Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Life and Works of Neil Bissoondath

Diaspora is a term used to indicate the migration of Jewish people to different parts of the world in search of home and protection largely due to untold oppression of the Nazis against them. Second half of 20th Century is known as the time of transition, migration, and mobilization and produced a reversal of the locals becoming global and the world coming to be known as a global village. The problem of migration differs today from what it was in the earlier times. People have been going abroad of free volition to fulfill their needs and desires, even ambitions. This is in sharp contrast to what it was in earlier times when people went in search of better life to work as indentured labour. Education is a game changer that has led to the realization in the present generation that the situation as it exists requires adjustment rather than flight from it. The large-scale migration of people across countries has led to greater ethnic variety and diversity leading to the formation of multicultural nation-states, thus making it impossible to trade the processes involved in the formation of national culture of any given nation-state.

Diaspora today consists of ethnic categories that speak of hybrid people, yoked together: Black, British, British Asian, and Kenyan – Asian, Anglo-Indian,
Indo-Caribbean, African-Caribbean, African-American, and Chinese – American. It is also a fact that most diasporas – Asians, Caribbeans, Africans, Chinese – are attempting to develop their own ways of living in England or Canada, a way one could not really call ‘English’ or ‘Canadian’. The question of national belonging surfaces in literatures of the diaspora. About diasporic literature, one has to admit the fact it is a kind of psychological attempt to regain that which the writer has lost at the level of reality. Diasporic writing, in terms of theory and practice, is the work of people in exile who have experienced unsettlement at the existential, political and metaphysical levels. With this experience, they have unsettled the philosophical and aesthetic systems.

Diasporic discourse is mainly woven around the location of culture, search for identity, the quest for home, through self-discovery or self-realization, giving rise to their sense of homelessness, placelessness, alienation and deracination. Writers who can be associated with Diaspora are V.S. Naipaul, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Meena Alexander, Bharati Mukherjee, Homi Bhabha, G.V. Desani, Neil Bissoondath, Rohinton Mistry, and M.G. Vassanji.

Neil Devindra Bissoondath was born in Arima, Trinidad on 19 April 1955, grew up in the town of Sangre Grande. He attended a Presbyterian primary school founded by Canadian missionaries and a catholic high school in Port of Spain. Although he was born in Trinidad, he has Indian roots. Bissoondath’s great
grandparents were among indentured labourers (Girmitiyas) who came to Trinidad from India as a part of indentured labour system from 1838 to 1917. They laboured in rice and sugarcane fields in India and years ago migrated from India – their home country to Trinidad and from there to Canada. So, Bissoondath has double migration family history. Apart from it, he belongs to a family connected with literary tradition. Bissoondath happens to be grandson of Seepersad Naipaul (1906-1953) – the first writer to emerge out of Indian settlement in Trinidad, whose *The Adventures of Gurudeva and Other Stories* (1943) is recognised as the first full-length work of fiction by an Indo-Caribbean author. Neil is the son of Crisen Bissoondath, a merchant and Sati Naipaul the sister of V.S. Naipaul, a brilliant diasporic writer and winner of 2001 Nobel Prize for literature and Shiva Naipaul. Trinidad became independent when Bissoondath was seven years old. The departure of the British in 1962 brought about army rebellions, violence and riots. Neil Bissoondath did not experience independence as an improvement of his opportunities though he was a member of comparatively wealthy but politically underrepresented minority within Trinidadian multicultural society. Instead of returning to India, Bissoondath’s family decided to remain in Trinidad where his paternal grandfather opened a store in the town of Sangre Grande, an enterprise that gave employment to Crisen Bissoondath and provided the family members with opportunities for education and travel that were not available to all but a small minority of East Indians in Trinidad. Bissoondath’s family
moved to Trinidad’s capital Port of Spain where he received his secondary education.

It needs to be acknowledged that the greater influence in terms of literary creativity came from his mother’s side as Sati Naipaul and her sisters encouraged Neil in his reading from an early age. Bissoondath’s mother provided him a gift - a book Hans Christian Anderson’s *Fairy Tales* that turned fruitful for him at a very young age in order to develop interest in the sphere of reading. It is worth noting that V.S. Naipaul had moved to England (in 1950), five years before Bissoondath’s birth, his influence as a role model for his nephew was crucial. The credit for the development of Neil, as an emerging literary figure goes to Uncle Vidia (V.S.Naipaul) and this can be seen as a continuation in literary tradition of the family that begun with Seepersad Naipaul.

