Chapter V

Conclusion

Bissoondath’s handling of Identity and Racism in a Multicultural context

The prime concern of the research relates to the probe into two fascinating arenas of Diaspora - Problem of Identity and Racism in context of Caribbean origin. However, he would introduce himself as a Canadian author. In Bissoondath’s works, Diaspora denotes migration of people from their homeland to another country out of compulsion. The period of 20th century, specifically second half is considered as the time of transition, migration and mobilization. The outcome is that boundaries have been removed and the entire earth is classified as a global village. The issue of migration in this context appears to be different from the former time. Nowadays people migrate from their countries willingly with a definite drive for attainment of personal aspirations. In the past, it was not migration but rather a transportation of third- world people as indentured labourers. Education plays a decisive role in terms of current generation’s attunement to diverse social, religious, economic, and political surroundings. Their condition is not so pitiable as compared to the earlier emigrants. Thus, the surface migration of diverse races and communities generates racial, cultural and linguistic confusion and this aspect impedes the development of a national culture. The problem of national belonging is reflected in the literatures of the Diaspora.
Diasporic writers think local but at the same time encompass the global. They particularly focus on location of culture, search for identity, and quest for a home through self – realization. The contemporary diasporic writing connects the past with the present and creates new perceptions of liquefied and transnational identity. The Canadian culture is enriched by the arrival of immigrants and created cultural mosaic - unity in diversity. The pride of Canada is its multicultural and multi-ethnic identity. The literary advancement in Canada largely depends upon its expatriate writers who hail from Caribbean, Asian and other places. They facilitated in redesigning the Canadian literary background. Among them, the prominent writer is Bissoondath. He has a history of double migration from India to Caribbean and then to Canada. He is vociferous of categorizing him as a person having a hyphenated identity.

The present thesis focuses on two important notions presented in Bissoondath’s works – The problem of Identity and that of Racism.

The introductory chapter deals with the biographical details of Bissoondath. The Indo-Caribbean-Canadian writer is viewed carefully in this portion. His history of migration which takes us back to his great grandparents who landed in the Caribbean as indentured labourers (Girmitiyas). The chapter also reveals the roots of the literary tradition to his uncle V. S. Naipaul – a celebrated Diasporic writer. Initially he thought that migration of grandparents, would help them remove poverty but in reality, it gave rise to the loss of identity and acquiring a hyphenated identity in a host country. Various factors that compelled Bissoondath to forsake Trinidad include narrowness of life on island, riots, army rebellion, freedom of Trinidad, racial, cultural and economic differences in society, pessimism, political disturbance, and corrupt and violent world
of racism. After graduating from Canada, he focused on teaching spared time for literary writing. Bissoondath’s fiction at present is concerned with experiences of immigrants, refugees, nomads, and wanderers. The chief character of Bissoondath’s works often feel marginalization, insecurity, homelessness, isolation, uncertainty, cultural dislocation. He holds a perspective that Canadian multiculturalism asserts dissimilarities. His fictions also focus on dark themes and contrary positions. Bissoondath, very firmly believes that novels cannot work without its complex characters though representing social and political issues. Apart from some descriptions of unknown island or countries, places, situation and people in majority novels Bissoondath refer to his own experiences in the Caribbean. He presents the journey of character from ignorance to maturity and understanding. His characters hail from different backgrounds. He creates eye-catching graphic details in his novels and short stories. His individual characters represent conditions of human beings in a Diasporic society. He deals with multiculturalism and generation gap in a beautiful manner. He adopts Hemingway’s style in his works. His major characters such as Raj, Boobie, Sita, Montgomery, Sue’s parents, the Prasads, etc turn into immigrants for one reason or the other. They confront the problems of Diaspora willingly or unwillingly. One also learns that from his interview with Kruk that he admires Jhumpa Lahiri and he says every writer creates his own path and does not imitate any other writer. He has presented his views on the issues of identity, racism, hopelessness, homesickness, marginalization, multi-culturalism prostitution, exploitation, corruption, selfishness, insecurity, etc, in his works.
The second chapter is an attempt to analyze five novels of the author in context of two thrust areas of this research – The Problem of Identity and Racism. Here the researcher focuses on the immigrants’ problems faced by the novelist. He provides a universally accepted notion on racism - ‘racism for one is racism for others’. The theme of Racism and the Problem of Identity form a prominent aspect of almost all of his works.

