Chapter - 1

Introduction
From historical accounts, human existence on earth has been characterized by movement across geographical space-places. Some movements have been marked by permanent removal from one space-place to another, while others are marked by temporary immigration. There are varied motivations for an individual or group to move from one geographical area to another. The current phenomenon which has been termed as 'globalisation' is an example. European imperialism from the 16th century to early 20th century heightened industrialization and efficient communication and spurred expansion of military and economic - hence social, cultural and political - dominance over the world by Europe. Though this modern imperialism replicated the historical trends in empire conquests, expansions and occupations: it surpassed the Greek, Roman, Turkish, Islamic, and other such imperial expansions.

The Twentieth century witnessed large-scale migrations, especially from the so called third world countries to the West, due to socio-political and economic reasons. Globalization came as a catalyst adding to the pace of resettlements and melting of borders. It resulted into various identities coming together with their cultural differences and their being alien to the native ethos. As a consequence many nations confronted with a series of problems that seemed difficult to resolve. Diaspora gave way to several issues to the two sides. Not only cultural differences, but also the identities, i.e. the fact that immigrants could not shed the sense of their belonging to the country they came from, gave way to diversity, conflicts of interest, divisiveness, ghettoisation and occasional display of hostility. Increasingly it is becoming apparent that the myth of a nation with its homogenizing tendency is not enough to unify all the people living within a nation's territorial boundaries, fas the whole discourse of nation seems to ignore diversity of those different groups it seeks to homogenize.

The idea of a nation is also based on race and ethnicity. Race is easier to identify because it is biological e.g., Black skinned. White skinned. whereas ethnicity is more complex. It refers to socio-linguistic groupings with clearly differentiated rituals, religion, history, etc. The nation identifies those who it considers its legitimate citizens. This idea is never clearly articulated but the exclusivities are clearly
identified as a part of the discourse of the nation. According to Balibar, nationalism and rectal-ethnic discrimination are in a reciprocal relationship. Where there is the idea of a nation, illiberal notion of a race and ethnicity always exist e.g., Blacks, Pakis, Wogs, etc. in the vocabulary of otherwise politically correct but racially diverse England. The last two decades witness to the fact that with Globalization the world is learning to celebrate diversity and pluralism. It is also the logical result of different groups living, interesting, socializing and even accepting marital bonding between diverse groups.

The 'sovereignty of melioration' regulates the present scenario which is unquestionably a Carrefour of burgeoning globalization, acculturation and transnationalism. Globalization involves the movement of capital, people, culture across borders; dissolution of nation-state borders, ethnicity, morels, institutions; increasing communications and network linkages new forms of transaction and consumption. Multiculturalism is a widely prevailing phenomenon, acting like a pulley maneuvering the corduroy of globalization, Immigration of people from one nation to other or from one continent to another continent institutes the pervading vibes of new ism, called ‘Multiculturalism’.

Multiculturalism may be defined as reaching out to both the native-born and newcomers, in developing lasting relationships among ethnic and religious communities. It encourages these communities to participate fully in society by enhancing their level of economic, social, and cultural integration into the host culture(s). (M.G. Vassanji’s No New Land: A Study in Multicultural Aspects, P.1).

Multiculturalism is the appreciation, acceptance or promotion of multiple cultures, applied to the demographic make-up of a specific place, usually at the organizational level, e.g., schools, businesses, neighborhoods, cities or nations.

In a political context the term is used for a range of meanings, ranging from the advocacy of equal respect to the various cultures in a society, to a policy of promoting the maintenance of cultural diversity, to policies in which people of various ethnic and religious groups are addressed by the authorities as defined by the
group they belong to. A common aspect of many such policies is that they avoid presenting any specific ethnic, religious, or cultural community values at central.

**Multiculturalism** is often contrasted with the concepts **assimilationism** and social integration and has been described as a "salad bowl" or "cultural mosaic" rather than a "melting pot." The person is able to develop a **cosmopolitan** perspective by being in a nation that incorporates within its society citizens who possess **differing** languages, customs, religions, dresses, foods, morels and global frames of reference.

**Today** it is not unusual to see people of all different races, ethnic backgrounds or cultural groups living in one society. The society is formed of a mix of **different people** and sometimes it is not easy to define 'one's self. Since one can live in a society that is influenced by many social aspects expressing ones personal identity may be a hard task. Aspects of society than **make** it hard to identify one's **self include** a person's sexual orientation, their ethnicity and their lifestyles.

The origin of the concept of Multiculturalism is considered to he fairly recent. This concept has established unpresidented enthusiasm **among** educated and has provoked divergent responses throughout the world. It has become a vital area of research in the department of literature and social services currently it has been eased in not only academic but also popular discourse with a growing frequency and width. Yet this growth does not really reflect a common understanding of the term 'Multiculturalism'.

Before discussing on the term 'Multiculturalism’ one has to concentrate on one more word called 'Diaspora'. **Undoubtedly** these two words are interconnected and related to reach other. Defining 'Diaspora' has been the subject of on going debate. While some literates have argued in favour of identifying a closed set of attributes, others have dispersal. To illustrate, Safran defines that diaspora is that segment of people living outside homeland. Docker says diaspora as "a sense of belonging to more than one history, to more than one time and place, to more than one past and future."
The more 'Diaspora' was at the beginning used the ancient Greeks to prove their spreading allover the then known world. For those people the term meant migration or colonization. It has more often been used to describe the real dispersion of the Jews in the sixth century. There far Jews, Africans, Palestinians and Americans diaspora signifies a collective feeling where one dreams of home while living in exile.

The term 'Diaspora' has now attained the full-fledged status of a concept. Today intellectuals and activists from various fields are frequently using it to describe such categories as "immigrants, guest workers, ethnic and racial minorities, refugees, expatriates and travelers." It has now emerged to be a useful concept to analyse the relationship between place and identity and the ways cultures and literatures interact. Though diaspora has assumed different meanings and interpretations. since its early uses. it is currently employed to imply a wide variety of contexts. from dispersion to trade diaspora and worker/migrant diaspora. In the present day literary studies it has achieved great significance. According to this concept, different responses to migration are agriculture in literature produced in the places where diasporic communities exist. Apparently a metaphorical application of the term is prevalent. encompassing a wide range of phenomenon under the very notion. (The Poetics of Diaspora. P.vii).

