

Reflection of Diasporic Consciousness in the Select Works of Malaysian Literature: A Study of Innate Crisis in Indian Immigrants

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Personal thoughts or ideas of real-world life sometimes do not look in nuanced manner to the readers by directly expressing it in biographical or autobiographical form, as the society is governed by existing rules. The norms of the society are governed by the class or the status of the person. Importance of being cognitive in class consciousness, matters most in this materialistic world. The selected works envision the readers about understanding the diasporic consciousness in the substantial form, as it deals with the problems of immigrants in settled land, the selected works forethought authors shrewd beauty and eye-catching gesture for the readers. Every author explains the diasporic consciousness in their own form. This paper mainly deals with war-crimes, racial discrimination, atrocities, sadomasochism, feministic perspective, vengeance, oppression, inflation, unemployment, colonialism, postcolonialism, existentialism, hybridity, cognitive behaviour, class consciousness, hegemony, commonwealth nation, socio-political conflicts, bildungsroman, dual colonist interventions (British, Japanese) and psychological disturbances. Structure of select works are linear and nonlinear in nature. The dystopian vision of the migrant land turns like a mirage after assimilating to the host land is nicely reflected in the selected works. For readers, there is no spoiler in between works, spilled beans and spine-chilling revelation occurs in the works. Overall, the study provides insights into the diasporic consciousness and its certain limitations and emphasising the need for a nuanced understanding of the Indian immigrants experiences in Malaysia.

Keywords: Diasporic-consciousness, Indian-immigrants, bildungsroman, war-crimes and hegemony.

General Etymology of Diaspora, Its Features and Its Consciousness

The etymologic meaning of the English term Diaspora is the ancient Greek word *speiro* or to sow, or to disperse. It was previously commonly used in a particular theological context to describe the dispersion of the Jewish people in case they violate the will of God. The term in later Jewish tradition came to have a wider meaning, which included not the dispersion itself, but also the geographical places to which the people were displaced. The term still retained its religious connotations well into the middle of the twentieth century, despite several efforts of scholars to secularize and generalize its use outside of its Jewish and theological context.

Dufoix pursues a fastidious conception of the genesis of the term. He proves that, however, contrary to scholarly claims, Diaspora was not used in the general

translation of Hebrew words *galut*, *galah* and *golah*. The Septuagint, in its turn, translated these terms by the variety of the Greek lexical words: *apoikia* (emigration), *paroikia* (settlement abroad), *metoikia* or *metoikesia* (transit or transportation), *aikhmalosia* (captivity in war), and *apokalupsis* (revelation). In the original meaning, the term Diaspora referred to the risk of dispersion that was involved to the Hebrews in case they neglected the command of God, and this was mainly limited to divine actions. The meaning of the term was only later broadened in the later Jewish tradition to include the scattered people as well as the places where the people were dispersed.

Features of Diaspora:

1. Some of the typical distinguishing characteristics of diaspora in Cohen are listed below:

2. This involves the trauma of dispersal of an original motherland to two or more regions.
3. There is a shared memory and myth concerning the homeland and its place, and its past, pains and conquests.
4. Romanticization of the actual or fancied ancestral home and a common devotion to its preservation, refurbishment, security, and success even to its origin.
5. The unending cultivation of a reverse movement to motherland that has collective support despite the fact that many members of the group are content with just vicarious relationship or even periodic visits to the homeland.
6. A powerful ethnic group awareness that is long-standing and founded upon a sense of distinctiveness, shared history, passing of a shared cultural and religious heritage, and the conviction of shared destiny.
7. Poor relations with host societies, which imply that the society is not accepting or there is a chance of an occurrence of another crisis to the group.
8. The feeling of sympathy and being responsible co-ethnically with co-ethnic members in established nations of settlement, although home has become more nominal.
9. There is the likelihood of individual creative and rich living in host countries with a pluralism tolerance.

Diasporic Consciousness

It is defined as sharing of common ancestry and geography, and 'members subscribing to a common ethnic or a national identity who are part of a diaspora, may find that the pressure to associate, remember or

forget their original culture may vary with the changes they face within the political and economic environment the members of the diaspora live in, which creates differences between members lived experiences. Diasporic consciousness would be different for different communities. Hybrid defines people who belong to two cultures – their native culture and the culture of the country they are in. For the Indian community, it would be a combination of the Indian culture practised in their homeland and the culture assimilated into the Indian culture and experienced by the younger Malaysian generation. This hybrid culture is reflected in the food and architectural styles which could have been adapted and/or adopted from the other racial groups in Malaysia as well as overseas.

Select works of Indo-Malaysian Diaspora

The select novels are K.S. Maniam's *The Return* (1981), Rani Manicka's *The Rice Mother* (2002), Preeta Samarasan's *Evening is the Whole Day* (2008), Sunil Nair's *When All the Lights Are Stripped Away* (2012). These novels were written between 1981 and 2012; a 31-year period, which is a substantial period to show the transition in diasporic consciousness in the writings. These novels share the same theme, that is, the experiences of Malaysian Indians before and after independence. In addition, apart from being debut novels of the writers mentioned, Maniam's *The Return* is the first published novel by a Malaysian Indian while Nair's *When All The Lights Are Stripped Away* is the latest novel published by a Malaysian Indian on this issue. The selection