In his first novel *A Casual Brutality*, he has constructed an imaginary island called Casaquemada, which in a way that resembles Trinidad, full of brutality and corruption. The novel talks about the predicament of Raj, the central character and the circumstances that compelled him to leave the disturbed island – Casaquemada where he started as a child. The novel is narrated in flashback and flash forward to project the condition of Raj. The conflict between Raj and Madera also plays a significant role in context of two contrasting ideology related to racial difference. Raj seems to get late in taking decision to leave Casaquemada early that cost him his wife – Janet Linda (White) and son – Rohan. Raj returned to his native island for his uprootedness and willing to be a part of homeland but in the end, he adopts an aloofness from this culture. Bissoondath has presented Casaquemada’s condition as deeply disturbing almost throughout the novel. Raj also appears helpless in curing the cancer of Mrs. Lal. The author has presented the cultural differences between Canada and Casaquemada. Whereas Canada allows freedom and provides solace, Casaquemada smothers everyone. Kayso represents humanism in the corrupt land of Casaquemada. The character called Surein’s paranoia in a way represents a problem in identity formation. According to Grappler, Raj’s uncle Casaquemada is rotten, corrupt and
self-deceptive. Grappler also raises issues related to the dual citizenship in case of lucky people like Raj and their struggle for survival. Dough Madera, the antagonist of novel holds a belief that racial dissimilarity is a basic factor in the formation of one’s cultural identity. Raj on the other hand, being a doctor cannot overlook human values. Raj undergoes an inner development as a character in the novel and he attains maturity and understanding. Ironically both Raj and Madera share childhood memories in Casaquemada as schoolmates. However, Raj’s grandmother is sceptical about miscegenation – interbreeding of two different races or colors with marriage of Raj and Janet, a white woman. The problem of marital life of Raj and Janet does not seem to foster the notion of different racial background in fact communication gap was a problem and individualism as well. The difference between Raj and Wayne, a servant at Raj’s home define that compassion between different races can elide difference of community. Raj and Wayne make rigorous efforts to control brutality and violence. The discussion between Raj and Surein regarding West-Indian team having lacked in terms of sufficient Indian players indicates that Raj believes team selection should be based on class of individual and not with community or racial backdrop. This is an evident example of racism in the novel. The death of Raj’s wife Janet and son Rohan provides objective approach to Raj’s clash between Canadian and Caribbean culture. The ultimate desire of any individual to be back home gets jolted Raj avows never to return to Casaquemada. Canada appears a better place for him though the concept of ‘Here’ and ‘There’ always pains his mind.

The second novel The Innocence of Age deals with Canadian background in terms of characters, approaches and some other aspects, deals with multiculturalism and how
people reside collectively in a multicultural society. The renovation of the house deconstructs the policy of multiculturalism in Canada. Daniel Taggart, the central character is given the task of refurbishing the house of Mr. Simmons, a rich businessman. Somehow, the house smothers and during the course, Daniel comes to learn of the treachery of Mr. Simmons. He exploits Sita, physically who is his illegal tenant. She has migrated to Canada from Caribbean with aspirations for better life, but becomes the victim of human trafficking. The intricacy of renovating Mr. Simmons’ house is a prime example that multicultural policy in Canada needs reconsideration. Sita’s exploitation on sexual and financial terms is less an indication of cultural marginalization than an individual marginalization. The racial discrimination is evident in case of Sita and gender distinction as well.

The novel also entails generation gap or conflict in terms of four characters – in case of Pasco and Daniel as father and son, Montgomery and Nutmeg as father and daughter. Pasco’s humanist approach is sharply contrasted with Daniel’s materialistic concern. In pursuit for success, Daniel seems to be getting greedy while working for Simmons, his ideal. Daniel is also not shameful with refurbishment of his house, which represents pious feeling, and memory of Pasco’s dead wife Edna in the house. Simmons’ house remains silent at Daniel and Sita’s existence is neglected. When Daniel becomes aware of Sita’s rape by Mr. Simmons, he develops hatred for him. Sita’s vengeance on Mr. Simmons is able to arouse humanity in Daniel who assists her going back to the Caribbean.

