



Depiction of Multiculturalism in the Short Story Collection *Digging Up the Mountains* by Neil Bissoondath

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Abstract

Multiculturalism throughout plays a vital role in the shape of Diaspora literature. Neil Bissoondath, Second generation Diaspora writer adopts Multicultural roots in a new host country with differ perception of looking towards Diaspora. This research paper is an attempt to grab attention on the acceptance of multicultural identity of second-generation Diaspora writers with special reference to respected author's short story collection *Digging Up the Mountain*

Key words: multiculturalism, diaspora, adoption, identity

Since the last few years of literature the emergence of the second generation Diaspora is at its full fledge. Neil Devindra Bissoondath, short-story writer, novelist essayist; Nephew of V.S. Naipaul, a Indo-Caribbean-Canadian Second generation Diaspora writer, lives in Quebec; has imbibed the multicultural root in his works with special focus on Immigrants and this author would like to refer to himself simply as a Canadian author without any hyphenated identity. Reasons for migration can vary but as far as the acceptance of the new environment takes place the idea of the adoption of Multicultural identity is more diverse than its conventional mode. *"Digging Up the Mountains"* the initially published collection of fourteen short stories in journal Saturday Night and Broadcasted on CBC Literary Program Anthology of him traces the idea of Multicultural root and identity crises.

Gradually, with the adoption of multiculturalism, Diaspora literature is turning its

road into a new direction than a mere historical event of the first-generation Diaspora writer. Today, the Globe becomes a one family with the advent of technology and adoption of new culture. The Diasporic novelists carry a burden of native cultural values in the new host land and being caught between two cultures make it more difficult for them to maintain their dual identity.

The research paper is an attempt to view Neil Bissoondath's short story *"Digging Up the Mountains"* in the context of Diasporic Literature as acceptance of the Multicultural identity though issues of identity crises and racism are still cannot be completely abandoned. With an objective of differentiation in thematic concern and justification of the works of both generation writers in mind the paper highlights the adoption of multiculturalism in the above mentioned work of the author.

According to Cambridge dictionary, Diaspora means "A group of people who spread

from one original country to another countries" or in other words, "it is defines as a scattered population whose origin lies in a separate geographic locale." As per Britannica "Diaspora, populations, such as members of an ethnic or religious group that originated from the same place but dispersed to different locations. The word *diaspora* comes from the ancient Greek *dia speiro*, meaning "to sow over." The concept of Diaspora has long been used to refer to the Greeks in the Hellenic world and to the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem in the early 6th century BCE. Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, scholars began to use it with reference to the African Diaspora, and the use of the term was extended further in the following decades."

The sense of being rooted with motherland and being well known with the fact of not returning back as immigrants arouses the sentiments of Indian Diaspora. The literature of Diaspora refers to the works written by those who live outside their native land and mostly defined in two categories i.e. first generation (the one who born in India and migrated to the host country) and the second generation (the native Indian born and brought up at the host country). Their Nostalgia, together with the curious attachment to the root and homeland's tradition, religion and languages gave birth to Indian Diaspora literature. Some of the most prominent first Generation Indian writers in English belong to the Diaspora is V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Seth and Rohinton Mistry and the Second generation includes Jumpa Leheri, Hari Kunzru, Govind Gupta and Neil Bissoondath. Anita Pratap opines "Great creativity comes out of great departures".

As the term suggests it has multiple meanings in context to Sociology, Political Philosophy and Colloquial use. Multiculturalism is co-existed in Diaspora literature and it is defined "as the co-existence of diverse cultures, where culture includes racial, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviors, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking, and communicative styles".

Neil Bissoondath in his narrative often focus on the experience of (im) migrants for he has

a family history of dual migration from India to Trinidad to Canada, where he has been living since 1973 and is considered by the literary world as both a Trinidadian and a Canadian writer has written various award winning works of fiction, such as "A Casual Brutality", "Digging Up the Mountains", "The Innocence of Age", and in non-fiction, "Selling Illusions". "Digging Up the Mountains, was shortlisted for the City of Toronto Book Awards. "Dancing", one of the short stories, won the McClelland and Stewart Award for fiction and the national Magazine Award in 1986.

The New York Times quotes about the selected short story collection: "The superb short stories in Neil Bissoondath's first collection are alive with movement and flight, leaving and returning, insecurity and impermanence. Peopled by exiles and immigrants, deracines and runaways - perhaps the true representatives of the mobile 20th century - these are tales of two worlds, usually the Caribbean and Canada - and of those who are stretched between the two."

Several characters of the story are in Canada, the Caribbean is trying to overcome the sense of displacement, adjustment, defeat and relocation with the adoption of Multicultural identity. Along with sense of fear, uncertainty, and insecurity experienced by the immigrants in the host land, the land which they feel they belong to, Multiculturalism is witnessed in the title story "Digging Up the Mountains", which depicts the life of the protagonist Hari Beharry, a second generation immigrant, who wants to live a comfortable life on recently independent unnamed Caribbean island unlike his father still clung to inherited images of India and he lived until political plights worsen due to recent independence and a new government, declaring a state of emergency and making all the right progressive noises. Nevertheless, the circumstances forced him to keep a revolver for the safety of his family, as the violence increased gradually, followed by fright. He is not ready to give up, as he declares to his wife, "This is my land and my house. Let them come. It's bullet in their backside" (Bissoondath, Digging 4).

