Chapter - 7

Summing Up
The present thesis is aimed at an evaluation of the multicultural articulation in the selected novels of M.C. Vassanji. He is one of the living legends in Post modern English literature. He belongs to the modern age. His writings are elaborate, depicting the culture of times immemorial to the modern times. His writings are apt to the present trend and highly informative and thought provoking. He wonderfully describes the complexity of race and relations in post-colonial and multi-cultural societies.

To secure his place as a novelist, M.G. Vassanji has been struggling very hard for a long time. He says, "It is my attempt to grab a place in the sun for - our stories, our sense of ourselves..." ("Grabbing this Place in the Sun", http://www.gulf-newsnews.com.) When he began writing in the nineteen eighties, few magazines would publish articles by immigrant writers. They could not understand them. Certainly a creative mind rich with folk tales and stories, reported tales and remembered half events and loaded with cultural memory of three continents would have been much for them. To publish a book set in Africa the writers like M.G. Vassanji had to go to a publisher with a map in his hands and an apology on his lips. Peter Nazareth solemnly observes:

"[O] Africa, the Asians of East Africa were unknown. It was outside Eastern assumed outside that the issue was a black and white one - a straightforward case of Africans versus Europeans. Asians in East Africa? Forming distinct, significant communities'? The thought did not even cross the mind. Outside Africa, Asians were the invisible people of Eastern Africa - unnoticed, non-existent, irrelevant." (In a Brown Mantle, P. 90).

From the nineties onwards there has been a growing interest in marginal, transnational and diasporic literature. Developments in postcolonial theory advanced by critics like Home K. Rhabha and the rise of the cultural studies in the Universities have helped in disavowing nativist and racialised (post) colonial narratives. This has led to the paradigmatic shift in literary studies that has enabled researchers to interrogate narratives that are being produced by ‘new’ writers such as M.G. Vassanji. There is a consensus that Asian African writers continue to use Literature as a mode of representation through which the forgotten history, cultural difference and migrant minority identities of the writers’ communities can be articulated.

M.G. Vassanji’s contribution to the Canadian Literature in articulating the problems of Indian immigrants in Canada speaks of his postcolonial perspective in terms of immigration and multiculturalism. In the present globalization scenario, multiculturalism as a buzzword whose effect shows on every social sphere, and particularly on literary domain, Vassanji through his narratives proves that there is a necessity of examining the true ground reality situation in the lives of immigrants, and exploring the past reality situation. Vassanji’s presentation of the past is never crystal clear. Speaking about this visibly dreary past he says, “the past in (The Gunny Sack) is deliberately murky to some degree. I do not see, not wanted to give the impression of a simple, linear. historical truth emerging. Not all the mysteries of the past are resolved in the book. That is deliberate. It’s the only way” (P.23).

In the domain of post-colonial and post-modern literary works, M.G. Vassanji’s role is characteristically well set, and he proves himself that he is the one who’s postcolonial and postmodern mentorship vents voice against this veiled colonial mindset and takes up the guardianship in favour of the immigrant community. A personality like Vassanji in the world of letters in a multicultural society like Canada is highly aspired for the better reasons to know like how life’s nuances in an alien land he experienced for good or had. and how muted émigrés live in solitudes. His novels like The Gunny Sack and No New Land are proving examples of unimaginable vicissitudes in the imaginary homelands.
What M.G. Vassanji faced in multicultural Canada is generally the fate of all postcolonial migrants to the first world. Many of them are subjected in the new world to a set of racialised discourses of nation that designate them in stereotyped, stigmatized and essentialist terms as entities that are alien, exotic and incongruous to the national culture.