The thought of being a writer clicked in Neil Bissoondath’s mind when he realized at the age of nine or ten, from his uncle’s example that writing could be a way of making one’s living. There was no pressure on Bissoondath from the family to follow his uncle Vidia’s footsteps for they had normal expectations like any common family.

Although Bissoondath had a great time in his childhood, he always recollected the thought of being conscious of the narrowness of life on the island. From the early age, he was constantly aware that there was something more to the world.
Neil’s teenage life was pervaded by a sense of threat because Trinidad had riots and army rebellion. The departure of the British in 1962 and freedom of Trinidad the old, highly stratified, plantation society had an experience about the existence of racial, cultural and economic differences in the society. Neil Bissoondath did not experience Independence as an improvement of his opportunities. He graduated from High School in early 1970s. However, he became pessimistic and cynical about political life in general with the prevailing situation. Political atmosphere in Trinidad had become extremely corrupt, violent, and harshly divided among racial categories which we visualize in Bissoondath’s works. The suffocating captivity of island life, the persistent political tensions and Bissoondath’s understanding of non-availability of opportunities to pursue a career as a writer in Trinidad, impelled him to depart from the island at the age of 18. Bissoondath was motivated and able to take a decision for his career, thanks to the sagacious counsel and guidance of V S Naipaul.

In September 1973, at the age of 18, he travelled to Toronto to study French at York University, leaving his birthplace happily, hoping to strive a better future and new kind of life in a new country. After the completion of graduation from York University, Toronto with a B.A. degree in French literature in 1977, he began to teach English and French as a second language at the Inlingua Institute of Languages and Language Workshop between 1977 and 1985. However,
midway through it in 1982, he was posted to the position of it’s assistant
director. Although Bissoondath was busy full time in teaching, he was able to
manage some spare time for reading and always thought of shaping himself as a
writer like his uncle – V.S. Naipaul in order to realize his dream on a large
canvas, Bissoondath continued writing even at the Institute of Languages in his
leisure time. His fellow teachers read and commented on his short stories. In
1984, he met his future wife, Anne Marcoux, who happened to be a Quebecois
law student striving to brush up her knowledge of English language. In 1985,
Bissoondath moved from Toronto to Quebec City to accompany his partner –
Anne, a lawyer. They came back to Toronto in 1986 where Anne was engaged
in completing her graduation in law. In 1989, the couple moved to Montreal,
where Anne had been appointed to a research position. During the time span,
Ann became a crucial commentator on Bissoondath’s writing. He and Anne
were blessed with a daughter – Elyssa in 1991.

Bissoondath has not been to Trinidad since 1983, when he travelled there to
attend his mother Sati Naipaul’s funeral. His father subsequently remarried and
moved to Toronto for a time, but returned to Trinidad where he died in 1990.
While his father was in Toronto, he attempted to establish an adult-to-adult
relationship with him, but realized that generational and cultural differences
came into the way. His brother and sister have lived in Canada for some time.
He is also in tune with Anne’s family in Quebec City. In 1989, he hosted
segment of T.V. Toronto’s Fragile Nature Series, and in 1991 prepared a personal film essay, *My Father, Myself*, on the relationship between fathers and children. He has served as a writer in residence at the University of Toronto, the University of Ottawa and Concordia University in Montreal and began teaching a creative writing course in 1993. At present, he lives at Ste-Foy in Quebec City with Anne Marcoux, his wife and Elyssa, his daughter. He has been teaching literature and creative writing in French at Laval University, Quebec from 2005 as a full-time instructor and has been organizing workshops entirely in French with Francophone students. Outside the academic world, he shares an unusual profile within Quebec Society. He writes articles for the francophone papers about the visible minority in a city with few immigrants on a regular basis. He is well-known on the Quebec cultural scene too and is recognized as a Canadian author.

