# EMERGING TRENDS OF INDO-FIJIAN DIASPORA LITERATURE

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***Abstract***

The history of Indo-Fijian literature witnessed a remarkable growth in recent years. Fijian Literature, comprises expatriate and iTaukei writing in English, local writing and Fijian language, writings from the island of Rotuma and works of Indo-Fijians. Dislocation and displacement have forced many writers to emphasize a sense of fragmentation and nostalgia in their writings. Indians have enriched the literature of the South Pacific region by their pen and pathos. Indo-Fijian writers reveals their indenture past in the pages of their writings. The literature of the Indo-Fijians reflects strong sense of Indianness and we can hear the continuous echoes of Indian classical literature.

**[ Key Words :** Indian Diaspora, Girmit literature, Indo-Fijian Diaspora, Nostalgia, Diasporic Consciousness, Exile and loss of identity**]**

# Introduction: Emergence of Indo-Fijian Diaspora Literature:

Diaspora literature is a new wave in the ocean of world literature. The history of Indo- Fijian literature witnessed a remarkable growth in recent years. The Indo-Fijian literature especially, encompasses a history of forty years and more, which mainly constitute poetry, fiction, essays, and short stories. When Fiji became an independent nation, it gave birth to the rapid increase of written literature. Fijian Literature, comprises expatriate and iTaukei writing in English, local writing and Fijian language, writings from the island of Rotuma and works of Indo-Fijians. Dislocation and displacement have forced these writers to emphasize a sense of fragmentation and nostalgia in their writings. Fiji-Hindi and English were the main languages of expression. In this sense, we can say that Indians have enriched the literature of the South Pacific region by their pen and pathos.

# Girmit ideology and Literature:

Girmit ideology remains at the center of Indo-Fijian literature. Dr.Vijay Mishra uses the phrase, ‘Girmit ideology’ to suggest the expressions and descriptions of the histories by the Indo-Fijian

writers. It suggests the self-consciousness of Indo-Fijian writers of their indenture past. The new generation or descendants of Girmitiyas have written the records and chronicles of their anguished ancestors, emphasizing their different ‘origins’. Their literary works expressed their rebellious spirit, their suffering, and above all feeling 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 a span of years but also expresses their feeling through words. Vijay Mishra points out here the hyphenated identities of authors and their works;

[t]he hyphen–Indo-Americans, Indian-Americans, Hindu- Americans, Muslim- Britons – signals the desire to enter into some kind of generic taxonomy and yet at the same time retain, through the hyphen, the problematic situating of the self as simultaneously

belonging ‘here’ and ‘there’. **1**

Some new generation diasporic writers effectively expressed the tragedies of their ancestors, making it as the central narrative of their works.

# Writers of New Generation:

The great writers who expressed the deaths and lives of their forgotten fathers are; Totaram Sanadhya, Dr. Vijay Mishra, Dr. Satendra Nandan, Subramani, Sudesh Mishra, Raymond Pillai, Ahmed Ali, Brij Lal, Prof.Vijay Naidu. The Indo-Fijian literature is full of different varieties; short stories, essays, novel, and poems were written in plenty by the prominent Indo-Fijian writers, using English or Fiji Hindi as their medium. Exile, nostalgia, and twice-banishment are the general theme of these writers.

# Expression of Protest, Persecution and Pathos:

Girmit life and forgotten past of multitudes of Coolies forms the central narrative in the works of the Indo-Fijian writers. 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 the 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, Ahemad 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 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.

Subramani (1943) another prominent writer of Fiji, wrote his masterpiece, *Dauka Puran* in Fiji Hindi. His contribution includes novel, short stories, drama 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 complete collection of short stories. *Dauka Puran*, published in 2001 is an epic novel and magnum opus of Subramani. The novel written in Fiji Hindi, is a sheer achievement, established 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).

Raymond Pillai (30 August, 1942-18 October, 2007) was Fiji’s most well-known and prominent writers. He can be considered the pioneer artist not only in Fiji but also in the literary field of South Pacific. In 1980, he published his first short story collection named, *The Celebration.* He becomes a major voice with a sheer talent of 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 Pillai made a vanished world come alive, full of good humour but also simple, unaffected humanity.**2**

Sudesh Mishra is 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, 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 the works based on Diaspora criticism.

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.

Dr. Satendra Nandan stands supreme among the prominent writers of Indo-Fijian diaspora. He contributed immensely in the field of South Pacific literature. His works are the veritable instruments of protest and spreads the message of peace, non-violence and brotherhood. He chiefly wrote novel, poems, autobiography, essays and memoir.

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, 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.

Fiji Hindi also became an important language for the expression of the indenture past. Many Indian writers of Fiji wrote their best works in Fiji Hindi. Many linguists also contributed in the Indo-Fijian literature. “Roadney 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 *Bible* in Fiji Hindi.”**3**

# Conclusion:

The literature of the Indo-Fijians reflects strong sense of Indianness and we can hear the continuous echoes of Indian classical literature. It also developed as the folk tradition of Fiji where many Indians settled and flourished. This literature developed with the growth of Indian community in Fiji. It also became an excellent mixture of Fiji-Hindi dialects. It was a blend developed from the confluence of two cultures.

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