**REDEFINING SOCIAL SUBJUGATION IN INDO-FIJIAN LITERATURE**

**By**

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Subjugation, alienation, loss, exile and uprootedness remains the major theme in the works of Indo-Fijian Diaspora writers. Diaspora is a new class and creed of people who were expelled from their homeland and their emotional environment shattered.

The word Diaspora is derived from the Greek word, *disperio* which means ‘through’ or ‘across’ and ‘speiro' means to 'sow' or 'scatter'. In world history, the word diaspora was first for the citizens of Greece who migrated and settled in the newly conquered land. The word received prominence and a new significance when Greek-speaking Jewish people were expelled from their motherland by the Babylonians in 586B.C. and then in 136 A.D. In *Sociology of Diaspora: A Reader*, the word is explained as:

Diaspora is derived from the Greek word *dia* (through or over) and *speiro* (dispersal or sow) originally associated with the dispersal of the Jewish people in the 6th century B.C. The word 'diaspora' over the years acquired a more expanded meaning beyond the original connotations of violence, catastrophe, alienation, loss, exile, and return. Ordinary usage of the word today would include reference to a common ancestral homeland, voluntary or involuntary migration, and a sense of separateness and marginality in the country of residence.**1**

The continuous saga of humans as invaders, travellers, traders, workers, and explorers makes them a constant sufferer of conflict, pathos and trauma. He remains alone and disconnected from his homeland. It is a fact that dislocation and relocation compel the writer to express his or her traumatic experiences. Displacement, in this sense, is a catastrophic phenomenon for human beings. These feelings of hopelessness and exile create pathos and trauma. The quest for the unknown and unexplored makes a man a global traveller. The feelings of nostalgia and uprootedness which he has experienced during his travelling or exile remain in his heart, even after his staying in one place. Different writers from different origins have expressed their saga of dislocation, exile and pathos in their literary works.

It will be worthwhile to mention the short history of the indentured Indian labourers in Fiji. In Fiji, the Indenture labour arrangements started around 1879 and continued till 1920. During this period around 60,000 Indians**2** were brought to the various plantations on the agreement which they called '*girmit*’ and lived under the cruellest and most brutal circumstances. *Girmit* is a vernacular word of the Fiji-Hindi variant of the word 'agreement'. By their indomitable will and hard work, they changed the face of Fiji. Despite immense suffering and exploitation, they succeeded in creating Fiji, a multicultural-agricultural nation. But their relations with the indigenous Fijians proved fragile because of the effects of racial politics. The first coup in 1987 and the second in the year 2000 spread the poison of racism among them. As a result, many Indians had to migrate from Fiji. Nandan, who was an active politician at the time of the coup suffered betrayal and shock. The government in which he was a minister was overthrown. That is why in his works, he strongly advocates ethics, morality and values in politics. Today, in most countries the slave trade and indenture labour arrangements have been abolished during the second half of the 20th century, but still, these countries are haunted by the ghost of racism and political fragmentations. These countries are replete with diverse problems of colonialism, race and culture. In the age of post colonialism, these countries are suffering from economic backwardness, political upheavals, chaos, and socio-political disintegrations. In this kind of chaotic conditions, the diasporic people remain in the predicamental state of exile, and longing for a place of recognition. In this case, the uprooted and transplanted people immensely suffered from a sense of alienation, existential despair and nostalgia.

Literature of Indo-Fijian Diaspora:

The history of Indo-Fijian literature is a new phenomenon in contemporary literature. The Indo-Fijian literature is around forty years old, and mainly constitutes poetry, fiction, essays, and short stories. When Fiji became an independent nation, it gave birth to a rapid increase in written literature. Dislocation and displacement have forced these writers to emphasize a sense of fragmentation and nostalgia in their writings. In this sense, we can say that Indians have enriched the literature of the South Pacific region with their pen and pathos. Sudesh Mishra calls this category of writers "a subaltern knowledge category"3 which grows out of the indenture past.