### 1.2 His Style of Writings

Neil Bissoondath is one of several Caribbean writers who felt that they could achieve value to their literary potential only by leaving their native lands for the metropolitan centers of Europe and North America. While the previous generation of writers, such as V.S. Naipaul and Samuel Selvon, migrated to Britain, Bissoondath and other Indo-Caribbean writers of his generation, following in the footsteps of Trinidadian novelist Ismith Khan, preferred to make North America their adopted home. It was in fact V.S. Naipaul, his uncle,
who advised him that there was not much future for Caribbean immigrants in Britain and suggested that he migrate instead to Canada. Bissoondath has been living in Canada since 1973 and is considered by the literary world as both a Trinidadian and a Canadian writer.

Bissoondath’s fiction to date is almost exclusively related to experiences of immigrants, refugees, nomads, and wanderers. He seems to agree with his protagonist in *Veins Visible* who believes that everybody is a refugee and everybody is running from one thing or another. His narratives occasionally talk about the excitement of new beginnings or the satisfaction of achievements. The protagonists of his fictions experience marginality, insecurity and homelessness, impermanence, loss of bearings, etc. The aged protagonist of the short story *Security*, Ramgoolam, is a characteristic Bissoondath migrant. After escaping from the political turmoil in his Caribbean island, he chose to be with his sons in Canada, where he discovers to his dismay that they are now considered Canadian to the point of strangeness and he spends endless stretches of being alone.

Neil Bissoondath is a well-known writer of fiction and an out-spoken critic of Canada’s system of multiculturalism. He is of the opinion that Canadian multiculturalism emphasizes differences. His is an intellectual persona that relies on it’s ability to write on the basis of pure instincts, a self described optimist whose writing thrives on dark themes and contrary positions. It is
ironical that Bissoondath, one of the crucial Canadian writers to emerge from mid 1980s focusing on global themed fiction, is probably better known in Canada for a work of non-fiction that attacks official multiculturalism of that country. At present, the author says he is deeply weary of the entire subject. He writes without any outline or preconceived plans and always begins with images and characters rather than plots or themes.

His writing is a journey for readers into marginalized social and geographical territories, hardly moving far outside the conventions of literary realism. He believes that he was always an eager student of current events and by his general reading, he collected majority of the information required to tell his stories. His recent work may sound dark and troubling but he has been writing about personal strife and political violence for two decades. He says that he has been told that there may be some controversial aspects to few things in his novels, but he observes that he just writes what appears to be true and well and waits what is going to happen.

He is of the view that fiction has the power to go beyond such logic is its key strength, a strength that he perceives as arising directly from its focus on the character(s). Bissoondath says, with almost militant conviction, “Character, character, character, without convincing, complex characters, a novel, no matter how much it fleshes out its social or political context, will not work as a novel.” (Dinka, 2005, Interview) One can notice the influence of some writers like
Conrad, Tolstoy, Milan Kundera, etc. in his works especially in terms of the physical description of unknown islands or countries; the reader generally sees setting locale also from Canada and the element of insurgency as these.

Bissoondath’s family holds history of double migration from India to Trinidad and from there to Canada. It is indeed amusing that his narratives tend to focus on the experience of immigrants like displacement, uncertainty, alienation, isolation, cultural dislocation, insecurity and adaptation. These themes prevail in many of his stories in his *Digging Up the Mountains* (1985), a collection of fourteen short stories, published by Macmillan Canada, Toronto. The collection won fascinating reviews and Bissoondath entered the world of an author taking that moment as a first break for upcoming long career in the field of writing.