In the story "The Revolutionary" a Trinidad immigrant from Eugene Williamson comes across the protagonist, a former student who is coping with life at the university. Both have different perceptions towards life as immigrants, one full of revolutionary ideas and the other at the end pretend not to notice those ideas. Similarly, in "A short visit to a Failed Artist" the narrator had a small visit to Adrian and his wife Charming invited by Willie and Shushilla. In this encounter with the artist he came across a failed Artist who is tired of everything but Rachel and others who look like they are coping up with the new lifestyles they adopted.

"The Cage", a story of a young Japanese protagonist leading towards a life she felt like caged and eloped away from it. The conflict between the father and daughter stated very briefly. In her immigration to another land she finally returns to home again but still chooses to live alone without any reason for being there: "Tradition designed my cage. My father built it. Keisuke locked it" and ends with hope that "I continue to arrange my Flowers. Even a cage needs decoration." (Bissoondath, *Digging* 47)

While in "Insecurity", the story of a self-made Progressive export-import businessman in the Caribbean - Alistair Ramgoolam, is trying to escape by smuggling out his money and buying a house in Toronto due to inferior politics and corruption, and to protect his children from the insecurities of future, he starts investing his money in other countries: "He had no desire to return to the moneyless nobility of his childhood: pride was one thing, stupidity quite another, Alistair Ramgoolam was acutely aware of the difference" (Bissoondath, *Digging* 71). However, as a traditional Indian, his desire for ready cash and a free house leads him to purchase a house in Toronto out of the balance he has in his bank and "The more insecure he saw his island becoming, the more secure he himself felt" (Bissoondath, *Digging* 72). Moreover, from the conversation about ballet with his son, Ramgoolam realizes that his son has gone far away from him, which indicates that the second generation of (im) migrants has no bonding or attachment to their originality and culture. He realizes the real insecurity is not only of the island but of his next generation

who is becoming ignorant of their ancestry and originality and trying to sow new seeds in the new country: "He suddenly understood how far his son had gone" (Bissoondath, *Digging* 77).

In the story "There Are a Lot of Ways to Die" traces a reverse journey of an immigrant Joseph Heaven, who finds his own homeland misfit for him after his long residence in a host land. After making a good fortune in Canada. He sincerely intends to help his island economy, but is accused of manipulation and witnesses his misconceptions shattered one by one. On his return to home island, Joseph feels: "Friends and relatives treated". As Moya Flynn states in her book, *Migrant Resettlement in the Russian Federation: Reconstructing 'homes' and 'Homelands'*: "The relationship of the first generation to the place of migration is obviously different from that of subsequent generations. Reactions amongst initial returnees to the new 'home' is mediated by memories of what was recently left behind, and by the experiences of disruption and displacement as they try to reorientate, to form new social networks, and learn to negotiate new economic, political and cultural realities. (74)

In another story "Christmas Lunch", the narrator, a Caribbean immigrant, was new in Canada and was invited for Christmas lunch by Raj, an Indo-Caribbean immigrant and his host, who was a stranger to him. He accepted the invitation but received a cold welcome and was introduced to other guests who were a group of Indo-Caribbean immigrants and as many strangers as his host. The very ambience and the crowd of strangers were making the narrator uncomfortable. For him he might truly belong to the place where he feels like home rather than being with own cultured people.

In "Dancing", As Toorn expresses, "Dancing" depicts the story of a black Caribbean servant woman migrating from Trinidad to Toronto for a better life exposes the bitter reality that those Trinidadians, who proclaim to be discriminated by the superior community, may themselves display their very racialism through their own action, and in addition they blame the ethnic mainstream of. Sheila recently joins her sister Annie and her brother

Sylvester in Canada for better life and befriends with West Indian friends of Sylvester. After a while during the party, they had a confrontation with white neighbor. Sheila is so upset by the incident that she wants to go back to Trinidad, but her brother rebukes her: "We have every right to be here. They owe us. And we are going to collect, you hear me? (Bissoondath, *Digging* 208).

Thus, "Digging Up the Mountains" a collection of stories as for so many other characters like Alistair Ramgoolam of "Insecurity", life had "given him a certain authority over and Comprehension of the past. But the present, with its confusion and corruption, eluded him". And for the author "Home is where you start from" and the second generation of Diaspora writers or immigrants are now looking at it differently as "Home is where your feet are". Thus, from wherever one starts they start it as their own though racism, rootlessness, isolation and fear be present but accepting the new wind with sub cultural or multicultural roots will be the new reign in the world of literature as it is wisely said by Plato that 'the mirror of life'.

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