When Rohinton Mistry, a prestigious literary member of Indian diaspora, won the Canadian Governor-General’s Award for his famous work named *Such a Long Journey* and later, the Giller Award for his fine piece of work *A Fine Balance*, critics said they were not Canadian novels. Similar criticism is directed at M.G. Vassanji’s novels. They are labeled as immigrant fiction. Perhaps this is why writers like M.G. Vassanji feel alienated from the mainstream of the Canadian society and they circumscribe themselves within their own world. M.G. Vassanji suitably illustrates his strange position in multicultural Canada through the portrayal of Nurdin Lalani, the protagonist of *No New Land*, and his relationship with Africa. With the help of this character Vassanji deals with the crises of identities in Canada. He elaborates the class differentiation, injustices and inequities. It seems that Canada is not different from Africa. For Vassanji it does not appear as a new land.

M.G. Vassanji’s most skillful narrative style is a mesmerizing attraction to the readers. His reader-arresting power synthesizing historical facts with various literary genres is poised to he attracted towards his works in different perspectives.

His gripping story-telling style stands out to he special us it is incomparably as natural as his life-reflecting characters in his novels. His readers tend to love his works for those works are the impossibly textured mosaics of sorrows and hopes of a community circumstantially forcibly displaced across the trans-continenal wilderness.

The cognizable intention of Vassanji in producing such wealth of immigration-literature on the Canadian literary hemisphere is to let the world identify a victimized community's historic past, journey into present and uncertain future. His self-imposed accountability towards his own community settled either by chance for
choice in the New World is proven by his literary works. And these works are part and parcel of Canadian Literature-abounding it, proving that a Diaspora is really a possibility in Multiculturalism.

In the multicultural Canada, voices of different solitudes find prominence. Writers like Vassanji are highly encouraged in spirit by the Canadianness in the sense that it is with which they are identified. With the Canadian identity itself first, the Diasporans could make a mark on the literary scene as a whole. Vassanji is an equal representation of Canadian ‘multiple solitudes’.

His serious concern is the problems the immigrant community faces in their exile and alienation; how these migrations affect the lives and identities of his characters. An issue that is personal to him as well: "(the Indian Diaspora) is very important … once I went to the U.S., suddenly the Indian connection became very important: the sense of origins, trying to understand the roots of India that we had inside us." And in light of immigrant’s position in the culture-centred phenomenon, as is highlighted – taking seriously into consideration what every immigrant experiences the experiences like exile, isolation and alienation need to be understood from every possible dimension. The perennial aspects of immigration like social alienation, physical exile, and cultural and religious isolation are part of post-colonial consciousness.

Frantz Fannon and Edward Said in their seminal works proposed reclamation and exploration of the past. And post colonial perspective critically negotiates with the past, revisits the ambiguity of the past. This ambiguity is reflected in several Diasporan novels, and they stand for the recollection of the past history through nostalgic history.

The specific literary discourse that made its entry into the world of letters in the second half of the twentieth century is related, besides as many, to the post-colonial studies. The post-colonial literary theory is the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature and models of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of
the European imperial powers. The postcolonial studies are mostly focused on the transcontinental Third World geo-spaces.

The theory and practice of postcolonial studies has its precedence of the development in Orientalism by Edward Said which is a revised form of the related theory enunciated by Michel Foucault. The theory speaks of 'cultural imperialism' imposed by the European colonizers not by force but by effectively spreading in the subjugated colonies. The master-narrative of the Western-imperialism subordinating and marginalizing the oriental discourse, giving the impression that it is the only cultural agency representative during its colonialism is now replaced by counter-narrative in the post-colonial era. The Eurocentric version of colonial history which has also hybridized the languages and cultures of the pre-decolonized geo-spaces, pets gradually defunct as the postcolonial counter texts come into existence.

The subaltern is also designated with colonial subject, and constructed by European discourse which is also ultimately resisted and replaced by the very postcolonial discourse. The agenda of postcolonial studies to disestablish Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values and to expand the literary cannon that includes both colonial and postcolonial writers. And this army of narrative makers includes Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, VS Naipaul, Derek Walcott, G.V. Desani, Salman Rushdie, M.G. Vassanji and others.

Postcolonial narratives today are not without of M.G. Vassanji whose famous Diasporic writings. The Gunny Sack and No New Land are examined in the postcolonial contexts.