The conflict between Montgomery and Nutmeg ends in a catastrophe by depicting generational conflict in a specific civilization. Bissoondath deconstructs race as a
explanation of a human behaviour. Nutmeg, with alteration of her name from Nutmeg to Spice provides her rebellious nature. She escapes from the so-called torture of life and turns into a prostitute. Her decision can be connected with a rebellious nature of a teenager. The author, in his approach to multiculturalism depicts that social relations cannot be confided in race. The society in novel is blamed as racist in killing Montgomery, as an act of self-defense by a young officer Kurt against racial violence. Montgomery’s son is the mouthpiece of Bissoondath in declaring that racism should be utilized cautiously. The novel also depicts a perspective of Canadian multiculturalism as a policy, encouraging racism rather than obstructing.

The author has also presented a place called Starting Gate where few people like Lanny, Pasco, Cruise, Pushpull or Manfred, Marcus and Montgomery meet one another for liberation of themselves. Wherein everyone praises Canada Montgomery does not since he rewards the hatred towards America. As Bissoondath’s typical nature name of Montgomery’s homeland or country is not provided specifically but believed as Grenada. Montgomery works as a mailman in Canada. All the other characters are living ordinary life in Canada.

Another aspect highlighted here is that Pasco is highly disturbed at the death of Montgomery and comes to know through TV that the death of Montgomery is depicted as a racial attack and converted into dirty political issue. As Pasco is aware, Montgomery has always kept a safe distance from race, color and skin aspects all his life.
The Unyielding Clamour of Night depicts the condition of a young central character of novel Arun Bannerji, who is having high ideals, wants to create a huge difference by teaching students of southern areas – two percenters community. Arun right from the beginning of his journey visualizes an officer abusing a southerner for idleness and worthlessness in work. Arun is unaware of the land to which he is proceeding, a land with racial and political disturbance. In the course of his journey for betterment of children of South, he meets characters like Jaisaram, Mrs. Jaisaram, his daughter Anjani, Kumarsingh and few other characters. A majority of characters in this novel confront identity crisis.

The people of Omeara are not too friendly to strangers. Arun gets a warning from Seth, the army man to be careful in Omeara. Arun gets a bit disturbed when he becomes aware that children are busy with normal work of milking, weeding, tending goats and hence cannot attend school. Through Anjani, he becomes aware of the victimization of Southerner in Capital. Due to her roommate, Anjani has to pay the price of expulsion from Capital’s school for which she is innocent. Bissoondath seems to represent identity and racial element the idea that it is difficult to overcome at a very young age. Her marginalization as two percenter is portrayed in a significant manner. Jaisaram, a butcher is also skeptical regarding Arun’s intention to teach in neglected place- Omeara. He seems to be uncertain regarding the outcome of the conflict between dissatisfied boys and army people - who is correct in approach. However, he appears to support the boys during course of the novel.

Another character called Prakash Kumarsingh, who aspires to make it big in life. Despite having skills and talent, he has to perform odd jobs in Omeara as an office
boy, cleaner, night watchman. A character is connected with marginalization in the context of identity formation. The group of dissatisfied boys demolishes the nightclub established by Kumarsingh and the incident makes him aloof in striving to achieve success. Jaisaram is also portrayed as a hopeful character when in his conversation with Arun he favours education in terms of transformation of power for the marginalized and downtrodden people. However, Arun feels frustrated in Omeara when he lost a brilliant child, Shanti in an explosion. He encounters a student – Saman having little ability to learn, Arun’s beating him reveals his frustration and later on he laments his act. At times Arun appears to be a man torn between people in Omeara and Army people. He is unable to decide who carries the right notion.

Arun also feels disgusted with army’s indifferent approach towards the soldiers’ body, which like the dissatisfied boys’ bodies is flung into drainage. Arun feels gloomy with the environment. The tyranny of Army is presented when combing for the blast culprits makes them compel Anjani to strip in the presence of her mother for soldiers. This indicates the disgrace of marginalization of an individual. Arun plans to leave Omeara since he is suspected to be a spy by the people of Omeara.

