perpetual predicamental state. Through his poems, he discusses the personal agony which reflects the universal problem of displacement, dislocations and identity. The phrase, ‘In my ancient, eternal mind!’ suggests that the ancient tales of exile and loss of motherland still lies in his consciousness and with this consciousness he tries to soothe his agitated mind and heart. The philosophic and diasporic voice in his poetry appears to be groping to acclimatize to the inner Indian world. According to Prof Bruce Bennett:

He has lived through parliament, coups, migration, exile and return – a variety of experience is refracted through the individual voice of a poet, who was born in Fiji and has lived and studied in India, England and Australia, countries of the mind which have shaped his writing and distinctive subjectivity.

As we noted earlier, Satendra Nandan suffered immensely during the coup of 1987, so he cannot cut off himself from the current political conditions in Fiji. He also becomes personal when he tells about nationalism and identity in the poem entitled A Remembrance, Nandan remembers his grandmother and his childhood days. Nandan remembers his face “The anguish on an ancient face/ Is all that remains/ Of a word – half forgotten, half remembered, / So
many memories then/ So many embers now, burning.”

In another poem named *The Old Man and the Scholar* through a series of arguments, Nandan satirises the scholar’s futile efforts to know the reality and praises the Old man’s practical wisdom. Once a Scholar comes to complete his thesis and for that purpose he asks many questions to different persons about their journey, life, family, wife, relatives, etc, but all these men replied but they have same answer; *Bhaiya, rowat-gawat / heelat-dolat / adat-padat / hum sub aain!* when he doesn’t finds a proper answer and fails to understand the language, the Old man replies him, “Authentic history cannot be written/ With words from living mouths.”

Nandan also presents a vast gallery of local characters in his poems. In one of his poems, *The Strange Death of Bisnath*, Bisnath is a villager who writes a letter to the Governor and thus rebuked by the officer. In the poem Nandan creates the lively atmosphere of a Fijian village where the Indians were living with all their habits and hardships. In the poem *Two Waves* Nandan discusses the issues of racism, identity and ethnicity. He notes that a few people “who knew the difference in man and man!” spread racism among Fijians. He also depicts that they were their ancestors who died to make this country proud and yet today they longs for their rightful status and place in Fiji. The coup of 1987 and racial policies of the certain governments divided people of Fiji. The Indians were betrayed, cheated and demoralized in the land where many generations have sacrificed their lives for the country’s development. For the girmitiyas, Fiji was the land of their birth and death. For them-

```
This little village is my second womb
This little village is my second tomb;
That formed – deformed by father’s breath
This is the country of my life and death!  
```

They created their new identities and status in Fiji, made friends and relatives, established homes and trades. These lines depict the poet’s staunch attempt to reestablish the identity and recognition. But the evil influence of racism have made them-
Yet homeless, nameless between earth-sky
A race without a place must forever die;
Uprooted, transplanted lives grow in pain,
To live must their generations die again?  

In the very appropriate words, Nandan reveals the true socio-political conditions of the Indo-Fijians. The present state of the Indians in Fiji is very pathetic and deplorable. Nandan’s diasporic consciousness includes two crucial factors, the quest for identity and nostalgia which are important to understand his literary corpus, and his personal as well as public life. The poem *The House* depicts the diasporic migrations of the people and the deserted house represents the loss. The last poem in the collection *The Second Banishment* reveals the trauma of the twice exiled Indo-Fijian Diaspora. According to the *New Straits Times*, in which the review of his poetry was published:

> The poems of Satendra Nandan are the voices of exile, the reluctant pilgrim both lost and found in a distant land…Nandan lifts the traumatic experience of his ancestors to mythic status.  

His literary output which exhibits firmly his diasporic consciousness, revolves around the feeling of dislocation and alienation, sense of loss and trauma. He also craves for the reestablishment of self. He notes that Indians in Fiji is a race without place and identity subjected to suffer torture, exile and pain. Sudhir Kumar considers the thirty-six poems included in the volume, *Lines Across Black Waters*:

> …in which such diverse elements as contemporary politics, colonialism, ethnic conflicts, identity crisis, relocation of culture, nostalgia or longing for home, feelings of exile, loss and alienation and the prodigious play of mythical consciousness mixing past and present, form the kernel of poetry matrix.  

