

M. G. Vassanji's *No New Land*: A Study in Multicultural Aspects

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The 'sovereignty of melioration' regulates the present scenario which is unquestionably a Carrefour of burgeoning globalization, acculturation and transnationalism. Globalization involves the movement of capital, people, culture across borders; dissolution of nation-state borders, ethnicity, mores, institutions; increasing communications and network linkages new forms of transaction and consumption. Multiculturalism is a widely prevailing phenomenon, acting like a pulley maneuvering the corduroy of globalization. Emigration of people from one nation to other or from one continent to another continent institutes the pervading vibes of newism, 'multiculturalism'. "No New Land" accommodates the doubly immigrated Indians who are undergoing 'International Diaspora' and depicts Canada as a 'Shangri-La for international refugees'. No New Land is an infotainment dissecting the Canadian multicultural mosaic redacted by dynamics of emigration. The sway of emigrants from different parts of the world in Canadian culture and likewise the corollary effect of Canadian cultural affluence on the espoused citizens. Canada's purvey of cultural friendly nuance is manifested interwoven with the lives of Lalani's and other Asians characters who mildew the case of No New Land. This paper deals with the multicultural aspects in M.G. Vassanji's novel No New Land.

DEFINITION

Multiculturalism may be defined as reaching out to both the native-born and newcomers, in developing lasting relationships among ethnic and religious communities. It encourages these communities to participate fully in society by enhancing their level of economic, social, and cultural integration into the host culture(s).

Multiculturalism is the appreciation, acceptance or promotion of multiple cultures, applied to the demographic make-up of a specific place, usually at the organizational level, e.g. schools, businesses, neighborhoods, cities or nations.

In a political context the term is used for a range of meanings, ranging from the advocacy of equal respect to the various cultures in a society, to a policy of promoting the maintenance of cultural diversity, to policies in which people of various ethnic and religious groups are addressed by the authorities as defined by the group they belong to. A common aspect of many such policies is that they avoid presenting any specific ethnic, religious, or cultural community values as central.

Multiculturalism is often contrasted with the concepts assimilationism and social integration and has been described as a "salad bowl" or "cultural mosaic" rather than a "melting pot."

ADVANTAGES OF MULTICULTURALISM

The person is able to develop a cosmopolitan perspective by being in a nation that incorporates within its society citizens who possess differing languages, customs, religion, dress, foods, mores and global frames of reference.

Today it is not unusual to see people of all different races, ethnic backgrounds or cultural groups living in one society. Our society is formed of a mix of different people and sometimes it is not easy to define one's self. Since we live in a society that is influenced by many social aspects expressing one's personal identity may be a hard task. Aspects of society that make it hard to identify one's self include a person's sexual orientation, their ethnicity and their lifestyles.

ADVANTAGES OF A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

A multicultural society is a blessing some might say, while others are afraid that foreigners are taking over the society with their strange cultures and languages. There are many speculations and thoughts on this subject, and people often seem to come up with quite different conclusions. In this article I will take a closer look on some of the advantages and challenges of a multicultural society. Culture is the word most people think of when multiculturalism is discussed. The fact that the globalization is causing the world to become a smaller place makes everyone of us more in touch with more of the different cultures in the world. A few years ago, not many people knew what tortilla, shish kebab and tikka masala was. These are cultural marks that most Norwegians think of as a natural part of their daily life now, but as quite foreign not long ago.

Foreign cultures come in all shapes food; art, movies, fashion and music are important areas for culture to be expressed. A really good example from Norway is the festival Mela. Mela is arranged every year in the capital of Norway, Oslo, and is a festival made to celebrate multiculturalism in the country. The three days the festival lasts, many Norwegian artists with another ethnic background than Norwegian, but also artists from all over the world perform on the large stage. Around the festival area exciting food from all the corners of the world is sold to the audience. Both fashion and short movies are also presented on stage. From these days we really see that the Norwegian society has been enriched by foreign cultures. Another advantage we get from multicultural societies is connected to language. Many people use lots of time, learning Chinese, Arabic and Russian and many other languages, and become attractive employees for work in international companies. Countries that receive immigrants with such lingual competence should look at this as a great resource and not a burden. The most important challenge when it comes to having people from different countries and cultures in the same country is integration. There are innumerable reasons why it is important to not only make foreigners a part of the society, but also make them feel like a part of the society.

The last few decades have been a time of rapid social and cultural changes for the western world in general, America and Canada in particular. Wave after wave of immigration has been encouraged at first, then viewed with diffidence soon turning into open hostility have altered dramatically the ethnic and social composition of cities and whole countries. Diversity has

become a dominating feature of modern life, whether it is valued for its contribution to a truly supranational society, or opposed for its undermining effects on national identity.