For the last four decades, many dispersed communities, those once known as minorities, ethnic groups, migrants, exiles etc. have now been renamed as Diasporas or multiculturists either by scholars or academicians. Up to 1960, the term diaspora was confined to the extensive studies on three classic or traditional Diasporas viz. Jewish, Armenian and Greek, of which the ideal case was the first. The disciplinary application of the diaspora term to non-Jewish and non-Christian peoples and their exile situation seems to have first been undertaken within African studies. In a now classic paper, George Shepperson spoke of the African Diaspora at a conference of African historians held in Dar es Salaam in 1965-66. Analogous to the expulsion of Jew in early times, the dispersion of sub-Saharan Africans through colonial slave trade was called an enforced expatriation. accompanied by a longing to return to the
Since the mid-1970s, African historians deliberately employ multiculturalism as a concept and topic within African studies. As Harris summarises, the African diaspora concept subsumes [...] the global dispersion [voluntary or involuntary] of Africans throughout history; the emergence of a cultural identity abroad based on origin and social condition; and the psychological or physical return to the homeland. Africa. As the term took of within African studies, it also became applied within social sciences. The seminal article 'Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas' by John Armstrong in 1976 investigates in general perspective migrant groups with regard to their socio-economic position and the range of tolerance or repression they faced in multiethnic states.

Various scholars within Sociology and Political Sciences took up Armstrong’s approach and usage. For example, various authors in Gabriel Sheffer’s by now classic volume Modern Diasporas in International Politics explicitly refer back to Armstrong’s study. Sheffer, an Israeli political scientist, summarises what a diaspora is understand to mean to his opinion: Multiculturalists are distinct trans-state social and political entities; they result from voluntary or imposed migration to one or more host countries; the members of these entities permanently reside in host countries; they constitute minorities in their respective host country (thus for example, Canadian of English descent are not regarded as multiculturist diaspora community); they evince an explicit ethnic identity; they create and maintain relatively well developed communal organizations; they demonstrate solidarity with other members of community, and consequently, cultural and social coherence; they launch cultural, social, political and economic exchange with the homeland, whether this is a state or community in a territory within what they regard as their homeland; for this as well as for other purposes (such as establishing and maintaining connections with communities in other host countries), they create trans-state networks that enable exchanges of significant resources: and have the capacity for either conflict of co-operation with both the homeland and host country, possibilities that are in turn...
connected to highly complex patterns of divided and dual authority and loyalties within the diasporas. (Three meanings of Diaspora: Exemplified among South-Asian Religions, P.277).

Daniel J. Elazar regarded multiculturalism as ethno-religious communities, which as a catalytic minority would influence the host society. And Esman specified in his working definition that multiculturalism is a minority ethnic group of migrant origin, which maintains sentimental or material links with its land of origin. Where as the ethnic factor according to Sheffer, is decisive. the religious ingredients would only help to strengthen some ideological, cultural and emotional identification and relation with former home country. (Modern Diaspora in International Politics, P.39).

It would be impractical to list all the authors in disciplines such as linguistics, history or anthropology etc. who during the 1990s took up the term multiculturalism in order to relate it to expatriate, national, ethnic or religious cultural groups.

M.G. Vassanji was born in Nairobi, Kenya on 30th May 1950 to Gulam Hussein Vassanji and Daulatkhanu Nanji. His family was a part of community of Indians who had immigrated to Africa. As one has to know that immigration from India did not cease after the abolition of indenture and other systems of organized export of labour. Immigrations to East African countries namely Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania during the late 19th century present a new pattern: 'free' or 'passage' immigration. Under this pattern trader, petty contractors, artisans, bankers, clerks and professionals of India immigrated to East African countries. This is the pattern under which Vassanji’s ancestors came to Kenya from the Gujarat region in northeastern India.

When Vassanji was five, his father died and his mother ran a clothing store to support her five children. His family moved to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. There were some reasons behind this move. During the colonial era, thousands of British and European settlers had obtained land seized from the Kikuyu, Kenya’s largest tribe. Determined to get their land back and drive out the foreigners, Kikuyu fighters took to the forests and swore vengeance against all who opposed their Mau-Mau Asians, who
dominated trade and the middle levels of colonial service, was on the rise. After independence in 1963 many Asian business were taken over by Africans. Asians were forced to leave Kenya. Vassanji's family thus moved to Dar es Salaam in neighbouring Tanzania.

While attending the University of Nairobi, Vassanji won a scholarship to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to study nuclear physics. He went to the United States to join MIT in 1970. In 1978 he earned a Pennsylvania. In the same year he immigrated to Canada to work at the Chalk Kiver nuclear power laboratories in began writing. He joined the University of Toronto where he worked as a research associate and lecturer in physics from 1980 and 1989 and published widely.

In 1980s Vassanji began to dedicate himself seriously to a longstanding passion, writing. His path to this profession is a surprising one. After completing his doctorate in nuclear physics, he felt that nothing would make him so happy as writing. He felt that he had too many stories to tell. Thus he abandoned academia to pursue the unpredictable writer's life full time. In an interview with Chelva Kanaganayakam, Vassanji said of his decision to leave the field of physics:

> It is the kind of thing you can keep on doing. I had reached a point when I could just chum out things. Unless you are at MIT or Harvard, or a place like that, you are not really at the forefront. Sometimes I miss that life because of the way of the thinking it demands. My writing, however, is much more important. It seems to be the 'mission in life that I finally achieved. ("Two Abolitions: African Slavery and East Indian Indenture ship", India and the Caribbean. P.30).

This decision coincided with the critical success of his 1989 novel, The Gunny Sack. In the same year he, with his wife Nurjehan Aziz, founded and edited the first issue of the Toronto South Asian Review [TSAR], which became the Toronto Review
of Contemporary Writing Abroad in 1993. At present he lives in Toronto with his wife, Nurjehan Aziz, and has two children, Anil and Kabir.


M.G. Vassanji represents in his novels the impacts of the planetary movements and displacements that were a direct result of this European imperialism. The British also facilitated the dislocation of hundreds of Asians from Indian sub-continent to East Africa to work as labourers during the construction. Vassanji reflects this in his novels. The main characters whose live stories the novels revolve around, situates their belonging in Kenya through their living style.

Vassanji’s literary career was launched with the publication of *The Gunny Sack*, the saga of an Asian African family in East Africa told through the contents of a magic gunnysack. It was his first attempt at fiction. In this novel Vassanji tells the story of four generations of Asians in East Africa. He examines the theme of identity, displacement and race relations. This novel is both the story of one extended family’s existence in East Africa and a repository for the collective memory and oral history of many other African Asians. *The Gunny Suck* received considerable critical acclaim. In 1990 the books went on to win the Commonwealth Writers Prize for best book in African region. In that same year Vassanji was invited to be writer in residence at the University of Iowa.