Bissoondath spent a month at Banff School of Fine Arts in 1983, on the advice of the editor of Macmillan Canada, and it was at that school that he gained the exposure to writing, he wrote and revised his stories in consultation with the experts in workshop on creative writing at Banff. It was only there onwards that his works like *Dancing* published in Saturday Night and two other stories – *In the Kingdom of the Golden Dust* and *There are a lot of Ways to Die* – gained in exposure as they were read on the CBC radio programme entitled ‘Anthology’. Macmillan asked him to look at his revised stories and offered him a contract for *Digging Up the Mountains* in 1985. With mixed emotions on publication of his first work, he was very glad that his dream of becoming a writer turning into
reality on the one hand and he felt sad that his greatest supporter for his literary effort, his mother, did not live to see the publication of his first book on the other hand, Sati, his mother passed away in 1983. His stories reflect the vigilance vis-à-vis the complexity of gender relations in context of multiculturalism and perspectives of men and women regarding experience of migration and adaptation of culture. His work deals with narrative urgency on themes of displacement, marginality and political victimization in stories such as The Cage, In the Kingdom of the Golden Dust, Insecurity, Dancing etc. It represents his excellent debut as a foremost voice in Canadian fiction. By providing center on current themes of cultural dislocation, revolution, and the shifting politics of the Third World, the stories resound with Bissoondath’s consideration for people threatened by circumstances beyond their control.

About half of the collection of shorter stories focus on character sketches. They seem pleasant and generally well done but lack fire. The longer stories are broader in context and far more successful. The title story, extremely heartrending, even harrowing, Counting the Wind effectively represents the characters who make an attempt to survive anarchy and intense shadow of unknown authority as they suffer disgrace and panic of civil war and revolution. It is a series of short stories which throws light on themes like alienation, terror, homelessness and adaptation. Bissoondath has to his credit awards like McClelland and Stewart Award for Fiction and National Magazine Award in 1986 for Dancing – a story from Digging up the Mountains (1985).
1.3 Racism and Multiculturalism and the Problem of Identity of Immigrants

Bissoondath, like his uncle V.S. Naipaul, gives expression to a strong sense of the “displacement” of Indians in the Caribbean. In dealing with this aspect of Indo-Caribbean experience, Bissoondath raises the issue of his identity as a native of Trinidad and Tobago, inquiring whether he was a Trinidadian or a displaced Indian! He resolves the query of his identity by regarding himself simply as “Canadian.” He does not consider himself as someone retaining his West Indian culture in a mosaic (mixture) of cultures in Canada. Bissoondath’s views on multiculturalism in Canada are much debated in his literary work. He inspects (multi) ethnic landscape of Canada today, bestriding emotive and receptive worlds of the protagonists. He claims that some degree of assimilation is essential today and it is legitimate to expect it, for ethnic/ migrant groups have tended to remain aloof or to detach themselves in one way or another, too much from majority population in the midst of which they reside. Bissoondath believes that such a situation was an outcome in identity crisis for Canadians of a different ethnic descent, that it focused upon (cultural) difference and in doing so it supposedly hindered assimilation of immigrants into the Canadian mainstream. Thus unwillingly spoiled Canada’s national self of a (unified) collective self.

Bissoondath’s first novel A Casual Brutality (1998) features prominently the immigrant as an unanchored individual uncertain of his future. The protagonist,
Dr. Raj Ramsingh, returns to his island of Casaquemada, a fictional version of Trinidad, after living in Canada for several years. Discontented and unfulfilled in Canada, he craves, like the West Indian immigrants of Bissoondath’s stories, for the familiarity of his native land. His return coincides with the island’s economic slump and consequent political chaos. A crucial aspect of the novel is its tracing of the mood of violence and corruption and its portrait of numerous secondary characters involved in the social and political conflicts. Raj left the island at 18 to study Medicine in Canada. After some years, he comes back to the island with his white, Canadian wife – Jan and son, practices briefly as a doctor, but in a short span of stay, the political situation rapidly declines into revolution and chaos, as a result of which his wife and son are killed, so Raj returns to Canada. It depicts a tough picture of both societies. Narration of the novel is done in first person, which describes the protagonist’s inner journey towards maturity and understanding. This aspect resembles with a physical journey from a small Third World island to a metropolitan centre of Western culture. This piece of work can be called as a ‘Colonial Bildungsroman.’

The novel presents first chapter in an intense manner wherein Raj at Casaquemada’s airport, feeling of unexplained anxiety, while awaiting for the plane to Canada. Once, in the plane and flying, he starts writing in his book about factors that compelled him to abandon Casaquemada. What he writes are remaining seventeen chapters. Narrative’s huge portion therefore deals with
flashback of Raj’s “Shattered dreams.” The narration of Raj focuses on historic origin of Indo-Caribbean diasporic consciousness, in the context of post-colonial Caribbean. One needs to admit with regret that this autobiographical novel is heavily burdened with irrelevant mini-biographies of people who lead miserable lives in Trinidad or Canada. The tension of novel originates from the moral corruption of simple Caribbean people at they run after money. The aim of Bissoondath is not to recount a particular era in Trinidad’s history, but rather to depict episodes that happened in various West Indian countries.