The third generation or descendants of these Girmitiyas have written the records and chronicles of their anguished ancestors, emphasizing their different 'origins'. Their literary masterpieces gave rise to their rebellious spirit, their suffering, and above all feelings of exile and nostalgia. There is a class or group of writers, who are the fateful descendants of the Girmitiya legacy and though living outside India, they not only remember their motherland after years but also expresses their feeling through words. Some new generation diasporic writers effectively expressed the tragedies of their ancestors, making it the central narrative of their works. The great writers who expressed the deaths and lives of their forgotten fathers are; Totaram Sanadhya, Subramani, Sudesh Mishra, Raymond Pillai, Dr Vijay Mishra, Dr Satendra Nandan, Ahmed Ali, Brij Lal, Prof.Vijay Naidu. Indo-Fijian literature is full of varieties; short stories, essays, novels, and poems were written in plenty by prominent Indo-Fijian writers, using English or Fiji Hindi as their medium. Exile, nostalgia, and twice-banishment are the general theme of these writers. Dr Viajy Mishra uses the phrase, ‘Girmit ideology' to suggest the expressions and descriptions of the histories of the Indo-Fijian writers. In this way, the term Girmit ideology suggests the self-consciousness of Indo-Fijian writers about their indenture past.

All the Indo-Fijian writers make their narratives on their past Girmit history. Their ancestors’ horrible experiences force them to make haunting expressions in which we confront heart-tormenting episodes of exile, displacement, gullible tricks and temptations of recruiting agents, pangs of separation through crossing *Kala Pani*, savage life in dark lines/*bhut* lane, barbarity and cruelties of the Overseers etc. The deracinating Indian Indenture experience first received its formal expression in Totaram Sanadhya (1876-1947)’s work *My Twenty-One Years in Fiji*. In this autobiographical book, Totaram who was himself a girmitiya, reveals realistically, the pathetic and deplorable conditions of the Indian Girmitiyas in Fiji, working there under the Indian Indenture system. This book can be called an epoch-making event in the history of Indo-Fijian literature. The struggle for expression in Fiji produced many notable Indian writers. Dr Vijay Mishra, Dr Satendra Nandan, Subramani, Dr Brij.V. Lal, Ahmad Ali, Vijay Naidu, Sudesh Mishra and Raymond Pillai are the best-known and established writers of Fiji. Kamlesh Sharma, Mohit Prasad, Kavita Nandan, Anurag Subramani, Shalini Akil, Sunil Bhan and Satish Rai are among the emerging writers of Fiji.

Three predominant writers Raymond Pillai, Subramani and Satendra Nandan can be called three pillars of Indo-Fijian diasporic literature. Raymond Pillai and Subramani's short stories in English can be considered the first published works in Fiji, in the early 1970s. These writers not only provided the theme of exile and suffering but also gave voice to the exilic experiences of the Indians. They also realistically presented the contemporary Fijian political and social life. In this sense, they can be called the moral monitors of the age. The Indo-Fijian writers like Subramani, Sudesh Mishra, Vijay Mishra, and Brij V.Lal, have invoked indenture consciousness and social subjugation in their writings. Some critics like James Clifford, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and Robin Cohen argue that cultural and social awareness or consciousness enables the Diaspora to connect themselves with both, the host country and homeland.

Raymond Pillai (30 August 1942-18 October 2007) was Fiji's most well-known and prominent writer. He can be considered the pioneer artist not only in Fiji but also in the literary field of the South Pacific. In 1980, he published his first short story collection named, *The Celebration.* He becomes a major voice with a sheer talent for telling stories with realism. His finest masterpiece, *Adhura Sapna* became the first literary work written in Fiji Hindi, which exquisitely describes the age-old relations of Indians and Fijians. Later he migrated to New Zealand in 1993. *The End of the Line* is his second volume of short stories. According to Brij V. Lal:

Raymond Pillai was Fiji's greatest writer of short fiction, capturing in his inimitable style the inner-lived experience of the Indo-Fijian community with great humour and sensitivity…it is people like Raymond Pillai who planted the idea in us that our world was worth writing about and that if we did not do it, no one would. Raymond was a pioneer in the true sense of the word.**4**

Pillai’s poem, *Labourer’s Lament* was published in 1974 it is an intellectual, prophetic poem on the subject of race and coup. He began writing his magnum opus, a play *Adhura Sapna* in 1977.The marvellous written play can be considered the first literary work to be written in Fiji Hindi. The play explores and expresses the nuances of the relationship between the Indian and Fijian communities. The play was completed and published in 2001. Later the play was updated, revised according to the current context and made into a movie in 2007. Thus the movie brought before the global audience the traumas, hopes and aspirations of the Fiji-Indian diaspora. His ardent attachment to language can be seen in his experimental poetry and short stories. He also experimented with his teaching career and left the University for a period to teach at the high school. He also worked in Radio Fiji and recorded stories for children.