Most postcolonial writers delve into their national past that has been distorted by the colonial process. Frantz Fanon says, "this passionate search for a nation culture which existed before the colonial era finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by native intellectuals to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped." (Localizing Strategies; Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing, P.23).
The first chapter in the thesis presents the brief survey of the multiculturalism and diaspora. It is startled the spread of the term ‘diaspora’ or multiculturalism to make its meaning clear to study a multicultural writer like M.G. Vassanji in an in-depth and detail manner. Thus in the first chapter the short history of the formation of Indian diaspora has been traced before talking of author’s life and contribution.

The second chapter is *The Gunny Sack*. It is M.G. Vassanji’s first novel. The novel is both the story of one extended family’s arrival and existence in East Africa as well as a repository for the collective memory and oral history of many other African-Asians. As one of the first African-Asian novels of its kind, *The Gunny Sack* tells a tale deeply committed to both tradition and to the future of contemporary Africa. The story begins with the narrator’s address to *The Gunny Sack*, an icon of origin, an object embodying the past and legacy from grand-mother Ji Bai as ‘Shrine’ for short.

*The Gunny Sack* celebrates the spirit of Asian Pioncers, Muslims from India who moved to East Africa in the early 1900s. Living under German colonial rule the family of Dhanji Govindji become permanent residents of Africa while witnessing historical events that result in the birth of African nationalism. Vassanji has created a family memoir, a coming-of-age story that looks at the past with affection and understanding. He shows that the hopes and dreams of immigrants are essentially the same as those of Europeans who pass through Ellis Island: education for their children and more prosperous future for the next generation.

The tricontinental immigration is the first phenomenon that has antecedents in the postcolonial em which are elaborately discussed in the novels. *The Gunny Sack* has Juma, the narrator, who relates the present no-taken-back situation that has come to the fore in the every individual life of his grand-father Dhanji Govindji’s posterity. The postcolonial stigma is stinkingly odorous in terms of immigrants whose lives are testingly placed in the a subtle situation. Either the African immigancy in *The Gunny Sack* or from there to the New World in No New Land the postcolonial living situations are well depicted by the writer.
The third chapter is *New Land* which is something of a sequel to *The Gunny Suck* not in the literary sense but of following the same characters at a later stage of their lives. This novel portrays the difficulties of the immigrants who have come to the new world, and the readers see how they are victimized. The protagonist in the novel is Nurdin Lalani whose family is a double immigrant family which goes from Asia to Africa and from there to Canada Nurdin’s encounter with Mohan turns a new leaf in his life. The writing style does illustrate M.G. Vassanji’s excellent academic abilities.

His *New Land* in which the protagonist of Indian origin is uprooted from his moorings and is expatriated to alien country. This novel is a tragedy of bicultural experience in its gruesome aspects. Both the novels are written in the postcolonial perspective. Vassanji is under least influence of Eurocentric agenda, but has a clear-cut vision for his characters to be part of the postcolonial intrigues.

The socio-cultural context is the feature of post colonialism. It is affected by change in political ideology which alters the definition of the space and position of the protagonist situating him in a new relative context. Vassanji situates his protagonist in a totally new and alien space, the socio-cultural context of Canada, and explores the effect of the interaction and adaptability/non-adaptability on the character in the new socio-cultural construct. The protest-emotion is the thematic construct of *New Land*. And it is the feature to be found in the postcolonial literature mostly. The postcolonial narratives amalgamate the events of the colonial era and of the later situations. *The Gunny Suck* carries with it the reminiscences of the past handling them to the posterity which includes the narrator.