In the novel Raj’s encounter with past leads to an encounter with his former schoolmate Doug Madera. Casaquemada is a society which is portrayed as racialist and racist. For Madera racial difference is a crucial factor in deciding one’s cultural identity. On the other hand, Raj cannot deny humanist ideals underlying his professional training as a doctor. Just as medicine’s view on man acknowledges no essential difference between different races and ethnicities, Raj denies any allegiance to a collective. In the novel Raj undergoes a development as a character, Madera remains tied to an irrational and fanatic logic of violence. The novel A Casual Brutality was long listed for 1998 Booker Prize and short-listed for the Books in Canada First Novel Award.

With the passage of time, author’s focus has drifted away from Trinidad towards his Canadian experience and concerns. The title story of On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows (1990) – a collection of short stories makes a way into
the indeterminate state of world of a different group of fugitives from political violence and economic repression who anxiously await the result of their application for ‘refugee’ status in Canada. All ten stories of *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows* deals with immigration or exile in one way or other and backdrop is in Canada except *The Arctic Landscape High above the Equator* and *Things Best Forgotten*. Problems of Caribbean immigrants and sense of alienation and insecurity in Canada have been dealt in his four stories out of ten. *The Power of Reason* a story from this collection deals with the migrants’ experience of gender specificity and the problem of equal opportunity for women by the characters named Monica, her daughters and sons who work hard and remains strangers respectively. Bissoondath in a very artistic manner represented all migrants’ experience to take advantages of opportunities gained through migration in this collection of short stories.

The powerful, consistent and moving writing catches the attention and holds it through this collection. The fact that we need to admit – one may expect Neil Bissoondath, the nephew of V.S. Naipaul to write about the immigrant experience, focusing on those from the Caribbean but he has come far away from it. With the title story author makes effort to reveal that we all face ‘uncertain tomorrows’, some poured with physical danger, others with emotional or social upheaval and change. Bissoondath has selected characters from different background and he takes us from Montreal to Toronto and from
Spain to South America to World War II Paris. In the said process, he discloses to us the link of our experiences, that we all take away traces of our past and of our present’s past with us, and that change is consistent. Bissoondath’s all characters reveal their strength to the audience.

Bissoondath’s second novel The Innocence of Age (1992) is concerned with multiculturalism and its problems. It is interesting enough to know that although novel is written by an immigrant, but narrated by a member of the dominant ethnicity. The fact that Bissoondath writes about multiculturalism from such a position can be understood as a reflection of his insight into the possibility, probably necessity, of switching ethnicities in a diaspora situation. Considering himself a Canadian rather than an immigrant, he refuses to allow his writing be restricted to stereotypes. The novel deals with multiculturalism in an allegorical way by recourse to the motif of house. Through this author makes a point about the way people live together in a multicultural society. The central importance of house as a metaphor is illustrated by the occupation of one of its chief characters, Daniel Taggart, who works for Mr. Leon Simmons, a real estate agent in Toronto. Daniel is asked to renovate Mr. Simmon’s house but it proves difficult for him to do it. The silence of house is connected with silence of its illegal tenant Sita, 19 years girl from Caribbean who is sexually exploited by Mr. Simmons. More precisely, the difficulty in renovating Mr. Simmon’s house is an indication that Canada’s multicultural policy is in need of rethinking and
reform. Exploitation of sita is nothing but cultural and individual marginalization of an immigrant.