Moyez Gulamhussein Vassanji was born on May 30, 1950, in Nairobi, Kenya, into an Indian immigrant family. When he was five years old, his father died and his widowed mother decided to move her whole family to Dar es Salaam in colonial Tanzania. In 1970, after finishing his high school and pursuing a short-term study at the University of Nairobi, Vassanji accepted the offer of a scholarship from MIT and began an eight-year-long period of advanced study in the U.S. *Cultural Theory: An
In the introduction, P.28. Trained as a physicist, to work for Atomic Energy of Canada at Chalk River power station. In 1980 he moved to Toronto to work as a research associate and lecturer at the University of Toronto and started to be involved in the literary circles of that city. In 1981, along with his wife Nurjehan Aziz, he co-founded and began editing the literary journal The Toronto South Asian Review (1982-93), which in 1993 was renamed The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad.

However, it was not until 1989, with the publication of his first novel The Gunny Sack, that Vassanji’s life would be steered into a new direction. The success of The Gunny Sack, which won the 1990 Commonwealth Writer’s Prize for best first book in the Africa region, convinced Vassanji to quit his job as a physicist to become a full-time writer.

This experience of familial and personal migrations has come to make up Vassanji’s works. In an interview with John Clement Ball, M.G. Vassanji points out that he feels "quite exhilarating that there are so many parts of me to explore, so many experiences that are not really integrated within me." (P.206). In No New Land (1991) and Amriika (1999), Vassanji dives into his own personal experience as an "immigrant" in Canada and the U.S., representing the difficulties faced by the “Third World” immigrants in these "First World" counties. While in these two novels Vassanji pays more attention to depict his later experience, depicting how the likes of "upward-moving" immigrants struggle to survive in the metropolitan settings, his other works have addressed parts of his experience that have come to enchant his readers.

Vassanji’s debut The Gunny Sack (1989) deals with the central experience of his life: the communal memory of East African Asians. A family saga that expands through four generations in four continents, the novel is about how the narrator Salim’s family undergoes several migrations from India to Africa in the colonial period, and then to North America/Europe after the independence of African countries. Vassanji continues to explore his community's history. With vivid characters that abounds in these short stories, Vassanji recreates the lives of East African Asians in the city of his childhood-Dar es Salaam-between the 1950s and the
1980s (*Uhuru Street*) and their moves within the Subcontinent, Africa, and North America and their negotiations of their new and old identities among these different worlds (*When She was Queen*).

**Vassanji**'s concern over "history" culminates in his widely-celebrated novel *The Book of Secrets* (1994). Using a British colonial administrator's diary as the starting point of exploring a lost past, *The Book of Secrets* reconstructs the colonial history of Tanzania in the early twentieth century but meanwhile reveals the constructedness of history writing. **Vassanji**'s experimentation with the literary form to **problematicize** the writing of history (a "private" diary to be "opened up" by a historian-narrator in reading/interpreting history) in the novel **eventually** earned him the inaugural **Giller** Prize for fiction in 1994.

The novels of **M.G.Vassanji** show that the immigrants align themselves and negotiate identification to best position themselves to advantage economically and politically. The characters in his novels have traversed this thin line in their civil service work and in private business. All the time they are conscious of their minority status and "Otherness".

As a response, Indians in multicultural society diaspora evolve mechanisms to deal with the challenges they face in the economic and political environment of the host country. Strong social networks ensure harnessing of resources which helps the community weather economic challenges and prosper, but also counter persecution and sabotage. This is even more so with the **transnational** multiculturalism that grows stronger with more Kenyan Indians moving to Europe and Northern America, ensuring social integration in the expanding diaspora.

Asian **multiculturist** residential patterns in Kenya are distinct setting them out more as a class and cultural group. Due to their population and geographical extent, they have a "critical mass". hence are able to **form** "self-sufficient communities."

Immigrants have to consciously and unconsciously work around the **challenge** of **carrying** the status of 'foreigner', 'outsider' or 'Other'. In one of **Vassanji**'s novels
Vikram imagines how his grandfather may have decided to remain after the completion of the railway and settle as Kenyan. For the Lalls, it is even more traumatizing as they have no 'home' to return to in India. For with independence from Britain, India was split and they had lost their homeland. By some perverse twist of fate, Peshawar, our ancestral home, had become an alien, hostile place; it was in Pakistan.

As a growing up boy Vikram uses tajtasies which serve as representational activity in his working out identification with Kenya to assert his belonging. He draws the images and symbols from the environment he lives in and the stories his grandfather told the railway construction, manifesting a diasporic condition of 'outsider-looking-in'. Within this consciousness the immigrants seek to insert themselves in the host country or community, symbolically using experiences which are drawn from a mixture of factual and fictive details.

Elliott explains the psychological process as the 'rolling identifications and representational wrapping of self and other' in working out subjectivity and intersubjectivity ("going on being"): The intertwining of representational wrapping, imaginary and socio-symbolic forms is the means through which human beings establish a psychical relation to the self, others, received social meanings, society and culture. Thus Asian multiculturalism has to maintain a delicate balance between belonging and identification with their adopted homeland and maintenance of authentic Indian culture and values.

When one speaks of multiculturalism one has undoubtedly to pay attention on Canadian Society.

Canadian Society is a multicultural society where all ethnic allies and divided groups are considered as equal in status. The multicultural Acts in Canada speak with one voice for protecting the rights of the immigrants. But in spite of such legislatures, there are individual though minor incidents of racial prejudice in the normal routine experience of people. The national policy of multiculturalism has been adopted by Canada to ensure that all multicultural groups enjoy an equally meaningful and
recognized space on a horizontal plane, but in the actual practice of day-to-day living, different ethnic groups occupy different rank in the society on a vertical pattern compared of many different individual items. Though the policy of multiculturalism is idealistically a real attempt to forge a new lively society – consisting of diversified cultures – to mark a unified identity, it has remained just like a patchwork quit or a mosaic or a symphony. In practice it does not work as it could eliminate racism. If there is equal opportunity and equal status to immigrants, it would cause feelings of economic insecurity, moral outrage, and conscious superiority among certain groups.

The proponents of the WASP culture always treat the visible minorities with racial dislike and openly express dislike to accept them as their equals. Moreover, since many South Asians are well qualified and stand a better chance in the job market, this becomes another grudge as they feel that the South Asians are a definite threat to their own right to work in their own country where unemployment is at its peak position.