Postmodernism denotes a multitude of styles and attitudes which exist partly as a response to high modernism, and partly as a result of post-industrial mass production and late Capitalism. It is the concept embracing all those tendencies in late 20th and early 21st century culture that seem to represent a break with the style and value of modernism. The postmodernist novels are intensely reflective and paradoxically claim to historical events. The return to the past in the contemporary era of personal narratives is always a critical reworking, never a nostalgic return. Here in
lies the governing role of irony in **postmodernism**. In *No New Land* Haji Lalaji comes from India at the age of sixteen to make his fortune in **East** Africa and thinks that he has found a new country for his children and dies at a ripe old age. He *feels* a little nostalgic about his home across the ocean but thinks that they had brought their India with them. **Ironically**, he does not know that in another two years everything that he had taken as permanent would change and his *son*, with his whole family, would **depart** to another new country up north: "It was as if with Haji Lalani a whole era died. a way of life disappeared." It exemplifies the idea of ‘*positionality*’: nothing can be taken as permanent or *fixed* because all socio-cultural, historio-political situations are human constructs and the whole ambience or context can change with a change in political ideology. The little haven that Haji Lalani had created for his children becomes an insecure and threatened space with the Independence of Africa, which changes all inter-racial ‘*positionalities*’. Protest-emotion is the structural and *themetic* construct of *No New Land* and it is one of the features of postmodernism.

New historicism is a **method** based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts usually of the same historical period. It refuses to privilege the literary text; instead of a literary ‘foreground’ and a historical ‘background’ it envisages and practices a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other. This ‘equal weighting’ is suggested in the definition of historicism offered by the American critic Louis Montrose: he defines it as a combined interest in ‘the textuality of history. the historicity of texts’. It involves ‘an intensified willingness to read all of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts’. So new historicism embodies a paradox; it is an approach to literature in which there is no privileging of the literary text.

M.G. Vassanji’s *The Gunny Suck* is also ‘the-textuality-of-history-and-the-historicity-of-the-text(co-text)’ novel which explores the history and the story of the **Indians** in **East** Africa, during the **colonial** period who **were forced** to leave, after the **Independence** of Africa, with feelings of alienation. *The* novel *spans* four generations right from the beginning of the Indian **settlement** on the **coast** of **East** Africa which is
under the Germans and then changes hands and passes on to the British and finally to its Independence when the Indians no longer feel welcome or safe and withdraw from East Africa.

As Ji-Bai would say, in the beginning of the novel, memory is represented by The Gunny Sack, and this sack possesses innumerable tables of the Shamshi community of Indian origin, having first migrated from India to East Africa and from there to the New World is search of a better life.

The community's movement per se is part of a historical sketch drawn in the novel - their genesis in Kutch, movement from there to East Africa due to pressing social and economic problems at home in search of a better life, the innumerable troubles they encounter in their day to day lives in the alien land which is already by the time of their arrival under European colonial rule, their forced circumstantial vagabond life across East African counties under war-ravaged and Mau Mau Movement situations and finally as they are prompted to think again and act upon another new place to settle they leave the continent of hope and move to Westward.

M.G. Vassanji, by synthesizing history of the community of Shamshus with that of the colonial geo-political heavy handed vagaries in the space that is considered by these immigrants as home for their betterment tries to recreate new history. The Gunny Sack stands witness of new historicism as it throws out many a memory as regards the unfolding events in the entire genealogy of Dhanji Govindji.

The narrator of the story - Salim - vividly catalogues the descendants of Dhanji Govindji, their ups and downs living in East Africa. Every character's personal life is a historical manifestation told in the sandwiched circumstance of bouncy nowhere man/woman. For example, besides Dhanji Govindji's ventures and adventures, his African-slave keep, Bibi Taratibu and her son, Huseini who are never henceforth to be found physically are the victims of the circumstances -- which is a personalized history. The alien minority and their displacement, their predicament, the forced dispersement of the half-century settlers, and their identity struggles are part of personal history reflected in the novel. The Mau Mau Uprising, the Operation Anvil
to wipe out it, the German and British colonization, the liberation of East Africa from foreign rule. the socialistic system of Governance as replacement of colonization are the historicity in the textuality of The Gunny Sack.

No New Land is also the text that stands for co-textuality which starts in the Canadian present. journeys through African past and moves to the present with a futuristic outlook.

The two novels deal with the immigrant’s immediate problem of coming to terms with the new land. the real illusory land colliding in the author’s psychological landscape. Vassanji, for a change uses real raw-materials from the historical truths to narrate his novels.