Diasporic literature is a new wave in the ocean of literature. It is a writer’s conscious expression in an alien land to express his love for the motherland, his efforts to accommodate and articulate himself in a multicultural land. Nandan’s literary works deals directly with the issues of consciousness. In his ground-breaking novel *The Wounded Sea* and his wide ranging poems and
essays tries to re-formulate the concept of consciousness. Nandan’s diasporic consciousness can be understood as the source of his language, literature and vision. In Nandan’s case, like many writers of Diaspora, consciousness of past is involved in his creative process. In The Contemporary Pacific, Seri I. Luangphinith writes in this context; “Pain is revisited in the middle passage of the book, (The Loneliness of Island) which feature older poems confronting the girmit experience of dislocation, cultural loss, and brutal exploitation at the hands of the sugar industry in Fiji. But choosing not to close the book with these more political and darker lyrics, the poet instead maneuvers the reader to a more insightful understanding of art’s role in negotiating crisis. Citing T.S. Eliot’s famous lines, “These fragments/ I have shored against my ruins,” Nandan celebrates the ability of poetry to express love for ideals that have been lost and/or shattered. Nandan writes of the first rose that is plucked and blooms and by implication later withers. He entertains “no sense of guilt or dread / Only a rose bereft, broken, / Lay in [his] garden/ But for a day is was red” (218). That fleeting moment of brilliant hue, rather than the destructive act of cutting or the subsequent fading of the flower, is what poetry captures best – and this sentiment emerges as the force that carries the writer to epiphany. True, objects of human love are fleeting, whether those objects are actual people or a nation. But in the ebb and flow of the tide of human existence, the lyric poet’s craft gives voice to agape and to a profound adoration of “what we’ve lost forever” though “Rarely the dying of a single tree diminishes a whole orchard” (“Ivy”, 228) Much like his contemporary, Salman Rushdie, Nandan also finds that, “it is possible to love a broken mirror all the more because it is broken.”

Nandan’s diasporic consciousness must be understood in its social, political and cultural contexts. Nandan’s diasporic consciousness provides us a new aesthetics and ethics of living in Fiji’s multiracial world where all the Indian are to some extent ‘migrants’. Written in a realistic manner, Nandan’s
works provides a vision which explores his experiences as an Indo-Fijian writer and politician. In the words of Leela Gandhi:

Diaspora normally invoked as a theoretical device for the interrogation of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism...Not surprisingly, diasporic thought finds its apotheosis in the ambivalent, transitory, culturally contaminated and borderline figure of the exile, caught in a historical limbo between home and the world.\(^89\)

And because of this kind of assumption, diaspora express a kind of personal and cultural dilemmas in the era of post colonialism. Thus we can say that at the core of much of the diasporic writings, there lies a constant quest for the certainties, identity, and space in the age of disintegration and deterritorialism. Writers of Indian origin, taking their identity and vision as parameters have expressed to their respective diasporic situation differing with a purpose to receive greater knowledge of their own. In the prose and poetical works of Satendra Nandan, we can find a large amount of thematic and textual symbols which have socio-political and cultural overtones and which also suggests a new type of diasporic narrative of exile and enigma. M.S. Pandey observes in this respect- “Nandan’s texts deploy the indenture micro-narratives and the double exile framework of the Indian Diaspora in Fiji in order to thematize the diaspora question and the nature of national identity.”\(^90\)
References:


27. *Ibid*.


Literatures in English, Flinders University of South Australia, Adelaide in association with Pacific Indian Publication, 2000, p.8.


47. *Ibid.* p.239.


55. *Ibid.* p.75.


64. *Ibid*. p.82.


73. Ibid. p.121.
74. Ibid. p.128.
75. Ibid. p.139.
76. Ibid. p.141.
77. Ibid. p.151.
78. Ibid. p.152.
79. Ibid. p.242.
80. Ibid. p.159.
81. Ibid. p.168.
82. Ibid. p.168.
83. Ibid. p.181.
84. Ibid. p.181.
85. Ibid. p.181.
86. Ibid. p.239.