The South Asian Migration to Canada establishes a multiculturist groups whose urgent work is to pronounce clearly and distinctly its reflexes emotions, feelings and responses to the new society. The basic requirement of this multiculturalism is to formulate its significance in its existence as an entity. This curiosity for identity gives rise to a lot of literature, and it is the South Asian Literature written in English by writers of the South Asian Diaspora which attracts the general public. This is the sphere in which the writer makes his/her identity and the presence is felt to the world at large and not just to his/her own ethnic community. It brings not only fame and recognition to its writers in the form of awards but also brings the desires and tribulations of the South Asian Diaspora to the notice of the world. Their literature projects the dilemmas and the struggles thereby giving their ethnic existence a "voice". The racism and marginalization confronted by them and the emotional security provided by their own kind induces them to stay in close clusters and effectively create islands within society, where they try to create small replicas of their homeland.

The South Asian authors who have migrated to Canada negotiate the maze of memory and experience to recreate and reshape their new identity. They work from a
vantage point of distanced perspective in order to understand and come to terms with the past to manipulate the present. The preoccupation with the past, as Vassanji states, is the need to recreate, mythify and explain the rapid disappearance of a way of life, which was often held, in place and static, by the colonial government and the rapid and continuing modernization of the Third World. The Multiculturalism writers are to create and preserve a world that is slowly shipping away with the sands of time and change.

The South Asian Multiculturalism in Canada is an important factor since its strength is second only to the Chinese which is the largest ethnic group. It is a very vibrant multicultural Diaspora, containing in itself many vivid cultures and languages, and has an abundance of publications in English as well as in ethnic languages. It has excellent literary value for which it has been recognized. It has contributed a variety of new ideas and philosophies to Canadian Literature. And thus, the South Asian Canadian Multiculturalism is a force to reckon with, not only as a work force but also in the literature that it produces in English which is of an excellence comparable to that of the mainstream writers.

And in relation to the entire South Asian Multiculturalism Indian Multiculturalism also makes a significant mark on the postcolonial literature. The writers of Indian Multiculturalism prove themselves to be heard of as they create a new platform hitherto unhead of in the trans-Atlantic geospaces.

These Multiculturists through literary consciousness represent their communities in terms of bringing to light the problems they are facing in their day-to-day life. These problems are innumerable on count and pressing in nature, small though may be the presence of these communities; the huge problem they are encountering is identity crisis. They are in a big dilemma as to where they belong!

This present scenario has its antecedent. The generational movement from tens of decades together spanning from nineteenth through the current centuries in search of a better life has made it psychologically no better. Instead, it has proved itself traumatically marginalizing alienating and exiling the communities in the imaginary
lands. It may be either East Africa or Canada where these communities with a
glimmer of hope of Canada where these communities with a glimmer of hope of
making a better life moved. But, it is the situation unimaginable which throws them
into neurotic chaos from where they now try to realize the fact that they are merely a
marginalized grouping suffering from non-identity in an alien geospace.

*The Assassin’s Song* is the first of M.G. *Vassanji*’s books to be set principally
in India (though its protagonist spends more than 30 years in the US in an attempt to
cut himself off from his roots). Unlike *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, which
had a chronological narrative, this one moves around in time. The novel's present is
2002, which is when the narrator, Karsan Dargawalla, returns to the village of his
childhood following the terrible communal riots in Gujarat, but we are also taken as
far back as the early 1960s when Karsan, still a child but heir to the *Pirbaag* shrine in
Gujarat, begins to grasp his responsibilities as Lord and Keeper of the shrine after his
father.

Growing up, he struggles with this burden of divinity. After losing the
opportunity to be coached by a former first-class cricketer because his position as the
"gaadi-varas" must come first, it's understandable that he is deeply affected by the
Biblical story of Abrahan preparing to sacrifice his son Isaac to the almighty: *Glumly*,
he refuses to participate in a wishing ritual because "Isaac didn't matter. He couldn't
wish for anything." Karsan's parents are constant reminders of the path he is expected
to follow, but other adult figures play equally important, and perhaps longer-lasting,
roles: the companionable truck driver who brings him stacks of newspapers and
magazines, a constant flow of news about the outside world; a Christian teacher with
African antecedents, whom Karsan briefly hero-worships; an agent of the National
Patriotic Youth Party, obsessed with restoring the glories, real and imagined, of the
Vedic Civilization. Here as in his other novels, *Vassanji* is a wonderfully perceptive
chronicler of how childhood events and impressions can continue to influence
character long after they have been forgotten at a conscious level.

More than halfway through the book comes Karsan’s big decision to go to the
US to study at *Harvard* on a scholarship, effectively turning his back on his parents
and the Pirbaag shrine. **Tellingly**, his life in America – including college, a decade spent as a family man living in an idyllic suburb, followed by tragedy and a subsequent hermitlike existence – takes less than hundred pages to get through the effect here is akin to the story about Vishnu instructing Narada in the ways of MAYA/ILLUSION through a firsthand experience of the impermanence of the material world. Eventually Karsan does return to fulfill his spiritual calling, but there is no easy resolution, or even a sense of a story coming full circle.

Among other things. *The Assassin's Song* is about the danger of taking a neutral position in a world that demands certainties. The faith followed by Karsan's family, the keepers of the Pir's flame, is neither Hindu nor Muslim, but this doesn't count for much in the heat of communal riots, when convenient labels have to be put on everything. And the friction between Karsan and his younger brother Mansoor (who has become an orthodox Muslim and is wanted by police for questioning) recalls a similar clash of ideologies between two brothers in Kiran Nagarkar's God's Little Soldier, but the lines are not as clearly drawn in this case. (The *Assassin's Song* is sparer and more compact in every way than Nagarkar's which it resembles in places.)

Intermittently, the book also visits the late 13th century, when a mysterious Sufi named Nur Fazal arrived at the gates of Patan and came to be worshipped as a holy man becoming the Pir Rawa whose legacy would, centuries later, fall on Karsan's shoulders. The readers never learn enough about this figure, which is part of the point: history repeats itself in strange ways and the contours of a life may be determined by nebulous, barely understood events that took place hundreds of years ago. What the readers are finally left with is a portrait of a life wasted by the struggle between duty and individuality, between faith and pragmatism. Karsan is as much a hollow man, swept along by forces outside his control, as the protagonist of Vassanji's last book.

*The Book of Secrets* is the story of a stolen diary—a book of secrets—belonging to the British governor of a small fictitious town in Tangyanika (modern Tanzania) beginning at the start of this century. Around the diary is woven a fabulous
yam about a young Shamsi Indian and his mysterious wife, and the forces of world
history that break down their door and haunt three generations of Tanzanian Indians.

It is an encompassing tale that meanders through lives, but makes its way back
to the centre thread like improvisational jazz, as soothing and emotion-provoking.
Beyond the obligatory travails of forbidden love and a dabbling in magic realism are
explored truths of life, its organic qualities and tones—no implausible characters or
dissmissively unlikely events.