The fourth chapter is The Rook of Secrets. It is rather a story of a writer’s record. It is a spell binding novel which deals with the generations. It is about a diary which enflamed the curiosity of a retired school teacher Pius Fernandes, and his exploration of the stories. The first half of this novel makes it abundantly clear that Socio-cultural borders and their negotiation determine the lives. The second half of this book foregrounds the way in which social-cultural borders determine the diasporic identity. This is a post-colonial as well as post modern novel.

The fifth chapter is Amriiku and Thr Assassin’s Song Amriiku is a remarkable novel of personal and political awakening that spans three decades and explores the external quest for home. It is essentially a North American novel, told from the point of view of a man from Dar Es Salaam to East Africa. In 1968, Kamji, a student, arrives in an America far different from the one he had dreamed about. He was caught up the anti-war demonstrations, revolutionary lifestyles and spiritual quests. Amriiku is a novel of betrayal, disillusionment and discovery set in America during three highly charged decades in the national history. The Assassin’s Song is a shining study of the conflict between ancient loyalties and modern desires. a conflict that creates turmoil the world over and it is at once an intimate portrait of one man's painful struggle to hold the earthly and the spiritual impatience. In this Karsan Dargawalla tells the story of the medieval Sufi shrine of Pirbaaba, and his betrayal of its legacy.
But Karsan’s conflicted attempt to settle accounts quickly blossoms into a layered tale that spans centuries.

The sixth chapter is *The In-Between World of Vikram Lull*. This book deals with the Punjabi railway workers of Kenya and the writer’s own background, of course, is Gujarat. In this novel the writer renarrates the Mau Mau rebellion based on the experience of East African Asians. This represents the impacts of the planetary movements and displacements that were a direct result of this European imperialism. It is a haunting novel of corruption and regret that brings to life complexity and turbulence of Kenyan society in the last five decades. This is a powerful story of passionate betrayals and political violence, racial tension and the strictures of traditions. told in elegant, assured prose.

After the publication of *The In-Between World of Vikram Lull*, M.G. Vassanji became the first ever writer to win the Giller Prize – a prestigious Canadian award – twice. The award typically triggered a debate; to which country does M.G. Vassanji belong? Canada? Africa? India? Vassanji refuses to pick. Given the cocktail of his origins, M.G. Vassanji could well be a University critic’s fantasy: an archetype of the hybrid-postcolonial caught in an in-between world.

All these novels prove beyond doubt that the great M.G. Vassanji is one of the profound writers of the present. He has great talented in demonstrating his observation with regard to multiculturalism.

The representation of women in literature is one of the most important forms of 'socialisation' – it provides the role models which indicates to women, and men, what constitutes acceptable versions of the ‘feminine’ and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations. The portrayal of women characters in Vassanji’s novels is no big a surprise in the sense that they have any extraordinary role to play in the circumstances that are both favourable and favourable in no new places. The male dominated and chauvinistic treatment against women characters in his works are simply the prototype examples as to how Indian traditionalistic and orthodoxial womanhood stays intact
with what they do and how they behave at home, and it is no different either when they find themselves abroad.

Under the colonization, the woman’s role of being what she is generally expected to be and how she is supposed to behave depending on the cultural and traditional parameters is how it is described in the narratives. Vassanji’s women’s portrayal in the feminist perspective is not out of bounds other than how they should be. They are casual, traditional, eccentric, sometimes heroic, subdued, submissive, and more dependent. Their role is mainly marginal so far as decision making is concerned.

In lieu of their immigration either to Africa or to Canada and elsewhere things are no different from how they generally happen to be at their parent-home. A little of liberality may be experienced by the posterior generation settled in the New World, but the haunting of the mixed-situational cultural, traditional, intactual restrictions are perfectly in vogue.

Last Africa, during either colonization or after decolonization doesn’t show solutions to many problems faced by immigrant community. Even the so called Nyerere’s Socialism too fails to bring in justice to this community. The subversive situation prompts these people to move farther lands further where they do not belong either. The frontiers may have changed but they have simply created only imaginary homelands.