Raymond Pillai is a master artist and excellent craftsman, writing spectacular short stories and poems. He is a sheer literary genius, who brought back magical realism through his play. He is the minute observer and delineator of human relationships. His short stories are the repository of a variety of characters representing a mixture of Indian and Fijian ways of life. In his works, he talks about major issues about the Indo-Fijians like social subjugation, colonialism, race, identity, subjugation, exile, Indianness, coup, politics and so on. He captured the strong bonding of the Indians with the Fijian land. The dialogues and incidents of his stories reveal the trouble-tossed and pathetic condition of the girmitiya woman. Through his masterpieces, he has contributed immensely to the field of Indo-Fijian diasporic literature.

Subramani (1943) another prominent writer of Fiji, wrote his masterpiece, *Dauka Puran* in Fiji Hindi. His contribution includes novel, short stories, dramas and essays. His proficiency and skill lie in the fact that he has written works both in English and in Fiji Hindi. In 1978, he won an international prize for his short story collection, *Marigolds.* It established him as a prominent and acclaimed writer. *The Fantasy Eaters* published in 1988, is his marvellous collection of short stories. *Dauka Puran*, published in 2001 is an epic novel and the magnum opus of Subramani. The novel written in Fiji Hindi is a sheer achievement, establishing him as an innovator and intellectual writer of Fiji. The novel is divided into *Purans* (ancient legends) which can be read at several levels. His critical works, essays and addresses are published under the title, *Altering Imagination* (1997). He also edited two volumes; *Shifting Locations* (2009)and *The Indo-Fijian Experience* (1979).

Sudesh Mishra is a poet, playwright, and short fiction writer. He gained universal recognition when he received Harri Jones Memorial Prize for poetry in 1988 for his first book of poems, *Rahu* (1987). His other works are: *Confessions of a Would Be Brahmin, Grain, The Black Pagoda, Konark, The Rowers, and The Loving Song of R.J. Tangaya. Diaspora and the Difficult Art of Dying (2002), Memoirs of a Reluctant Traavller, Tandav (1992). Diaspora Criticism* (2006) and *Preparing Faces: Modernism and Indian Poetry in English* (1995), are works based on Diaspora criticism. His works narrate the major social traits of the Indian community in Fiji.

Dr Vijay Mishra is also a renowned academic and writer. His major works are: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary (2007), Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire, Devotional Poetics and the Indian Sublime, The Gothic Sublime, Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind, Rama's Banishment: A Centenary Tribute to the Fiji Indians 1879-1979.

Brij V. Lal is a well-known academic and historian. His autobiography, *Mr Tulsi's Store: A Fijian Journey* (2001), won the [Kiriyama Prize](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiriyama_Prize) in 2002. He is also the author of *Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey through Indenture in Fiji* (2000) is a history of the trials and triumphs of the [Indo-Fijian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Fijian)community. At present, he is the Editor of the [*Journal of Pacific History*](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Journal_of_Pacific_History&action=edit&redlink=1) and the Founding Editor of the literary journal, [*Conversations*](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Conversations_%28journal%29&action=edit&redlink=1)*.* His major works are *Bittersweet: The Indo-Fijian Experience* (2004), *Power and Prejudice: The Making of the Fiji Crisis*, *Broken Waves: A history of the Fiji Islands in the 20th century*, *A Vision for Change: AD Patel and the Politics of Fiji*, *Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey of Indenture through Fiji* (2000), *Pacific Islands: An Encyclopedia* (ed), *Pacific Places, Pacific Histories* (ed). His two books *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians* (2004) and *The Encyclopedia of Indian Diaspora* (ed.) can be called mammoth works, making the documentation of the Indian Indenture labourers in Fiji and Indian Diaspora across the world. “He can be called the current authority on the history of Fiji Indians.”**5**  He records the events of social subjugation and atrocities on Indi-Fijians in Fiji. His books are the rare social documents of Indians in Fiji.

Among the emerging writers, mention must be made to Anurag Subramani, Mohit Prasad, Satish Rai, and Kavita Nandan. Anurag Subramani is noted for his *Towards a New Pacific Historiography Re-Imagining History as A Literary Artefact* (2010). Mohit Prasad is also a writer of some beautiful works like; *Eyes of the Mask,* and *Eating Mangoes* (2001). His poetry collection *The Eyes of the Mask* is a reflection on neo-colonialism, and political Fijian life. Kavita Nandan, daughter of Dr Satendra Nandan wrote some of the glimpses of the saga of Indo-Fijian indenture experience in her *Stolen Words: Fiji Indian Fragments.* Satish Rai is an Indo-Fijian writer and film director. He started *Milaap-Discover Your Indian Roots* Project and visited India several times to make documentary films on this subject. These writers paved the way for future creative writers.