Before leaving the place, Mrs. Jaisaram reveals the secret of her son – Nagarat who lost his life in bomb explosion while supplying it. In fact, it was Mrs. Jaisaram’s mistake in time setting of bomb compels her son’s death so in order to receive punishment she shut her mouth. She is the real bomb maker and she learned the art at the Capital where she once visited with her husband. Her act of marginalization is also reflected when she declares that she was turned into a two percenter southerner. On the day of departure, nobody turns to wave Arun and he feels life has come a full
circle. His journey ends in the manner in which it began at Omeara. Arun at last feels disgruntled with his idealism.

The Soul of All Great Designs deals with two diverse characters – Alec and Sue or Sumintra who lead a snobbish life. Alec pretends to be a gay in order to get success in the sphere of interior decoration and can go up to any extent to protect his profession and thereby compromising his libidinal desires as a normal human being. On the other hand, Sue or Sumintra represents a perturbed character being an Indian immigrant girl in Canada, torn between Western tradition and Indian culture. Both the characters play a game of secret when they fall in love and are reluctant to make their relation public. Bissoondath seems to be in agreement with Alec’s theory of having secrets in life.

Alec also keeps his degree of interior decoration a secret from his parents. He demands money for some other course and fulfills his desire to learn interior decoration. One incident impels Alec to pretend as a gay in the sphere of interior decoration and he acquires to learn mannerisms of a gay by visiting a gay village. However, after having success in his profession he finds it difficult to hold his libidinal desires in case of Caroline and Sue. With the commitment from Caroline, Alec gets conscious of his profession and leaves the plan of seducing her. He concentrates upon his profession. In order to keep himself strong in his profession, he seeks the help of some agencies providing call girls to satisfy his physical needs. Alec’s life takes a decisive turn when he meets Sue or Sumintra, who initially hides her real name so as Alec.
Bissoondath represents the contrasts of approach in terms of characters like Kelly, representing typical Canadian youth, carefree girl wherein Rima and Sumintra are portrayed as typical Indian girls in Canada suppressed with the traditional mindset of Indian parents. Sumintra’s mother urges her to hold a good degree. When Sumintra leaves architect to study English literature, her mother believes that a good degree is necessary for a marriage. Rima and Sumintra symbolize suppressed girls of Indian origin, unable to manifest their individual choices like Kelly. Sumintra’s mother does not allow her to go to Kelly’s apartment for the party after graduation as she considers her girl would be out of control and turn into a total westerner who would be unable to hold on as individual. Even parents of Sumintra compel her to marry a widower of an Indian origin, saying she does not have much choice in the selection of a groom. In fact, this serves as an affront to her individual freedom to select her ‘type’ of man.

Sue faces racial hatred at the party with Kelly where Sue meets a white – British boy – Dan who abuses her by saying ‘Cunt’ – an offensive word for person having pleasure of sex. The racial comment ‘Pakistani girl’ heightens humiliating feeling for Sumintra who is already facing identity problem.

Bissoondath also presents Manohar- Sumintra’s father holding engineering degree and Mr and Mrs. Prasad having higher qualification being forced to do menial jobs like selling food etc, for livelihood. Here Bissoondath depicts the pathetic condition of the migrants in terms of search for identity. For Sue the situation becomes tough when she is compelled to select his parents or Alec in terms of future. Kelly advises Sue to reveal the secret of her relation with Alec to her parents. When Sue confesses true love for Alec, he feels reluctant and when Sue leaves her home to marry Alec, he
dejects her notion by saying he has to lose a lot in his profession for marriage. However, Sue feels deceived, Alec shows concern for Sue and reveals everything regarding his life to her and expects Sue to understand him. However, Sue scolds him and is lost in the forest. The fear of revelation of his identity compels Alec to murder Sue. Both the characters represent secret, here in the context of the problem of identity.