M.G. Vassanji turns the reader's attention instead to the density and richness of the dots, each constituting a point of recollection. in Gregory’s book of poems, Havin’ a Piece. Ranging from comic interludes to expressions of anger or longing, his poetry brings “back many memories of Dar as it issued to be” (The Book of Secrets, P.317). The novel emphasizes how these pieces of writing, “haphazardly distributed throughout the volume” (P. 318), conjure the past more vividly than any coherently-formed narrative might through their brevity and lack of specificity. Oblique, elliptical, and yet evocative precisely because of their scattered and piecemeal form, they resurrect in sharp, bright flashes a sense of the town and its past. The reality thus
rendered by these shards of truth is not a smooth surface reflection or mimetic reproduction, but a cracked and shattered mirror which incompletely and imprecisely reveals to the readers different facets or dimensions of its subject. In contrast, the metropolises of Empire are envisaged by Pipa as being paved with "streets of glass" and saturated with "perfumed air" (P.155). The glass streets, which possess a clear and glossy surface, suggest a way of knowing the world that abhors pieces and fragments, and which seeks to gild over the real through a discourse which casts out what is excessive and extraneous in order to present a smooth and unbroken image of itself. This desire for an ordered reality, evinced by the demarcation of fences that shut out the chaos of Mombasa town, with its "smells of overripe pineapples and mangoes, the open drains, animal droppings" (PP.16-17), remind the readers that while perfumes smell pleasant, they are also employed to mask less palatable odours.

On the subject of contamination, Cohen states, "[pollution is not simply the opposite of cleanliness; it also arises out of a confusion of categories"] (xi), suggesting the threat posed by the openness of boundaries, wherein truth cannot be fixed, and instead must remain permanently suspended and subject to revision or reinterpretation. It is therefore significant that the senses most prominently assailed within the novel are those of smell and also of sound. The aural penetration of barriers (not to mention the boundaries that we erect to distance ourselves) is demonstrated when Gregory, at the moment of Amin's death, "heard a scream, piercing through walls through hearts" (The Book of Secrets, P.280). Contrast against sight, the tyrannical eye of Enlightenment rationality and the distanced (and distancing) historian. smell and sound are subversive elements that are not easily contained or blocked out. They travel and creep in between the borders of the 'self, uninvited, unhomely, unwelcome. Kristeva states that through the process of abjection, "subject' and 'object' push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again-inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable". And so Corbin, when confronted by the abject odours of fees, corruption and decay, experiences a threat to his identity through the destabilising movement brought about by the smells and sounds of Mobasa market. Perhaps in some ways
Vassanji overstate the effects of Corbin’s shopping expedition; yet, as an immigrant newly arrived in Africa, Fernandes too is subject to sounds that reach him through the walls. and Corbin is haunted by the foreign notes and timbres of religious chants. Vassanji posits smell and sound as subversive functions, which are capable of transgressing the boundaries erected to preserve colonial identity and authority. As alternatives to the totalizing logic of observation and rationality, which rely primarily on the organ of sight, sounds and smells drift throughout the novel, defying barriers, eluding fixity, and resisting representation.

Constituting an intervention into the various bottle-books moulded out of the clay of Africa’s past, be they Orientalist visions derived from local tales, such as they story of Sinbad, or colonial biographies written by former administrators, or Western historiography itself: Vassanji’s novel reworks the story of Aladdin’s lamp to suggest, on one level, the rupture of imprisoning frameworks of representation, which, in their devaluation and hierarchisation of alternative ways of being in the world, oppress the souls captured within their discourse; and on another, the power of postcolonial literature, itself a genii capable of forging whole new worlds through its presentation of “new angles at which to enter reality” (Rushdie, P.15). The novel points to all the ways in which closure of containment denote an act of power, which fetters and distorts its subjects within discourse.