Fiji Hindi also became an important language for the expression of the indenture past. Fiji Hindi became an important medium of communication among Indo-Fijians. Many Indian writers of Fiji wrote their best works in Fiji Hindi. Many linguists also contributed to the Indo-Fijian literature. "Rodney Moag analyzed Fiji Hindi grammar in his book *Fiji Hindi: A Basic Course and References* (1977). Another writer Jeff Siegel, in his book *Plantation languages in Fiji* (1985) recorded the development of Fiji Hindi. Urmila Prasad translated the Gospels of *the Bible* into Fiji Hindi." **6**

Dr Satendra Nandan develops an abiding interest in the humanism and equality of races that assumes a powerful cogency and centrality in his works. He migrated and settled in Canberra, Australia after the Coup of 1987 in Fiji, which shattered the dreams and hopes of thousands of Indians in Fiji. Nandan's conviction in the Indian view and way of life doesn't veer in the vicissitudes of his life. From the very beginning of his career, Nandan had been a firm voice for Indian-Fijian equality in Fiji.

In Nandan's formative years, he extensively read Naipaul, Rushdie, and Patrick White whose diasporic writing not only shaped his diasporic consciousness but also from whom he is reported to have drawn his magnificent creative and artistic vision. Nandan's works and his life are so intermingled at every point that it becomes difficult to bypass this haunting strain. A repeated sequence of influences from both Indian and Fijian ways of life and the writings of major diasporic writers transformed Nandan into a formidable and conspicuous voice of the Indo-Fijian diaspora and its literature. His works are; *The Wounded Sea* (1991), and *Voices in the River*. (1985), *Faces in a Village: Poetry from Fiji* (1991), *Lines Across Black Waters* (1997), *The Loneliness of Islands: Collected Poems* (2007), *Fiji: Paradise in Pieces: Writing, Ethics and Politics* (2000), *Requiem for a Rainbow: A Fijian Indian Story.* (2001), *Between the Lines: Selected Prose 1978-2008* published in 2009.

Dr Satendra Nandan’s novel *The Wounded Sea* makes sarcastic remarks on Fijian politicians for overlooking reality around them. All three initial chapters of the book give a graphic depiction of the life of the Indians in Fiji. He narrates how the Indians mingled with the Fijian people and culture and in the final chapter he poses a vital question about the identity of the Indo-Fijians. He uses his powers of narration to recreate images of the past and colonial world out of the men and women around him. His narrative style helps us to develop our understanding of the predicamental state of the Indians in Fiji which can be considered his significant contribution to the literature of the South Pacific. Nandan has an excellent art of narrating the scene minutely and realistically. Using the lucidity and simplicity of his style, he reconstructs a whole picture before our eyes. He is a gifted craftsman presenting every detail with technical accomplishment. His pen pictures are vividly portrayed with a dint of realism and imagination. His brilliance can be seen in his perfectly portrayed scenes and events. His narration encompasses the minutest details and tremendous observation. His pictures bear the quality of lifelikeness that we can see before us as moving and breathing like a living entity.

All the works of Dr Satendra Nandan reveal the diasporic sensibility and identity quest. Because he possesses a complex identity of an expatriate, a twice–uprooted intellectual, it is natural that the study of his technique and style will seek to trace the reflection of a way of thinking, looking at the world around him at the Indian life and culture. Nandan's writing reveals the pain and pathos of Indians in Fiji.

Human psychology shows that the nostalgia for the homeland becomes very acute when the diasporic representatives have to suffer terribly at the hands of the indigenous people and circumstances in their lands of settlement. This social and political subjugation and oppression leave an indelible impression on their psyche and they suffer mentally and physically.

Thus, we can say that at the core of much of the diasporic writings, there lies a constant quest for certainties, identity, and social space in the age of disintegration and deterritorialism. Writers of Indian origin, taking their social identity and vision as parameters have expressed their respective diasporic situations differing with the purpose to receive a greater knowledge of their own. In the prose and poetical works of Satendra Nandan, we can find a large amount of thematic and textual symbols which have socio-political and cultural overtones and which also suggest a new type of diasporic narrative of exile subjugation and enigma.

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