There are burgeoning writers encapsulating the contemporary concern have-toes doe globalization, acculturation, immigration and multiculturalism. Writers like Michael Ondaatje, Bharati Mukherjee, Uma Parameswaran, Hanif Kureishi, Rohinton Mistry and others present diversified ethnic phenomena of nations like America and Canada. Vassanji is one such writer narrating accounts of transplanted Asians and African with special focus to conflating of multiple cultures. M. G. Vassanji's *No New Land* is a fictional documentary encapsulating the arenas of multicultural Canada rendering room for cultural assimilation. *No New Land* accommodates the doubly immigrated Indians who are undergoing 'international diaspora' and depicts Canada as a 'Shangri-la for international refugees.

The Shamsi community delineated in the novel represents the Indian community immigrated to Africa during colonial regime and later in the postcolonial time, transplanted in Canada. The immigration to Canada proves to be an escapade into sanctuary of hope and life. Chelva Kanaganayakam observes: "If you were to speak of what the novel is about, "It is about the emigrant population in Toronto, forced to begin a new life in a strange and often unwell land, confronted with obstacles, prejudices and disillusionments". (56)

The plot whirls around the predicament of Lalani who are transplanted into a land of dazzling prospects and laborious struggle. Nurdin Lalani, the protagonist of the novel is a prototype of the emigrants who envisions that Canada is a fairy land and the emigrant passport to Canada is the magic wand to heal all maladies. Canada's purvey of cultural friendly nuance is manifested interwoven with the lives of Lalani and other Asians characters who mildew the cast of *No New Land*. Acculturation and Assimilation are the two chief bi-products of Canada's migration friendly policies and Post-colonial epoch has fashioned.

Vassanji's *No New Land* is an infotainment dissecting the Canadian multicultural mosaic redacted by dynamics of emigration. Canada has been a refugee to many Asians and Africans who were dislocated during the colonial era of English. All South Asians now living in Canada are from Pakistan or Sri Lanka; many came from India, via Africa or the Caribbean, where their ancestors had setteled in British colonies either in the nineteenth century or the early twentieth. After most of these colonies gained independence from Britain in the 1960s, many of their Indian citizens immigrated to western countries such as Britain, Canada and the United States.

The Lalani family in Vassanji's *No New Land* represents the transplanted and dislocated Asians. The Britishers knew that Indians could be trustworthy administrators, clerks, menial servants. Hence, the Indians were taken to Malaya, Burma, Ceylon, the British colonies in Africa. The first wave of migration was in vogue during the Asian and African imperial rule. Vassanji has delineated this first wave of emigration in all most all his fictional works and *No New Land* is no exception to this. In 1906 Haji Lalani arrives from Gujarat and joined as apprentice to an Indian firm. Soon by dint of hard work, he prospers and sets up his own shop like other Asians who emigrated under the ascendancy of British.

Nurdin Lalani, the son of Haji Lalani floated along with the current of second wave of emigration and anchored safely in Canada. Arun Singh comments: “The family of the protagonist Nurdin Lalani is a double immigrant family- Asia to Africa to Canada” (82). America and Canada were the two nations rendering haven to the secondly migrating populous. No New Land mulls over the ethical transaction and Canada as the ‘no new land’ exhibiting cordial reception to all identity-sick emigrants. Though, there are many other countries sheltering diverse ethnic groups in the world, Canada outstands all the other by implanting emigrant accessible scenario.

Canada, someone must have whispered the word somewhere. What was Canada – a distant place most did not know where, a pink mass on the map beside the green of Greenland. Suddenly everyone was talking of Canada: Visas, medicals, interviews, “landed”. In Canada they needed plumbers, so those who did not know one end of spanner from another, schoolteachers, salesmen and bank clerks, all joined plumbing classes and began talking of wrenches and discussing fixtures they had never seen in their lives. Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal. You got the most recent news outside mosques after prayers, when men await their women and during morning and afternoon teatimes at the A-T and other tea shops: who had left the price of the dollar, the most recent black-market-related arrests. They talked of Don Mills as if it were in Upanga. The buildings of Rosecliffe Park were known; it seemed, in intimate detail. The rich had left almost overnight following the great nationalizations. (Land 28)

The novel explicates Canada as a dream land for people from developing countries all over the world and especially Africa and Asia. Nurdin Lalani’s family undertakes the flight of enormous hopes for promising prospect of high living and secured identity. Lalanis are denied economic sustenance in Tanganyika like other Asians and so embark on their navigation. Nurdin take leave of his past and perform his expedience of emerging a new trend, a new living in Canada land with opulence and technically advancement. The land genially welcomes the Lalanis and other Asians unlike London they are prohibited even to generously saunter in the city.