Told from the perspective of a retired Dar-es-Salaam teacher who finds the
diary and reconstructs its story, Vassanji’s tale is rich with memorable interlopers and
vivid descriptions of Indian East Africa from 1913 to 1988. And despite the potency
and simplicity of a very probable narrative, the engine that truly powers the novel is
indeed its littleness in the face of the overwhelming historic events that engulf it.

From the small but impactful parts played by the colonies in two world wars.
to the arrival of commercial wealth, Western ideals and Tanzanian independence, the
tangible taste of observable history is the protagonist here. Casual reference to the
migration of Indian culture to separated pockets intense concentration-London, Dubai,
Toronto and New York—serves as a map of global change.

The evolution of community is an important theme in the hook. The
perseverance of Arab-Indian culture and the preservation of its community’s central
tenets despite geopolitical tumult and commercial forces of change re binding strings
kept strong and taught in Vassanji’s thematic web.

Outstripping Ondaatje’s international bestseller in importance and living
vitality, Vassanji uses an effortless familiarity with East Africa’s history and
inhabitants as his vehicle for education, at times invoking the style and immediacy of
Salman Rushdie’s earlier jocular novels.

Vassanji’s novel is a story of displacement, physical and emotional, and of
one’s search for importance, love and safety in the face of dramatic terrestrial
machinations. In many ways, The Book of Secrets is written for Eastern immigrants to
the West, particularly in these times of shifting borders and alliances and of the emergence of the so-called new world order. "Mediocrity was the new order. and ideological correctness," says the book's narrator of his new students. "The new generation of students who came were sent by a government seeking bureaucrats, not, as in the past, by a community eager to get ahead in the world." But to epitomize the true flavour of the book, one must quote a film song oft recited by prancing school girl in *The Book of Secrets*. "The world belongs to the one who loves" they sing, with more than a touch of sadness.

The South Asian Diaspora writers like M.G. Vassanji recognize the dearth of identity, and begin writing about the pockets of communities who have immigrated across Africa and North America and have been facing the world of problems unknown to the outside world. To make the facts known to the world of how the life is like of these immigrants, M.G. Vassanji, brings out his well-sketched and fact-finding literary works like *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land*.

Canadian Literature today is rich of Diaspora writings beside its native literary works. The "Evolution of Multiple Solitudes" deals with the information of multiplicity of Canadian Literature and its chronological development. The first chapter illustrates the confluence of solitudes in Canada. It establishes the socio literary influence of British culture and French culture. The evolution of Canadian Literature is shaped primarily by these two influences. Northrop Frye, the popular Canadian critic has presented this socio literary evolution of Canadian Literature in *The Bush Garden: Essays in Canadian Imagination* (1974). This also traces the evolution and formation of other solitudes recognized as Third Solitude (1989) by Michael Greenstein. It is from the interlocked situation of multiple solitudes Canada has created awareness towards recognizing the emerging South Asian Solitude, which is the result of immigration. It is argued for healthy discontinuity from the Canadian tradition to facilitate the continuity of multiple solitudes. In the novel The Gunny Sack, Vassanji's masterly description is established beyond dispute.

It is interesting to note that the early 1990s witnessed the conceptualization and systematization of this term. In 1991 Khachig Toloyan launched a journal named
Diaspora. As an editor of this journal, he said: The word Diaspora is used provisionally to indicate the belief that the term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armerian dispersion now shares meaning with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugees, guest workers, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community.

In the 1991 inaugural issue of the Journal, Diaspora, William Safran has attempted a kind of 'ideal type' representation of diaspora. In his popular article ‘Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return’ he has suggested six key characteristics of diaspora and compared a wide range of diaspora situations and related homeland myths. According to William Safran, the concept of diaspora can be applied to expatriate minority communities whose members share several of the following characteristics:

(i) They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original 'centre' to two or more 'peripheral', or foreign regions:

(ii) They retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements;

(iii) They believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulted from it;

(iv) They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when condition are appropriate;

(v) They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and

(vi) They continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (‘Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return’, Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, pp. 83-84).
Scholar like Robin Cohen has also used the same perspective formula of constructing an ideal type of a diaspora. He proposes that perhaps these features need to be adjusted and some other elements should be added to the list proposed by Safran. He indicates that the concept of diaspora denotes:

(i) Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;

(ii) Alternatively, the expulsion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions:

(iii) A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements:

(iv) An idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;

(v) The development of a return movement, which gains collective approbation;

(vi) A strong ethical group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief of a common fate;

(vii) A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the last or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;

(viii) A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in the other countries of settlement, and;

(ix) The possibility of a distinctive yet creative and enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. *(Global Diasporas: An Introduction, P.26)*

Robin Cohen has clearly attempted to move the debate forward. His emphasis on 'strong links to the past' pushes the debate decisively forward. Such attempt to define diaspora undoubtedly offers useful insights and correctly reflects the formative influence of a sense of loss and displacement and the primacy of the relationship of diaspora with a homeland.

James Clifford suggests that members of a diaspora maintain such characteristics as:
(i) Dispersal from one centre to at least two peripheries;

(ii) A memory of the homeland;

(iii) A belief that they will never be fully accepted in the host country:

(iv) A belief in returning to their ancestral home.

(v) A commitment to the maintenance of their homeland and

(vi) Group consciousness and solidarity. (Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century, P.25)

Marienstrass is of the view that the concept of diaspora is used today to describe any community, which in one way or the other has a history of migration. Peters points out that diaspora implies a decentralized relation to ethnicity, real or imagined relations between scattered people who sustain a sense of community through various forms of communication and contact and who do not necessarily depend on returning to distant homeland.

It is clear from this brief survey that the notion of diaspora is used to refer a wide range of historical and contemporary phenomena. This brief survey offers me an opportunity to push the debate forward. The researcher thinks that a diaspora exists and reproduced by relying on everything that creates a bond in a place among those who want to group together and maintain, from a distance, relations with other groups, installed in other places but having the same identity. This bond can come in different forms, such as family, community, religious bonds or shared memory of a catastrophe or trauma suffered by members of the diaspora or the forebears. A diaspora has a symbolic and iconographic capital that enables it to reproduce and overcome the obstacle of distance separating its communities. Diaspora areas and territories must be gauged first in the host country, where the community bond plays the essential role, then in the country or territory of origin – the pole of attraction – through memory. Thus the term diaspora has more of a metaphorical than an instrumental role. On this basis the following can be identified as common characteristics of all the diaspora:
(i) **Exile:** Members of the diaspora or their ancestors have been forced to leave their homelands. They have been dispersed in several places under pressure (abject poverty, catastrophe, famine, disaster etc).