*Doing the Heart Good* represents a character of a retired English professor Alistair Mackenzie who feels lonely in his life after his wife’s death, which compels him to stay with his daughter Agnes. The novel also projects characters like – Thrush, Mackenzie’s colleague cum friend, Frank, Boobie and his brother facing issues with identity, racism and multiculturalism. Alistair is presented as a person dissatisfied with life, finding faults with every person in some way or the other. He neglects the work done by his daughter Agnes to support pregnant teenage girls as social work. It is a wrong practise to support these kinds of girls.

Through the character of Thrush, Bissoondath raises an issue of real identity – though it can be interpreted as a tragic incident. A girl student Miss R professes allegations against Prof. Thrush of sexual harassment. The tragic part is that Alistair is one of the members of the panel investigating the charges of plagiarism hurled against Miss R. However, she claims that Prof. Thrush warned her expulsion from university and asked for sexual favour from her. The colleagues of Thrush suspect him to be the culprit. The panel having a lady member who is not ready to consider Thrush’s statement since he was lonesome and secluded. Another person from the panel advised people not to believe girl’s words. The decisive factor lies with Alistair and he
considers that many years of solitude have turned Thrush imprudent. However, Thrush feels that the panel is not rational in its approach and he quits the job. The reality is revealed later when Alistair sees a nude photo of Thrush having no penis means he was a eunuch. Alistair laments on it but Thrush commits a suicide. An innocent person’s dignity is thus not restored in a cruel society.

Bissoondath’s represents the character of Frank who is a gardener leading a lonely life after his wife’s death. Actually, Frank has come to Alistair for helping Boobie and his brother. Boobie and his brother have come to a land as refugees, with approval of work from church authorities- difficult to survive with world’s tricky ways of lies. Both brothers turned to Canada with high aspirations from their homeland. Both face difficulties in adjustment – in terms of career and language. Frank supports them in terms of providing shelter since he was also a refugee once. They are not so fortunate to have a good life in another country where all aspirations will be fulfilled. Bissoondath seems to reveal backdrop of Boobie and his motive as refugee to enter into unknown land to achieve something. The perturbed condition of prosperous grandfather’s land snatched away and death of grandparents and his parents is the chief cause of Boobie’s arrival in Canada.

The most shocking incident in the novel is Adriana’s rape and murder, Boobie’s friend. Frank kills that person as a part of revenge from Boobie. He considers that Boobie as a refugee will face trouble in Canada if he murders that man. Alistair is dreadfully scared for Frank after listening to the whole thing. One may consider this as an act of foolishness. However, from a rational approach, a refugee (Frank) being a father figure and no one behind him helped another refugee (Boobie) because Frank
does not want to go to his homeland. Bissoondath has depicted Alistair’s helplessness in the context of identity in a splendid manner.

The third chapter deals with Diaspora in theoretical terms and various aspects concerning diasporic writing. When we talk of Diaspora in the second half of 20th century, we find that what was local has become global. People migrate to other countries willingly with certain motives of better opportunities and prosperity. People face problems like - uprootedness, the grief of going away from the culture in which nourishment prevails, transplanting oneself in an alien culture with the risk of approval or disapproval – different from his own culture, reluctance to mix up with other culture, the problem of acceptance in other culture and adjustment with native culture after arrival from failure abroad and going back abroad. This aspect creates the pathetic condition of nowhereness and homelessness.

The aforesaid issues give birth to basic problems – Problem of Identity, Racism, National identity, Individual identity, etc. which had not been experienced by mankind in past. The actual problem of identity comes to the surface when a person finds himself nowhere amid oceans of human beings, unable to detach from his/her real root and failure to assimilate with the new culture. The emotional attachment of heart with land creates a home for everyone. The Problem of identity and racism should be looked at from psychological angle. A man feels comfortable when he visualizes other people from similar cultural or linguistic backgrounds. However, current scenario has made it tough for finding same kind of people when they migrate to any part of the world. The innate desire of a person is to be liked and taken care of by and to stay together and care of young ones but difficult to practise in environment other than his
own. The problem widens for second generation. The feeling of acceptance in homeland when they return creates disturbance. He becomes an outsider once again. This is related to the condition of ‘nowhereness’.

Generally, people who migrate become aware regarding their identity merely after migration. The psychological aspect reveals that as soon as a person gets detached from his people, he happens to be awakening for himself and his identity. If we look at Indian, Caribbean or Canadian diasporic writers, they have chosen locale, settings and characters from the native backdrop. They barely get liberation from homeland aspect.