thus ranges from the most established Malaysian Indian writer to more contemporary authors. These writers present different perspectives due to their diverse diasporic consciousness. K.S. Maniam a Malaysian of Indian descent living in Malaysia while Rani Manicka is what can be termed as “doubly diasporic” as she is Malaysian Indian who has relocated to England, and Preeta Samarasan and Sunil Nair are “triple diasporic” – Samarasan is a Malaysian who resided in U.S. before moving to France, while Nair lived in U.S for ten years before settling down in England. So, each writer has a different imagination of their homeland. Each of the writers has a different imagining of the home country and it is, therefore, inaccurate to homogenise the experiences of the Indian community in Malaysia. K.S. Maniam writes on the experiences and struggles of the working-class communities and is very influenced by his grandmother’s stories of her life in India. Rani Manicka writes primarily on the relationship of the middle-class Indians with the other major ethnic groups in Malaysia. Unlike Maniam’s grandmother’s stories of India, Manicka grew up listening to her grandmother’s stories of her Malaysian experience. On the other hand, Preeta Samarasan writes more on the experiences of upper-middle-class society and the treatment of the working-class communities by the privileged class. Her writings are influenced by her parents and the community’s experiences. Sunil Nair writes about the experiences of the privileged class and the political aspirations of a minority communities in Malaysia. Since these authors write on the

Malaysian experience against the background of a multicultural country, the elements that make their way into the texts would not only be of an Indian defined experience but would also reflect the varied sights and sounds of the nation.

Innate Crisis in the Select Novels

The Return

K.S. Maniam’s *The Return* is a novel written across three heads of a Tamil immigrant family: Periathai (the matriarch of the family), Kannan (her son), and Ravi (her grandson). It narrates of the experiences and strive faced by the working-class of a Malaysian community involved in Indian tradition and culture. Set in the 1940s to the 1960s in Kedah, Malaysia, it pivots on Ravi, who leaves his small town Bedong and moves in England for higher studies, and the clashes he faces upon his return to Malaysia. A repeated clashes is the embarrassing situation faced by the working-class community receives from the middle-class of Malaysian Indian society. Prominence is placed on the value of owning land and self-education as a way out of the working-class existence. Periathai and Kannan attempt to plant their roots firmly in Malaya with a great sense of urgency. After Kannan’s demise, Ravi acknowledges the sacrifices made by the previous generation. The novel ends with a rhyme in deep regret and with the affirmation of a denied heritage.

The Rice Mother

Rani Manicka’s *The Rice Mother* narrates the story of a working-class Ceylonese family across four generations. It represents the struggles they faced during the

Japanese invasion in Malaya and the difficulties they experienced in post-independence Malaysia. The matriarch of the family, Lakshmi, who keeps the family together during their hardship. Lakshmi married to a widower at the age of fourteen and migrated from Sri Lanka to Malaysia. Although she is the main protagonist, the story is also told from the viewpoints of her family members: her husband (Ayah), her sons (Lakshman, Jeyan and Sevenese), her daughters (Anna and Lalita), her daughters-in-law (Rani and Ratha), her granddaughters (Dimple and Bella), and her great granddaughter (Nisha). With the Japanese invasion as a backdrop, *The Rice Mother* shows the challenges of upbringing six children in such a dangerous and cruel time. The saga also reveals how the family falls apart and the resulting damaged relationships and failed marriages. Although their lives are beset by tragedy, the story ends on a positive note, choosing to focus on the value that knowing self-roots adds to individual identity and self-pride.

Evening Is the Whole Day

Preeta Samarasan's *Evening Is the Whole Day* centers around a wealthy middle-class Tamil family, the Rajasekharans, and their household helper, Chellam. The Rajasekharans include Paati (Rajasekharan's mother), Appa (Raju-Rajasekharan), Amma (Vasanthi), their daughters (Uma and Aasha), and their son (Suresh). Set in Ipoh, Malaysia, from the 1960s to the 1980s, the story is told through the eyes of their six-year-old child, Aasha. The saga begins at the climax with two characters

parting away, the eldest child, Uma, for New York and Chellam's from the Rajasekharans' home under sad circumstances. The novel concerns on the arduous of a dysfunctional family in a newly developed independent country faced with its own political and social sufferings. The family's struggles are twine with the challenges confronting the new nation. Apart from that, the story shows on the varied treatment's, the middle-class Indians give to the working-class Indians. It also narrates the strained relationship between Paati and Amma, her daughter-in-law owing to their differences in class status.

When All the Lights Are Stripped Away

Sunil Nair's *When All the Lights Are Stripped Away*, set in Muar, Johor, Malaysia, tells the story of Anil's wealthy upper middle-class Malayali family. Taking place in the late 1990s, the novel dealt with the challenges faced by the young protagonist and the relationships he makes along the way. It starts in Kuala Lumpur, when Anil, who had run away after his mother's demise, receives a letter from his ailing father requesting him to return home. The Sankaran wants to change their relations and Anil's understanding of his father's legacy. The story also contains a political subplot. Anil's father, Sankaran (Acha), a well-established powerful and influential advocate, aspires that his son become the first non-Muslim and non-Malay Prime Minister of Malaysia. The novel ends with Anil inheriting all his father's wealth, his name, and position. Readers are left in dilemma, whether Anil fulfils his father's will.

Conclusion

Every character in select works need more attention in the various literary theories. One can never estimate or believe that crisis originated are over, every day is a challenging issue for the Indian immigrants, especially for the first generation. Every problem are specific in nature and they deal according as per it. Everyone deeds and wishes are different because of the decision they take in native land, so as the hardship and the related consequences they face in settled land for the first generation, once settled every generation faces some problem, but are different in nature. Viewpoint of every protagonist needs to be studied as a case; hence it is shared to future generation to avoid recurring problems. Hegemony should be understood in broader sense irrespective of the situation, problems raised should be resolved in any cost, or else vengeance and hatredness are originated by it will create havoc to society leading to disequilibrium in harmony. Humanity, equality, gender bias, and the value system should be deeply studied in all aspects to understand the diasporic consciousness.

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