(ii) **Alienation:** Members of diaspora are completely cut off from the main habitation. They share same fate as exile. suffering and separation. They believe that they can’t be Sully observed/ accepted by host countries and, therefore, feel alienated and installed. They feel that they can never be in a dominant position in the host country.

(iii) **Memory:** Members retain a collective memory – often a memory of pain, dispossession and trauma. They retain a rather strong identity awareness linked to the memory of the territory, of the society of origin and its history. From their collective memory they create/ articulate a version of and for their homeland. In their displaced, distressed and homeless conditions, it is their mother country which becomes their source of consolation, identity and imaginary their source of consolation, identity and imaginary home. With the loss of their home they depend on their mythical literature. To perpetuate their memory they celebrate the festivals of their own motherland and perform rituals of their own.

(iv) **Diasporic Consciousness:** Members continue to relate personally to that homeland and maintain a unique ethno-national, ethno-cultural and ethno-communal consciousness that can be treated as diasporic consciousness. This implies the existence of a strong sense of community and community life.

(v) **Longing for Return:** Segments of diasporic population sustain hope of returning to the homeland.

All these characteristics find unique articulation in the literary writings of diaspora writers. While languages, customs and traditions are distinct. all diasporic experiences share a similar sense of displacement, of seeking a sense of belonging. These experiences influence literary imagination and map literary texts. Diasporic writings are invariably concerned with exile, memory, diasporic consciousness,
longing for return, alienation, nostalgia, search for identity and sense of belonging. Such traits are evident in the works of M.G. Vassanji.

Diaspora can be classified into different types as:

(i) Victim diasporas.
(ii) Labour diasporas.
(iii) Imperial diasporas.
(iv) Trade diasporas.
(v) Cultural diasporas.

Each of these categories underline a particular cause of migration usually associated with particular groups of people. So, for example, the Africans through their experience of slavery have been noted to be victims of extremely aggressive trans-immigration policies, or in the case of Indians, they are seen to be part of labour diasporas because of their involvement with the colonial system of indentured labour. It must be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive, and at any given moment one diasporic group fall into several of these categories simultaneously, for example, the Jewish diaspora could be categorized as both a 'victim diaspora' and trade diaspora'. Perhaps, the Indian diaspora is the only one that fits into all the analytic sub-types.

Like Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, David Dabydeen, A.K. Ramanujan, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Meena Alexander, Homi K. Bhabha, Bhikhu Parekh, Farook Dhondi, Vijay Mishra, Satendra Nandan, Uday Singh Mehta, Sudesh Mishra, Anshuman Mondal, Susheila Nasta, Agha Shahid Ali and Jumpa Lahiri, M.G. Vassanji is also a prestigious literary member of Indian diaspora. Significantly enough, the diasporic Indian writing in English covers every continent and part of the world. It is an interesting paradox that a great deal of Indian writing in English is produced not in India but in widely distributed geographical areas of indenture (Girmit) i.e. Indian in the South Pacific, the Caribbean, South Africa, Mauritius, and the contemporary Indian diaspora in the USA. The UK, Canada and Australia. Although there are certain common resonances in the literary representations of the
experience of the writers of the 'indenture' and the 'new' Indian diaspora, the
responses and the narratives of the individual writers vary greatly. The above-
mentioned literary members of Indian diaspora differ from each other not only in their
socio-cultural backgrounds and the literary ancestries but also in their thematic pre-
occupations and literary style. Further, the responses of the diasporic writers to India
are also varied and not always adulatory; they range from sentimentality and nostalgia
to a cynical celebration of their coming of age. However, their diasporic condition,
their sense of exile and alienation and their effort to seek replenishment by making
symbolic returns to their origins bind all this writing into unity.

As M.G. Vassanji is a literary member of Indian diaspora, it will be proper to
sketch the short history of Indian diasporal before talking of his life and contributions.

The Indians diaspora is so widespread that the sun never sets on it. because it
spans across the globe and stretches across all the oceans and continents. It is the third
largest diaspora next only to the British and the Chinese. It is playing very significant
role in various fields. The field of creative writings is one of them. Once upon a time
people of the world were devouring the novels of Walter Scott and Charles Dickens;
now, both the novel and the English language, have been enlivened in the hands of the
writers of the writers of Indian diaspora – M.G. Vassanji, Vikram Seth, Amitav
Ghosh, Salman Rushdic, V.S. Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherjee and
Anita Deasai.

In the Indian context, immigration has been a continuous process. It has been
taking place for centuries. In pre-colonial times it was for the purposes of the trade
and the propagation for religion. In the history of ancient India, we come across
accounts of the Buddhist bhikkus who traveled into remote corners of Central and
Eastern Asia. To spread the gospel of Buddha, King Ashoka sent monks to central and
Eastern Asia in the 3rd century B.C. In the 1st century A.D.. during the rule of king
Greece. Kandhar (now in Afghanistan). South East Asia and Indonesia." The famous
Greek work Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, a first century Greek guide for sailors,
mentions India's trade relations with Ethiopia, Rome, Malay and China.
Maritime history of pre-colonial India records evidence of continuous contact between the kingdoms of the Coromandal coast and the islands of South-East Asia. According to Brian Harrison:

From at least the 6th century B.C. onwards Indian traders were sailing to those lands, and down through those islands, in search of gold and tin.

Originally trade with South East Asia was caused by demand for spices, which sent Indian merchants as middlemen to Malaya, Java, Sumatra, Cambodia and Borneo.

“The contact of the Palas with the Sailendra kings of Indonesia and the expeditions of the South Indian Cholas which was vanquished the great Indonesia Empire of Sri Vijay are repeatedly referred to by scholars.” Java was colonized by the Hindus between the 1st and 7th century. “The people of Java came to share with the Indians their religious, languages, art and architecture, their cultural mores, and legal and political ethos and forms. This area was exposed to “the heaviest Indianization.” Brahminical and Buddhist influences spread through the intervening cultural areas to islands of Romco as well as Mindanao and the Vaishyas in the Philippines. They gradually penetrated even to the northernmost island of Luzon. There are traces of Indic influence in the languages, literature and social customs in the Phillipines.