Diasporic writing largely connects to the work written by those in exile, who have felt existential, political and metaphysical problems. It can be divided into two sections – one consists of people who are connected to their homeland and later migrate in search of better prospects and the other consist of people who were born and brought up abroad and who live in ‘imaginary homelands’. The writers belonging to first category can understand homeland, its limits and the reasons for those limits. On the contrary, second category writers identify homeland merely through visits or readings or stories heard from their ancestors. They present a distinct view of the country and tend to have negative approach in their work since they lack firsthand experience.

Another aspect that has been taken into account regarding the psyche of Diasporic writers is that, they may be competent in writing good works but they tend to focus on the darker arenas of their native land such as poverty, corruption, caste, community clashes of homeland. It sounds like a deliberate intention regarding admiration from
host country for recognition in the said land. Diasporic literature also has a connection to multiculturalism, an aspect that arose due to Globalization.

The fourth chapter deals with the differences between Diaspora and multiculturalism. Diaspora connects with migration of people due to several factors and multiculturalism arises due to Globalization. Every country almost confronts the policy of multiculturalism in one way or the other. Multiculturalism does not mean goodwill but rather a materialistic concern and is not expected to follow the theory that my culture and your culture should be given equal amount of respect or attention. The modern man’s adjustment in the social milieu has a direct connection with multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is the new flavour of 21st century that has every variety in it and provides a chance for stay, work and communication regardless of caste, community, colour, religion and nationality.

The migrant needs to accept that from within and develop a new outlook of residing together in assimilation. Many intellectuals consider that multiculturalism expanded at the cost of native culture however, it is untrue. It is like a prospect of a link between your culture and other culture.

Even in 1971, the Prime Minister of Canada asserted to do away with discrimination regarding attitude and cultural jealousy. Bissoondath believes that in Canada people come across one another chiefly at festivals with multicultural mosaic tiles. It makes an impact as identity crisis for Canadians of different cultural roots and can get reduced with communication and participation in art, science or any other kind of knowledge having permission of communication. Bissoondath’s book on
multiculturalism entitled *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism* in Canada deals with the aspect that immigrants are expected to follow Canada’s ethics and approach of life. Few critics do not take Bissoondath and other expatriate writers seriously. These critics are of the view that majority of writers, write in the context of their specific home – their base country away from Canada. Bissoondath portrays the disparity regarding multiculturalism. It is the chief way of misidentification on the base of colour, not individual strength or weakness. The intentions of the author are looked upon from racial angle and to that; Bissoondath disapproves.

Thus, Bissoondath seems to project that for any individual it is complicated to survive without any type of identity. These aspects can be perceived in Mary and Windy while performing social work though paradoxically their interest is more in business than service. It can be perceived as hypocrisy. The conflict amongst African and Indian population in Caribbean countries is apparent in Bissoondath’s works. By employing techniques of flashback and flash forward, he is able to depict the story with the idiosyncrasies of hiding the name of the island. He very smartly merges the plot with the portrayal of the place. He impels readers to presume life on Caribbean countries. The quite perceptible aspect in his works is that he rarely reveals the name of the island, except Casaquemada; however, from depiction it is similar to Trinidad – his homeland. The portrayal of Raj as residing in Canada and his confrontation with multicultural society up to some extent reveals Bissoondath’s individual experience, which at the outset condemns multicultural policy of Canada and with the passage of time acknowledges Canada as his home. Through the caricature of Raj, Jan and Celia, he represents his personal claustrophobia. He ardently portrays lesser value to human
beings as per the notions of Capitalist society in his works. The issue of isolation regarding teenagers and aged people is frequent in his novels.

**Scope for further study**

The Present research is a modest attempt to review Neil Bissoondath’s selected works critically in the context of two essential arenas of diaspora – Problem of Identity and Racism in the context of a Canadian multiculturalist world of the author. The research can be carried out further in the context of all his works or in a comparative study with the other diasporic authors like M. G. Vassanji’s works that represent various aspects in the context of Diaspora.