As act that fences in (and also keeps out), closing delineates boundaries, curtails movement, and seeks to bind time, in addition to space. The text’s resistance of closure affects a turning away-from insularity, from stasis-in order to seek ways out, to undermine the narratives within which one is contained. Drawing on Vassanji’s example of clay, the readers are led to understand that the infinite potentiality of the clay resides in its malleability; thus the vessel which would claim to be the essential or universal embodiment of a pot is a thing of impossibility, for the very rigidity of its structure preempts any claims towards transcendentalism. A ‘complete’ or ‘whole’ structure-static, hermetically sealed, immovable, unmalleable—is one that precludes the possibility of movement or growth. Attempts to reinforce a
universal ideal through the suppression of the plurality of perspectives serve only to emphasize the faultiness and cracks in its structure. the internal inconsistency of its doubled logic.

In seeking to address the injustices of the past, our very experience of modernity, formerly rendered seamless and undisturbed by Benjamin’s conception of “homogeneous, empty time” (P.261), becomes assailed by a revisitation that demands the revision of the dominant paradigm through the secret’s contribution to, and subsequent alteration of, the twinned and twined narratives of humanism and (Eurocentric) history that have fundamentally shaped our present. The indeterminate existence of the secret is such that it destabilizes epistemological certainty and poses a threat to the status of Eurocentric knowledge. Therefore, the blank that is the secret is not the blank of an unwritten page, merely waiting to be filled in and slotted neatly into the grand narrative of History. Instead, it is "its interrogation, its interruption: an invitation to reconceptualise and reconfigure modernity itself" (Chambers, Culture After Humanism, P.19).

This disrupts the possibility of closure within any form of discourse, which necessarily seeks to establish boundaries, delineate meaning, and impose an arbitrary outer limit upon the myriad possibilities and contradictions of identity and experience. all in order to stabilize knowledge. Bhabha puts forth the idea that "the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing" (P.5), suggesting that the boundary is also the point at which knowledge approaches its limit and fails to encompass or understand what lies beyond. Reflecting this, the plot-structure of Vassanji’s text maintains the ‘gap’ by keeping possibilities open and leaving various narratival threads trailing off into Sutures that are never entirely spelled out. The reader is left with the understanding that, like history, a narrative can never be truly closed off, for to do so would be to deny the possibility of growth and change.

The novel’s self-reflexive treatment of the constructedness of narratives of identity, history and knowledge, which are produced through language, compels an awareness of how the ‘other’ becomes silenced through its constitution within colonial discourse (simultaneously a consolidation of hegemonic power over its
colonies, and also the framework of knowledge through which a sense of the imperial self and national identity emerged).

And yet, as Gikandi asserts, it would be a mistake to assume that the "lives and experiences of people in so-called Third World countries are wretched because they are perpetual victim of their colonial past" (Colonial Culture and the Question of Identity: \textit{Maps of Englishness}. P.15). Thus, Vassanji foregrounds the secret-something not known. hidden away. and sometimes forgotten-in order to demonstrate how its presence is a haunting and uncanny echo that destabilizes the stories told around it. revealing "in its gaps and silences. in the disruptions of its logic, that which has been repressed" (\textit{Mondal}. P.98). Secrets abound within the novel: woven into the rhetoric of the present. they hint at stories untold and histories unacknowledged. Aku, for instance, demands to know: "what is this secret? Tell me about Mariamu-my-mother-who was she" (\textit{The Rook of Secrets}. P.28): Fernandes describes Gregory as possessing "a certain secretiveness to him, a reserve; there remained sides unrevealed, a trait I attribute to national character" (P.208).

M.G. Vassanji is careful to point out that secrets are fragile, evinced by the exposure of the "secret liaison" (P.257) between Parviz and Patani that culminates in her suicide. At the same time, secrets can also create room for agency and freedom, such as in the case of Rita and Ali's "illicit love", wherein the veil of silence allowed them to engage, undetected. "in an exploration. in joyful play" The ultimate mystery that surrounds the figure of Mariamu demonstrates how secrets inhere within the very constitution of reality and serve as hidden narratives that, while never fully revealed, threaten to re-articulate the past, producing "an 'other' knowledge that irritates, disturbs and ultimately disrupts a preceding arrangement of knowledge and power" (\textit{Culture After Humanism}, P.21). The very potential of the threat posed by these secret narratives is such that they hold open the border, keeping the status of knowledge in a constant state of abeyance, denying the possibility of a final word.