In Indo-China the kingdoms of Fu-Nan, Champa, Kamujadesha (Kampuchea), Angkor and Laos were greatly influenced by Indian culture and civilization. From the beginning of the Christian era, the Indian merchants and adventurers, princes and priests spread the Indian language and literature, religion and philosophy, art and architecture, customs and manners in these countries. The Indians settlements had been widely spread all over the region by the beginning of the Christian era. Later they grew into small kingdoms. Within two to three hundred years nearly the whole of Indo-China and Indonesia comprising Burma, Siam, Malay Peninsula, Cambodia and Annam in the mainland and the islands of Sumatra, Java, Bali, Borneo. Celebes and perhaps many others were dotted over with such kingdoms and settlements. Some of these kingdoms like those of Fu-Nan and Champa grew very powerful.
The trade with East Africa, however, lead to a permanent Indian settlement there. McNeill observes: "there is some reason to think that a colony of Indian merchants lived permanently in Memphis, Egypt from about 500 B.C." At the time of Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) Indians settlements were in existence in the North Eastern Africa. It is said that following the suggestions of Aristotle once Alexander conquered an island of North Eastern Africa named Sokotra. In those days Indians were living there.

The Venetian traveler Marco Polo has a word of praise for the Gujarati and Saurashtra merchants on African's east coast whom he consider as the best and most honourable that can be found in the world (Travels of Marco Polo written in 1260 A.D.). Vasco de Gama touched East Africa on his historic voyage to India. He reached Malindi in 1497 A.D. and found Indian merchants in Mozambique, Kilwa and Mombasa.

Indian presence on the East African seaboard was quite substantial upon to the beginning of the 16th century when the Western maritime powers arrived in the Indian Ocean. The use of Indian systems of weights and measures and of Indian Cowries a currency, a great demand for goods, all pointed to the fact that Indians were playing a key role in the area. These early migrants to East Africa belonged mainly to small trading communities like the Ismailis, Bhoras and Banyas of the Gujarat region. Their counterparts covering Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, Thailand and Indonesia were mainly Nattukottai Chettiyars of Chettinad in the Tamil region of South India.

Before the Portuguese arrival in the Indian Ocean the merchants of Gujarat, Malabar, Coromandel and. Bengal looked to the east, to the Indonesian archipelago, for direct voyages organized with their own shipping and capital. From the 16th century the orientation was suddenly reversed and turned westwards, towards the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The Hindu merchants were to be found all through the Middle East in the 17th and 18th centuries.

In India the sacred Hindu scriptures prohibited crossing the seas. Thus there was no large-scale immigration until the 19th century. Indian immigration during the
19th and early 20th centuries was unprecedented. It was the European imperialist expansion that created condition for immigration in large numbers. Due to this India witnessed massive movements of people from India to other parts of the world. Broadly three distinct patterns of Indian immigration are identifiable during the colonial period. They are:

i) Indian labour immigration;

ii) Kangani and maistry labour immigration. and:

iii) Free or Passage immigration.

New plantations, industrial and commercial ventures in European colonies created the need for large supplies of labourers. With the abolition of slavery in the British, French and Dutch colonies respectively in 1834, 1846 and 1873, there was a severe shortage of labourers working in sugar, tea, coffee, and rice and rubber plantations in the colonies. To fulfil the enormous demand for cheap labour the colonial authorities introduced indentured system in India in 1834. Under this system millions of indentured Indian labourers were taken to the various colonies. The overwhelming majority of the labour emigrants were recruited from North India.

Indenture was a signed contract to work for a given employer for five years. During this period the emigrant was entitled to receive a basic pay, accommodation, food rations and medical facilities. At the end of the five years, the emigrant was free to re-indenture or to work elsewhere in the colony, and at the end of ten years, depending on the contract, he was entitled to a free or partly paid return passage to India or a piece of crown land in lieu of the fare. The prospective emigrant had to testify before magistrate that he understood were used to dupe ignorant country folks. Under this system only the young and physically fit persons were taken. The indentured were very rarely more than thirty years old. Majority of the recruits were young males. Females were few. "Although the government of India, supported by the colonial office, stipulated that there should be forty women for every hundred men, ships often left India with less than this percentage." "The shortage of women affected both indentured and free labourers."
Indian labour immigration under the indenture system first started in 1834 to Mauritius, Uganda and Nigeria. Later the labourers immigrated to Kenya, Tanzania, Guyana, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Trinidad and Tobago, Martinique and Guadeloupe, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent Natal, St. Kitts, Japan and Surinam, Jamaica, Fiji, Burma, Canada, Thailand. Under the indenture system some 1.5 million persons from various parts of the country migrated.

The indentureship was a new kind of slavery. Most of the immigrants under this system were the victims of deception. Many Indians lured to the city by the Arkatis (agents or labour contractors or middlemen) who promised them relief from the misery of their lives and substantial pecuniary gain; and indubitably many were kidnapped or otherwise tricked. Among many other reasons, it was the scourge of casteism, poverty, famine and social discrimination that compelled them to fall into the trap of the British and to travel in search of a better land. These ‘grimitiyas’, a corruption of the word ‘agreement’, were initially bound to serve for five years, it being understood that the planters would pay for their passage, and at the end of this term the indentured labourers were to receive their freedom. If they wished to do so, they could settle in their new homeland and gain the rights accorded to free men or at least such rights as coloured people could expect. The Europeans almost never adhered to these agreements.

From Calcutta and Madras Indian men, and much smaller number of women, especially in the first few decades of indentured migration, were herded into 'coolie' ships, confined to the lower deck, the women subject to the lustful advances of the European crew. Many Jehajibhai (shipmates) as they called themselves did not survive the long and brutal 'middle passage': the bodies of the dead were, quite unceremoniously, thrown overboard. The hardship of journey became a metaphor of their journey of life. More cruelties awaited on their arrival to the plantation. The working day was unduly long. The idea of a rest day was inconceivable. The labourers found their movement severely curtailed. They were caged within the walls of plantation. They were completely cut off from the main plantation. They were completely cut off from the main habitation. Discipline was enforced with an iron
hand. They lived in appalling conditions, in the barracks and lines formerly inhabited by the slaves. When their indenture was completed, some immigrants stayed on the plantation while others moved out into the rural communities. They combined subsistence farming with wage labour. However, most of these migrants and their descendants did not return home through the indenture system was terminated in 1917 due to anti-indentureship campaign by Indian nationalists. When the indentured system was brought to a halt, nearly 1.5 million Indians had sold themselves into debt-bondage.

With the loss of their home and absence of motherland, these Indians depended on the Gita, the Ramayan, the Hanuman Chalisa and the Mahabharata as Satendra Nandan explains:

We lived by such stories, our ancient epics- first our grandparents, then our mothers and fathers, now our political leaders. Our fate in Fiji had echoes of the Ramayana: exile, suffering, separation, battles but no return. (The Wounded Sea, P.88).