Vassanji has furthermore excavated the topographical ambience of Canada in *No New Land*. The collective residence of the Asians and Africans in the suburbs of Toronto and exceptional shopping streets are well furnished in the unfolding of the montage tale of foster civilians. The Lalani abode in Toronto represents a microscopic view of the Asian's macrocosm in Canada. The Lalani live in Rosecliff park which is a small heterogeneous community constituted by Asians migrated from Africa. This diverse neighbourhood tries to live an Indian Canadianised Asian way. They irrespective of their different religious beliefs adhere their own values and live a secular life and the inhabitants of Rosecliffe Park loved gossips, debates and choice morsel parties.

At Sixty-nine Rosecliffe Park and its neighbours the new immigrants were
 Beset by hosts of proselytizers. They came from several different sects, singly
 Or in packs, using all manner of approaches, bearing literature and tidings, good
 Will and goodies, warnings and mercy. But in the Dar immigrants
 these missionaries met a litigious lot, for they love to debate, and
 they debate nothing better than community politics and religion.
 Zera would be in unmatched form. She could tell of her master,
 Missionary's legendary public debates in Dar against sheikhs,
 pundits, priests, and scientist. So when the Bibles were produced,
 they were gratefully accepted. (Land 49)

No New Land divulges that the cultural practices are translated into a new cultural context. The small refreshment stall in the Rosecliff Park very much resembles the vernacular tea shops and dabhas in India. The religious prayers, the Indian festivities and few other cultural observations conducted in Rosecliffe Park confirm the secular and liberal cultural *No New Land* scrutinizes the impingement of Canadian ethos on the mental fabric of every individual character. Nurdin Lalani, the protagonist of the novel epitomizes the attributes of a person who has forsaken his individual respect and individual identity with the homeland. He strives hard in Toronto to commence his earning, however; he is all time sacked by the employers for dearth of Canadian by a woman for physically abusing her. His psychological shifts evince his gradual rupture from the innate emotional attachment and disintegrated self. He unleashes his equanimity and drifts towards the mayhem of uncertainties. However, he reconciles with forlorn present and wistful past. Indra Batt comments: "He accepts the new cultural situation" (77).

Jamal and Nanji are two erudite specimens emigrated from Africa to Canada groping opportunities amidst the assorted shackles. Jamal adapts well to the changing demands to retain his grip on life, sometimes by selling samosas and sometimes boast his status by making

appointments to meet. Nanji is a man of ideals who ascertains apathy in his adopted land which is appendage with existential qualms.

Nurudin's children extensively imbibe the Canadian ways of living and even detest their father who does menial jobs. Nurudin's children stand for the transformed Asian-Canadians who are not troubled by their pedigree or nostalgic reminiscence.

One envies these children, these darlings of their mothers,
objects of immigrant sacrifice and labour, who speak better-sounding
If not better English: one envies them their memories when they
are grown –up. Take this girl in hijab, standing in the elevator,
head covered, ankles covered, a beautiful angular face, long body,
who could have come straight from northern Pakistan. But when
she opens her mouth, out flows impeccable Toronto English,
indistinguishable from that of any other kid's discussing
what?-last night's hockey game. In her arms, covered with
a decorated green cloth, is a heavy book also apparently in
hijab. She's on her way to Quran class, on the fourteenth floor.
What will she remember when she is twenty, thirty, what will she write?
(Land 63)

Vassanji has vividly limned the micro Asian community which rummaged its tralatitious ethical distinctiveness. The Asians who transport themselves to this new territory almost immediately form brotherhood and their own clans. Lalani's reconcile with the new and changed social coverlet which bequeaths a special warmth and aroma to its denizens. They soon discover common social gatherings and similar way out for their recreation and a glee from their panoptic routine. A new Asian or African emigrant with all ease finds new social bonds to share and an outlet to pour his anxieties about past and future.

The multicultural mosaic of Canada is aggrandized with other cultural communities and this is palpable in Vassanji's narration. There are other minor characters in the novel that represent other social and cultural clans. The girl who accuses Nurudin for her rape is a Portuguese and she

dwells in a different locality of fishermen and butchers. Ramesh is also an emigrant from other parts Africa and he and Susheela stand for the hindu community based in Toronto. There are people of mixed identity living in Canada a nation with assorted legacy.

Conclusion

Sooner or later, Canada becomes a home away from home for the long disoriented emigrants. Canada is accredited with maple leaf, ten province, bi-lingual system and multicultural mosaic. The greater the diversity of the racial and cultural mix, the greater the need for tolerance and openness is expected. Vassanji has prolifically sketched the transitional phase in an individual's life interwoven with the multicultural setting of Canada. The synchronic structure steers the novel away from the present to the past, to areas of experience that lie beyond the immediate referential context. Vassanji has accordingly extrapolated the different facets of multicultural Canada, a refuge land for the expatriates and no new land for a homeless someone. The well-knitted narrative of the novel regurgitates that Canada is an asylum for the peripatetic individual and nurture that Canada its national heritage with the amalgam of diverse culture.

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