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IMAGINARY HOMELANDS: CULTURAL RELOCATIONS IN M.G.VASSANJI'S
IN-BETWEEN THE WORLD OF VIKRAM LALL

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the Post Colonial aspects like cultural identity, cultural oppression, and colonized experience by the novel of M.G.Vassanji's "In- Between the World of Vikram Lall". In Canadian Literature. M.G.Vassanji's characters are the representatives of the Canadians. In the novel, Vikram Lall is the first person narrator and his sister, are predominant characters. It is full of flashbacks, incidents in Kenya. Kenyans resorted to violence only after peaceful demands for moderate land reform were ignored. The "In-Betweenness's" of the title is more than that between a Kenyan past and Canadian present. The Asian was the brown presence between the "white". It represented the foreign environment where the Asian largely kept to them, preserving their culture and ethnic identity, by and large supporting the British imperialism that had brought them to Africa.

Key words: Identity; past; present; Kenyan; Culture; between; experience; exile; Vassanji

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"for surely it is one of the unhappiest characteristic of the age to have produced more refugee, migrants, displaced persons and exiles than ever before in history..."(Edward said 402)

The cultural independence is a major issue throughout the world. It is also closely associated with the question of identity. A culture of a particular ethnic group is the result of a set of values and practices shared and upheld by its members. Languages, religion, dress and food habits are some of the most salient features of a given culture. For example, the Sikh community may be sighted for

whom wearing of the turban is essential and which, not only functions as a distinct religious denominator but also as a visible clear manifestation of their collective identity.

Post-colonial literature often involves writings that deal with issues of decolonization or the political and culture independence of people formerly subjugated to colonial rule.

Postcolonialism (postcolonial theory, postcolonian studies, Post-colonial theory) is a specifically postmodern intellectual discourse that consists of reactions to, and analysis of, the culture legacy of colonialism and imperialism.

Postcolonialism is defined in anthropology as the relations between European nations and areas they colonized and once ruled.

Some postcolonial theorists make the argument that studying both dominant knowledge sets and marginalized once as binary opposites perpetuates their existence as homogenous entities. Home K. Bhabha feels the postcolonial world should valorize spaces of mixing: spaces where truth and authenticity move aside for ambiguity. This space of hybridity, he argues, offers the most profound challenge to colonialism.

Postcolonialism deals with cultural in colonized societies: the dilemmas of developing a national identity after colonial rule; the ways in which writers articulate and celebrate that identity (often reclaiming it from and maintaining strong connections with the colonizer); the ways in which the knowledge of the colonized (subordinated) people has been generated and used to serve the colonizer's interest; and the ways in which the colonizer's literature has justified colonialism via images of the colonised as a perpetually inferior people, society and culture.

Multiculturalism offers preferable alternatives as it dispenses with the notion of separate cultural groups by acknowledging the fluidity of cultural identity and mutual influence of one culture identity on another. A major feature of Canadian literature is the concern with either developing or recovering an appropriate identifying relationship between self and place that the process of subjectivity can be conducted.

M.G.Vassanji, on the Canadian scene as a writer of fiction, and his great popularity across the common wealth countries are linked with the modern phenomenon of immigrant literature. He was born in Kenya, went to school in Tanzania, and received his higher education in the USA. Now he lives in Toronto, Canada, where he writes ,and edits 'The Toronto Review'

Vassanji's novel includes a large slice of his experience which is confined to the East-African coastal regions like Zanzibar, Uganda; Tanzania and Kenya. A very important element of his novel is projection of the immigrant experience in East Africa and Canada. As immigrant writers they are

concerned with giving a voice to the displaced and dislocated, by showing, through their work what it is like to belong nowhere. More significantly, they are all determined to narrate, and thus put on record, their past-bequeathed memories, oral testimonies remembered histories-stories of their voyages.

Vikram Lall, the first-person narrator of M.G.Vassanji's recent novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, is a Kenyan Asian in his mid-fifties living in Canada. Vikram's father is proud to be a "subject" of the British Empire. Kenyans resorted to violence only after peaceful demands for moderate land reform were ignored. Altogether, thirty-two "white" settlers were murdered, but thousands of Kenyans were killed, and over one million were herded into concentration camps where many died of torture, starvation and disease.

The "In-betweenness" of the title is more than that between a Kenyan past and a Canadian present. This novel is political and historical, social and moral, public immortality finally is also private-that is, of the individual. The narrator, Vikram Lall lives in Canada, about his life in East Africa and his childhood days which saw the initial stirrings of the Mau-Mau rebellion against the White administration. Lall is forced to flee Africa and seek asylum in Canada, having got himself involved in money scandals back home. He was the secretary to the Minister of Transport and he acquired by the strong recommendations of his African friend Njoroge. His office gained him access to the inner political circles, even right up to the president but very soon Lall realized that it was not a mere clerical job, he was forced to act as a middleman in the money transactions between the minister and his foreign agents.

Then, Lall reaches Nairobi where he is hopeful that ultimately he will make peace with his world. He wants his lawyer to approach the Anti-Corruption Commission and make a confession before them. But the Anti-corruption Commission is declared illegal and disbanded. Lall realizes that what people in power need are his silence, and not his confession. They fear, if he speaks out, all of them will get implicated. His lawyer is arrested. That very night, Lall wakes up to an alarm call. The

building where he stays is on fire. The novel ends with Lall running out of burning apartment.

The reason why Lall decides to write his story is his attempt to preserve the past, much like his creator Vassanji himself. The antenna of his sensitivity is unable to resist the signals the past sends from its 'subterranean home'. Lall carries an album of photos with him, a ready reckoned of the past. He can never get over his childhood infatuation for the European girl Annie Broce whose whole family was butchered by the Mau-Mau. She always remains a silent painful memory in his mind. He carries her photo as a memento of their relationship. When his wife removes that photo from his private box, it appears to him that his past is sliced off from him. Njoroge gives the photograph of the butchered Bruces to Lall-a picture which he struggles to erase from his memory. He decides to burn the photograph. The burnt photos leave a stain that he can never wipe out. As he drops the ashes into waters, it becomes his homage to the past.

It explores the social, cultural, racial and political issues that the white experienced when ruled. Vassanji's main concern is not political but racial and cultural. It is a poignant story of the immigrant experience. It creates a rich portrait of a transplanted community. Vassanji appears as a keen observer of lives caught between one world and another.

Diasporic writings are invariably concerned with exile, memory, diasporic consciousness, longing for return, alienation, nostalgia, search for identity and sense of belonging. Such traits are evident in the works of M.G.Vassanji. .

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