Very often they compared their exilic life with that of Ram’s banishment from Ayodhya and thereby gave their act as something sacred and heroic. In Trinidad and other island countries we find these Indian celebrating Diwali, Ugadi, Holi and Thaipusam. Thus India with her flora and fauna and festivals largely loomed in the Indian communities’ imagination. Their pre-occupation with everything that is Indian gave them several names that had one thing common to them. India. Some of these names are: "Empire’s Banar Sena." In their displaced and homeless conditions it is their mother country India that became their source of consolation, identity and imaginary home.

Another system prevalent to get the contract labour was Kangani system. “The Kangani system prevailed in the recruitment of labourer for immigration to Ceylon and Malaya.” The word ‘kangani’ is an anglicized form of the Tamil word ‘kankani' meaning overseer or foreman. The kanganis were Indians who were employed by the
plantation owners to recruit labourers in India. "They were men with some capital who advanced money to the prospective coolies for traveling and settling down on a plantation." A variant of this system, called the 'maistry' (derived from Tamil 'maistry', meaning supervisor) system was practiced in the recruitment of labourer for immigration to Burma. It was more or less similar to the kangani system. Under these systems the kangani and maistry recruited families of Tamil labourers from villages in the erstwhile Madras Presidency. In contradictions to indenture labourers, coolies under these systems were largely free. They were not hound by any contract or fixed period of service. "During the period 1852 and 1937, 1.5 million Indians went to Ceylon, 2 million to Malaysia and 2.5 million to Burma.” After 1920 the kangani system of labour recruitment discontinued due to fall in demand for the Indian labour.

Immigration from India did not cease after the abolition of indenture and other systems of organized export of labour. Immigration to East African countries namely Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, Natal (South Africa), Burma, Malaysia and Fiji during the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries present a third pattern: 'Free' or 'Passage' migration. Under this pattern trader, artisans, bankers, petty contractors, clerks, professionals and labourers from India were brought to East Africa to build the Mombassa railway, most of the present Indian population of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania arrived after the railway-stimulated opportunities for trade and industry. Unlike the indentured labourers who belonged to mainly lower castes, the traders belonged to the upper castes. They included Baniyas from United Provinces, Marwari from Rajputana; Chettiar from Madras, Pathans from North West and Gujaratis and Punjabis. These emigrants were not officially sponsored. They themselves paid their 'passage’ and they were free in the sense that they were not bound by any contract.

A new and significant phase of immigration began after India became independent. The large scale and steady immigration of doctors, engineers, scientists and teachers to the developed countries like Britain, the USA, Canada. Austtralia and New Zealand is essentially a post-independence phenomenon, and particularly so of the late 1960s and 1970s. This pattern of immigration is often described as 'migration of talent' and 'brain drain'. Those who migrated during this phase held from urban
middle class families and were well educated and professionally trained. They formed the new Indian diaspora and maintained a close ties with the places of their origin.

The immigration of skilled and unskilled Indians on a large scale to the West Asian countries is also a post-independence phenomenon. The demand of the expatriate labourers rapidly increased in the oil exporting countries of the Gulf and North Africa. Thus during the 70s and 80s there was unprecedented immigration to the Gulf due to the oil boom. "There were only 14,000 Indians in the Gulf in 1948," "By 1971 their population had risen up to 40,000." Presently, Indian population in West Asian countries is vast.

Now, latest type of immigration is in process. Under this type the software engineers, management consultants, financial experts, media people and other professionals are migrating to the developed countries. They are considered to be the cream of India. They are very mobile and keep very close contact with India in terms of socio-economic interests.

In many diasporic situations, especially in multiethnic polities and where the people of India are numerically significant, the question of their image and identity has been critical. In the colonial phase, the British stereotyped Indian emigrants as 'coolies'. Even when the upwardly mobile Indians became professionals, the prefix 'coolie' was always attached to their professional designation. In South Africa M.K.Gandhi was often called 'the Coolie Lawyer'. Similarly, the traders of the East African Coastline were called 'passage Indians'. "The meaning was that they were travelers, sojourners, not settlers or immigrants." In the literature on the subject we also come across references to such expressions as 'East common identity to all members of Indian diaspora is their Indian origin, their consciousness of their cultural heritage and their deep attachment to India.

A prestigious literary member of Indian diaspora and recipient of several literary awards. M.G. Vassanji is Canada’s latest literary golden boy. Like many others, he is an Indian expatriate separated from the subcontinent by generations. As a
commonwealth literary hero, he must be ranked alongside Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Nigerian legend Chinua Achebe.

*No New Land* is Vassanji’s second novel. It is a poignant story of the immigrant experience. It creates a rich portrait of a transplanted community. Vassanji’s third novel *The Book of Secrets* is primarily set in East Africa and deals with ambiguous situation of South Asians in East Africa. The story of this novel is based on a diary kept by a junior British colonial administrator. Here the novelist focuses on the interaction between the Shamsi (Indian) community and the native Africans, as well as the colonial administration. Even though none of the characters ever returned to India, the country’s presence looms throughout the novel. This book was a national best seller and it won the 1994 inaugural Giller Prize, Canada’s richest literary award for a work of fiction. In 1994 Vassanji was awarded the Harbour front Festival Prize in recognition of his achievements in and contribution to the world of letters and in that same year was chosen as one of the twelve Canadians on MacLean’s Honour Roll.

Vassanji’s fourth novel *Amriiku* is a remarkable novel of personal and political awakening that spans three decades and explores the eternal quest for home. It is set in the North America. Vassanji won the Giller Prize for the second time for his fifth novel, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. This novel tells the story of the in-between line of a man.

Diasporic articulation is evident in the novels of M.G. Vassanji. They are concerned with exile, memory, diasporic consciousness, longing for return, nostalgia, search for identity and sense of belonging. They deal with Indians living in East Africa. Some members of this immigrant community later undergo a second migration to Europe, Canada, or the United States. Vassanji is then concerned with how these migrations affect the lives and identities of his characters, and issue that is personal to him as well.

How much are we defined by where we live? How much do you create it? Vassanji’s fiction is full of such questions. The need to find connections and
contradiction between address and spirit runs through his work. Vassanji’s presentation of the past is never cut and dried. He has attempted to explore his own past. Thus another major concern of Vassanji is "how history affects the present and how personal and public histories can overlap." He believes that reclamation of the past is first serious act of writing.

Vassanji’s unique place in Canadian literature comes from his elegant classical style, his narrative reach, and his characters trying to reconcile different worlds within. For Vassanji, who has experienced displacement from more than one continent, nation is an abstract thing. It is the sense of community and people that survives.