The novel also deals with generation gap and conflict between Father – Pasco and Son – Daniel. What presents itself as innovation for Daniel, in fact an invasion for Pasco. Daniel wants to embrace new; his father wants to retain the old. While Daniel calculates the real-estate value of his father’s house, the same house also has a sentimental value for his father because it is his wife Edna’s spirit that Pasco finds access to only in the house that both inhabited in the past at once. Throughout the novel author is able to present Daniel’s materialism and his calculating manner contrast negatively with Pasco’s idealism. The novel also glorifies the vision that migration is not a necessary precondition either to intergenerational conflict or to cultural alienation within the family. In the said novel, a father and son live in completely distinct worlds, though both have always lived in Toronto. Except for the fact that its two main characters are Anglo-Canadian, and have no familial connection with another country. The novel confirms nearly in every respect to the thematic and structural paradigms of “ethnic fiction”. By writing an “ethnic novel” focusing on people primarily perceived as “non-ethnic”, Bissoondath effectively “ethnifies” Canada’s dominant cultural group.

Bissoondath’s book on multiculturalism – Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada (1994) proves significant on debatable issue called
Canadian Multiculturalism. According to Bissoondath Canadian Multiculturalism is hollow because Canadians expected immigrant to adopt Canada’s values and way of life. This book is Bissoondath’s personal investigation of a politically motivated public policy with thoughtful private consequences – a policy with defect from its inception but nevertheless implemented with unmatched enthusiasm. Almost three decades ago, Bissoondath immigrated to Canada, he has time and again denied the role of the ethnic, and wanted to avoid the burden of hyphenation – a burden that would label him as an East Indian – Trinidadian – Canadian residing in Quebec. Bissoondath explains that the policy of multiculturalism, with its stress on the former or ancestral (inherited) homeland and its persistence that ‘THERE’ is more important than ‘HERE’ dejects the full loyalty of Canada’s citizens.

From 1971 Multiculturalism Act, Canada has expressed itself to order its population into a cultural mosaic of diversity and tolerance. Looking to keep in fact the heritage of Canada’s most of the people; the policy nonetheless has generated agitation at many levels, converting people into political tools and turning historical distinctions into typecast commodities. It promotes exoticism, defining the difference that divides Canadians rather than similarities that unite them. The intellectual alertness demonstrated in the respectful manner from which author deals with the fragile issues concerned with identity and not being a prey to political correctness is amazingly admirable.
Neil Bissoondath’s *Doing the Heart Good* (2002), the first book for Cormorant publisher, reveals the story of Alistair Mackenzie, a retired Anglo-Canadian professor of English, struggling with climacteric of his decline into old age, after death of his wife and he lives in the house of his daughter with her family – her French speaking husband and their son. The action is intermingled with episodes from Mackenzie’s retirement with flashbacks of his academic career, memories of past social and political events, and recollections of relationship with former colleagues, friends and his wife Mary. It is an influencing reflection upon the life of an old academician from one of Canada’s top most literary talents who re-examines his narrow life after his house is burnt, to reflect on the causes and effects of life: how transitory whims change the course of direction, how unexpected horrors still haunt him, how friendship can be nurtured as well as starved, how love sustains, how hatred destroys and how in a tumbledown way, all make a peculiar and rather moving sort of sense. It is a novel of memory of what means, how it informs, how it can salvage tomorrow from the debris of yesterday – written at the very peak of a great artist’s power.

*The Unyielding Clamour of the Night* (2005) is considered to be the best novel to date. The novel is a combination of humanity and wisdom who shares the vision of a novelist at the peak of his powers. The themes of novel are timely and well thought of suicide bombings, armies of occupation, persistent,
rebellion, and the politics of repression. At the outset no conclusions are drawn in this subtle, variety-shaded novel, there we need to challenge assumptions.

