

**TWICE-DISPLACED IDENTITY AND CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN
TWICE DISPLACED INDIAN DIASPORA: REFLECTIONS FROM THE
WRITINGS OF RAMABAI ESPINET, M.G. VASSANJI, NEIL BISSOON
DATH, CYRIL DABYDEEN AND INA IQBAL RASHID**

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Over the decades Diasporic communities have increasingly been acquiring a distinct global identity. Diaspora in the 21st century is the result of developments in both old and new Diasporas. Diasporas are flaring throughout the world through their creative ability and adjustability and marking them as an interesting ethnic community in the host countries. Genealogy of Diaspora can be traced from the forced settlement of Jews from Israel to Babylonia around sixth century B.C. The term Diaspora was first used for the Jewish Diaspora but later it was used for every community who were de-territorialised due to the system of slavery and indentured labour system. At present implications of this term has widened and includes communities who are residing outside their home country and have awareness of their culture and home country.

To quote (2006)

Diaspora exists precisely because it has nostalgia of the 'homeland'. Without this memory these migrants and settlers would be simply people in a new setting, into which they merge, bringing little or nothing to the new 'home', accepting in various ways and forms the mores and attitudes that already exist in their new country and society. However these people do not merely settle in a foreign space but also re-create in their socio-economic, political and cultural institution a version of that homeland they remember.

(Reeves et.al. 2006, 18)

In the article “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return” William Safran (1991) sets out six different characteristics to distinguish between diasporic and migrant communities. They maintain a myth or collective memory of their homeland and regard their ancestral homeland as their true home, to which they will eventually return. Further, they relate personally to the homeland to a point where it shapes their identity, they also feel that they will never be fully accepted by the host society. (Safran 1991, 1).

The term Diaspora in the context of Indian Diaspora is multilayered and often designates to the migrants who originated in areas falling within the territorial boundaries of present day India. Indians began migrating abroad since the time of British imperialist rule. Around this juncture there was movement of people as labourers to colonies. Slavery produced a colossal

order for labour in the sugar plantations and Indian indentured labourers were sold in countries like Fiji, Guyana, Mauritius, Surinam, and South Africa. There was also movement of labour to East Africa to work on the railways, tea and rubber plantations where Indians migrated to work in and with the migration they carried the hope to return back to the homeland. However, after the abolition of indentured labour system some of them came back but most of them decided to stay back as this formed sizeable diasporic community in those locations. But some of them made their move and shift from the lands where they stayed in some cases because of the discrimination and violence inflicted on them (Fiji,Trinidad and Tobago) and in some cases the migration was voluntarily in order to make again a new home for them. However this population went in severe identity crisis and obtained hybrid and multiple identities, which has been termed as ‘unfixed self’, ‘hybrid identity’, ‘basterdized Indians’. This hybrid identity, cultural hybridity and fragmentations are a normal part of their diasporic experience. Where, the twice displaced Diaspora is experiencing multiple hybrid culture multiple identity and fragmentation in their self. This multiple and hybrid culture and identity have become one of the central theme of writings of the twice- Displaced writers like Cyril Debydeen, Neil Bissoon Dath, Ian Iqbal Rashid. M. G Vassanji and Ramabai Espinet who have portrayed it very vividly in their writings.

The present writers see themselves twice-displaced and their literature are marked by to quote Vijay Mishra (2006)

...both a different memory of the homeland and a different kind of accommodation within their new land

(Reeves et al. 2006)

Ramabai Espinet, says.

We are not south Asians in a true sense of word we are peculiar hybrid, our cultural world more pronounced than most children of India outside it shores. We, for the most part speak no language but European tongue: English, French or Dutch in its standard form as well as the peculiar version of Creole.

(Mishra in Reeves et al. 2006, 130)

The twice displaced writers have challenged the theoreticians blaming them for failing in considering the uneven experiences of migration and inbetween-ness. They are of the view that the Diasporic awareness and the experience of unfixed slaves and twice displacement cannot be contained within the theories of Diaspora which neglect to specify historical moment’s specific experiences and difference in historical conditioning. The term twice displaced identity in Diaspora refers to the displacement of already once displaced and fixed culture and identity into different cultures identities and selves.

Ramabai Espinet (2004) in her novel *The Swinging Bridge* writes about the multiple identities, where her protagonist comes from Trinidad to Canada with a complex indenture history of her own and how does she negotiate living here and memorizing her earlier past and swinging in the hybrid identity Mona the protagonist says,

*All that it took then in Trinidad was looking Indian; all it took in
Canada was skin colour*

(Espinet in Reeves et.al. 2006, 130)

Bissoondath captures the very special trauma of Caribbean- Indian migrants. What we get in his stories such as “*Insecurity*1986” “*Security* 1991” is the sense of diasporic in-betweenness where one security is replaced by another insecurity he says in his story *Security*:

*The weekdays were long for him. He had not even after many
months, grown accustomed to the endless stretches of being alone.
On the island, someone had always been there*(security).

Like Espinet Bissoondath Cyril Davdeen’s poem “*Refuzee*” also analyzes the relocation of one kind of labour from one space (the West-indies) to another (Canada).

Likewise *M.G. Vassanji’s No New Land* (1991) situates itself in the possibilities of a heterogeneous, hybrid social and racial condition. Vassanji’s world is thoroughly Diasporic, partial, seeking to find new ground, a new consent and a new point of view. The book shows the dissatisfaction of the writer in both the lands where he doesn’t find any newness.

In the same way Ina Iqbal Rashid in his collection *The Heat Yesterday* (1995) discuss the memory of homeland and about the selves whose bodies problematise the whole idea of identity and self hood his work shows the marginalized beings of twice displaced Diaspora. How one individual migrates into different communities’ cultures and country?

Objective

My objective in this paper was to analyze, how the notion of twice-displaced identity and cultural hybridity are constructed and explored in the writings of Ramabai Espinet, M. G. Vassanji, Neil Bissoon Dath, Cyril Dabydeen, Ina Iqbal Rashid. The paper also tried to look into the writings of these writers and will tried to explore as how the personal note of culture hybridization and identity fragmentation of these writers are indirectly embedded into their writings it also tried to explore the themes and techniques used by these writes as how and what images and symbols these writers have used to portray their experience and self?

Methodology

The paper was based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are- *The Swinging Bridge*(2004), *Insecurity*(1986) *Security* (1991), *Refuzee*,(1986) *No New Land*(1991), *The Heat Yesterday* (1995). Secondary will be mainly drawn from the books, journals, published materials and unpublished documents, various articles and other relevant sources.

To conclude it can be said that twice- displaced Indian Diaspora and community has formed a new canon of writings which inscribe about the experiences and traumas under which a Diasporic community goes through, in the condition of multiple migration. The community has to face multiple culture and society and sometimes comes in the conflict with the host country where they come under the condition of dilemma and in betweenness. Thus the present dissertation will

try to look into the writings by Espinet, Vassanji, Dabydeen, Bissoondath and Rashid in order to explore the above issues.

Scope and Relevance

The analysis of the characters situation in twice-displaced society and in hybrid culture gives a new opportunity to think differently about the experiences of diaspora and think how the twice-displaced diasporic writers are ignored by the mainstream diasporic writing. The present paper also tends to explore the psychology of these “unfixed selves” and their struggle to make an identity which is swinging like a bridge which is connected to two or more than two ends but always swinging without fixity.

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