M.G. Vassanji draws on memory to illustrate the subjective and variability of experience and recollection, which cannot be incorporated into the linearity of historical narrative. The elusiveness of memory, and its tendency to be overlooked in
the annals of official historical records, is evinced within the novel when Fernandes is told that there are no more local wazees who remember the war, as "[t]he last one died just six weeks ago. I doubt you will find anyone else" (P.176). It is through coincidence, rather than by investigation or deduction, that Fernandes is informed by Young Jamali that "his father was alive, was in Moshi", on "[Fernandes's] last day there (P.179). The son of Jamali the mukhi of Kikono, and Mariamu's first cousin, the old man "has a confused memory of the war. He mentions it with the Maji-Maji uprising. But he was born after Maji-Maji" (P.180). The misty recollections of Young Jamali's father, with their imprecise placement of time, and even outright contradictions to recorded historical events, undermine the surety of historicism. Memory functions in the novel as an alternative way of knowing oneself and the world, which destabilizes the straightforward trajectory drawn by a universal conception of history by focusing instead upon the intensely personal and specific nature of individual experience, perception and remembrance. Unlike the bottle-book of colonial European history, which seeks to pull of holes, which allows for the free passage and movement of various elements, literally enacted within the text when the old man "picks up the pan of water ... and carefully pours the liquid out, spreading it about on the earth, which drinks it up" (The Book of Secrets, P.180). In spite of memory's confusion of time, the impressions it leaves, like those engendered by Gregory's poems, are nevertheless undeniable, irresistible.

The quest of self-assertion has, in fact, become a congenital leitmotif in all genres of writings of Asian Africans. Writing from the marginal location identified by Nazareth above compels these authors to confront issues of their racial difference and histories of migration across the Indian Ocean. It is worth noting that M.G. Vassanji's position within this general picture is singular. The writer was born in racially stratified, colonial Kenya, to parents of South Asian heritage, belonging to the minority Islamic sect of Khoja Ismailis. In 1959, he relocated with is family to Tanzania. Later in 1968, he joined the University College at Nairobi, before leaving education in 1969. Finally, in 1978, Vassanji settled down in multicultural Canada where he has now developed an international name as one of the finest chroniclers of
the treacherous 'middle passage' across the kala pani (dark waters) of the Indian Ocean and later the Atlantic by peoples from South India who now form the South Asian Diaspora in the west. How therefore, can one read Vassanji’s works.

The term in-betweenness will be useful to understand Vassanji’s writings. To talk of in-betweenness with reference to literature by a diasporic writer will immediately bring Bhabha’s name to many lips. The idea gained currency as a part of the critical vocabulary of postcolonial studies after the publication of Bhabha’s The Location of Culture.

In The Location of Culture, Homi K. Bhabha develops and uses various neologisms such as ‘in-betweenness’, ‘diasporia’, ‘unhomliness’, ‘re-membering’, and ‘interstitiality’, to help him grapple with nature of twentieth century migrant communities such as the Asian African of East Africa. Bhabha identifies the spirit of ‘in-betweenness’ with the cultural condition of people living in diaspora. He talks of national as an interstitial psychic space between the national consciousness and diasporic consciousness. The migrant in the diaspora is always oscillating in-between these two states of consciousness as they try to find stable identities for themselves. Vassanji’s fictions are best read with this view in mind.

A writer of M.G. Vassanji’s caliber remains marginalized even in Canada, where he lives. not to mention the United States or the United Kingdom. The tag of being a South Asian writer recent avatar. multiculturalism, while it ensures funding and book-writing grants, also relegates a writer like M.G. Vassanji to the exotic outer fringe of the North American consciousness. In India, A great writer like M.G. Vassanji need not to be so marginalized, but has the opportunity of being read and considered seriously.