Author’s fifth novel discloses in untitled county resembling like Sri Lanka, a land ragged with racial, religious and political strife. The central character of novel, Arun Bannerji (21), a young man from a privileged background, leaves his home in the prosperous North to travel South East Asian island nation to teach downtrodden students of South, wherein a civil war between the military and rebel dissatisfied intensely, affects daily life. Idealistic or impractical and guided by an impulse to give meaning to his life, Arun left his family’s profitable business for teaching at an elementary school in poverty ridden South. At the almost dilapidated school with sickly and rebellious children Arun’s idealism is greatly tested during his long span and his sense of purpose oppressed by the reality of his new situation. With the passage of time he befriends some of the locals like – Jaisaram, the local butcher, his daughter Anjani, who reads to her father from romance novels; Kumarsingh – a “go-getting” entrepreneur, Seth, an American trained army Captain stationed at the local base; and various students. In Omeara, however, what appears it doesn’t seem like; everyone has secrets and truth which is elusive. In the school of this village attendance is scanty and irregular. Students who are damaged with conflict and incapable of working in the fields attend the school. With the prevailing atmosphere of poverty and constant threat of violence, Arun’s
hopefulness is eventually diminished and frustration with educating village’s schoolchildren engulfs him. Finally, when violence comes at his doorstep, he is compelled to confront basic truth about his friends, his family, his country and most wrenchingly, himself. The filthy town of Omeara is the setting against which Arun works out his troubled destiny. It is a drowsy place with insidious air of menace, and the people of the village are devious, uncertain and fearful of unintended consequences. Arun’s alteration from an ideal man to suspicious man ends with great statement. The novel from the beginning till the ends holds the interest of the reader, quite gripping and sharply intelligent. Present book makes an attempt to put together anguish against harsh political reality where Arun seems the perfect mouthpiece.

Neil Bissoondath’s *The Soul of All Great Designs* (2008) is a typical contemporary Canadian novel. Most of the readers apply words like ‘witty’, ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘erotic’ when they share the views regarding it. The author unfolds half of the novel in narrating about a person known to us only as “Alec” who has grown up in Suburban Toronto, the only child of the loving couple but to the great extent average parents. Alec eventually assumes that the rapid way to escape from the tediousness of home and his job at a hardware, the solution is to play off his gentle manner and almost feminine good looks. Gay men find the heterosexual Alec very good-looking and women treat him as an unthreatening friend, because both parties presume that he is a gay. Alec begins his work as an
interior designer; it’s only natural that he seems doing nothing to disperse his client’s expectations that he is an openly gay man. Alec feels the way to have success is by formulating his identity as a gay man because that is the demand of his clients and to satisfy them is the keystone of his business. Alec has compromised in his libidinal desires to uphold his successful public ‘self’, so sometimes he faces a conflict between his ‘real’ and ‘public’ self.

A little fabricated with success of his hyphenated identity game, Alec steps forward to a dangerous turn of his life in involving true intimacy when he meets Sumintra (“Sue”), a recent graduate girl with English who helps her father in catering business. “Sue” is a young girl or woman torn between the role of a devoted daughter of her hardworking Indian immigrant parents, both of them unable to understand her passive but persistent resistance to a cord of arrange-marriage proposals from the families of suitable Hindu-Canadian men. She is compelled to balance her Indian immigrant parents’ strict tradition in Canadian society where she has to repress herself from both the worlds. When Alec and Sue meet, their chance meeting rapidly leads to a passionate affair encouraged by the thrill of secrecy. It brings about the tension of Alec’s looming breakdown in a series of understated but reminiscent scenes distorted by Alec’s self-serving confessions and distrustful appeals to the reader for sympathy. Sue, the hesitant but hopeless romantic, is equally compelling, and the domestic scenes capture the dynamics of an utterly ordinary Indian immigrant family.
Other works of the Author

[1] *The Age of Confession* [2007]


NOVELLA

*Postcards from Hell* - 2009

Bissoondath has written some books in French language like

- *Tous Ces Mondes en elle* [1999]
- *Re Tour a Casaquemada* [1999]
- *Un Baume Pour Le Coeur* [2002]
- *I L’Age de la Confession* [2007]

He has also contributed as Co-Author in books like


1.4 Adoption of Hemingway’s Style – Inner experiences through external particulars

In Bissoondath’s writing albeit chronological and space milieu of majority of his stories stay distorted, the immediate circumambient setting is crafted with an eye to graphic details. However, these details prove helpful rather than just construct the setting. Since Bissoondath implements the pared style of Hemingway, he transmits inner experiences through external particulars. As his characters are not always psychologically standardized to their own complex feelings and motivations, this technique as a rule works well. In *Cracks and Keyholes*, for example, mental state of the protagonist, a deprived black Caribbean immigrant employed as a dishwasher in a Toronto strip joint, is vividly induced through description of the Christmas decorations on Yonge Street by expressing his feelings that it is quite disappointing looking at the decorations which in reality not decorate anything and decorations across Yonge Street looking it’s plight felt nothing to decorate. Nonetheless, the stress on externals seems overdone as in *Kira and Anya*. The narrator’s deliberation on external substance or issues in this story indicates individuals looked at impersonally by a video camera; this camera eye seems unsuccessful to sentinet the characterization.
1.5 Views of Researchers on Bissoondath

Bissoondath quite early in his career just after seven years ago published first volume of short stories, he has received little extended critical attention, and however there have been a considerable number of reviews of his books in many prestigious magazines and journals. Majority is in favour and identified him as a very prominent talent since the publication of his first book *Digging Up the Mountains*. Albeit many reviewers point out to his insightful and sensitive depiction of the dispossessed and displaced, they admit that seldom he can be cold and detached. Since Bissoondath has a relation with V S Naipaul, it raised the level of anxiety of influence for reviewers with publication of Bissoondath’s first book. His pessimistic outlook, his sense of placelessness, and his diagnostic tone were perceived as Naipaulesque. The Spectator reviewer says, when “Bissoondath forgets he is writing ‘literature’ he is a very good writer indeed” (Lezard, 1988, p.36). The Times Literary Supplement [London] is representative of the reviews of Bissoondath’s latest volume, *On the Eve of Uncertain Tomorrows*, when it notes that there are stories in it that do not work well but overall the author “has kept the amazing promise he made with that first remarkable novel.” (Kanga, 1990, p.1271)

It is also fascinating to review Neil Bissoondath’s persona as Laurie Kruk has attempted to analyze in *All Voices Belong to Me: An Interview with Neil Bissoondath*. Here Neil reveals the fact that voices in his short stories and
novels are the part of experiences he faced with people around him like his mother, grandmother and aunts, who were widely read and travelled, and the latter university professors and teachers. The aspect that impels the author is the world and experience of that voice, regardless be it masculine or feminine, young or old, white, black, yellow, brown or green. It enables Bissoondath to see and understand everything. Neil as an author believes in the thought that he is not representative of Caribbean or any other Identity in his writing of any kind of label. His interest of literature connects with Nineteenth century Russian writing and love for Japanese writing. Garcia Lorca from Spain is his favorite poet. When Bissoondath commences to write a short story, or a novel, like many writers he is ignorant, what it is about and where it is going. Generally it begins with a voice, a scene, a character capturing him into a world he seems unaware in his head. He does not set out in search of them but things emerge naturally. Therefore, Bissoondath allocates his imagination to prosper and to meld things, spin things and create a story. When it comes to writing, the ploy for author is to maintain patience until the time to follow his gut that right voice is there. Bissoondath in the context of Identity reveals the fact that he does not feel constrained with certain things that bother him as an Individual human being. He feels that he is lucky to have an environment of freedom since he came to Canada as an immigrant of his own free will not as victim of circumstances in home country. In the light of racial injustice, economic injustice, and sexual discrimination as categories of oppression, Bissoondath
feels that they have to be fought democratically and believes as an individual one has a choice. Neil admires Jhumpa Lahiri as a wonderful short story writer. Albeit, Bissoondath believes V S Naipaul is the foremost source for him to be a writer, he never felt that he should follow his uncle’s footsteps. He confines that every writer creates his own path. The fact is one writes for himself. As a writer, Bissoondath believes that writing should speak to the human heart and absolute reality of People’s lives and if one fails to do so it sounds like you are drawing pages. He expresses, “I become very impatient when I get a sense that a writer is trying to be clever. Clever for the sake of being clever.” (Kruk 2012, p.64) Bissoondath as an individual is interested in dynamics of politics and politicians and he feels that both play a role in his writing. Bissoondath believes that a novel can get a success in teaching, however it is not the initial goal of any writer when he commences to write. Our author holds a view that Racism is a part of the human experience. Neil brings the aspect on the fore that whenever he does not like any of his characters, the challenging task is enough clarity about his life to begin to feel for him. If you are able to perform that role as a writer, you would probably feel a story is working.
End Chapter Reference:


