

Influence of Romanticism on South Asian Diasporic Writing in Canada

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The term “Romanticism” has been defined by various writers. Pater, for example, calls it the “addition of strangeness to beauty” and Watt Denton defines it as “the renaissance of Wonder.” Goethe, the German poet-critic, contrasts Romanticism with classicism and says, “Romanticism is disease and classicism is health”. I would like to define it, is a withdrawal from outer experience to concentrate upon inner experience. All such definitions are, however, unsatisfactory and partial. They emphasize one or other element of this type of literature instead of giving a composite view. It would, therefore, be more profitable and partial. They emphasize one or other element of this type of literature instead of giving a composite view. It would, therefore, be more profitable to consider the silent features of English romanticism, instead of wasting time defining it.

The chief characteristics of romanticism are: a. Subjectivity b. Love of the supernatural c. Spontaneity d. Melancholy e. Love of Nature f. Emphasis on the inherent dignity and nobility of man g. Romanticism is a revolt against all artificiality, it stands for simplicity in theme and treatment h. their interest in the past leads the romantics to experiment with old meters and poetic forms.

Summing up the chief characteristics of romanticism long points out that it is characterized by, “The Protest against the bondage of rules, the return to nature and human heart, the interest in old sagas and mediaeval heroic age, the sympathy with the toilers of the world, the emphasis upon individual genius and the return to Milton and the Elizabethans, instead of Pope and Dryden as literary models.”

It is generally supposed that the English romantic movement began in 1798, with the publication of “The Lyrical Ballads. But it is a mistake to assign any definite date to it. It was not a sudden outburst but the result of long and gradual growth and development.

The poets of the romantic school- Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, etc. were not the first romantics of England. Elizabethan literature is essentially romantic in spirit. It is also full of that sense of wonder and mystery that love of daring and adventure, that curiosity and restlessness which we associate with the poets of the early 19th century. Therefore, it is difficult to assign any definite date to it. The recent Diasporic literature is also a unique phenomenon in the history of English romanticism, in more ways than one.

Today, my task is to find out the influence of romanticism on the South Asian Diasporic writing in Canada. The term “South Asia” is a bureaucratic term. The writers who have come to Canada from the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal & Bhutan) and the writer from Fiji, East African and the Caribbean who trace their ancestry to the Indian subcontinent are known as South Asian Writers.

The common experiences of immigrants bind South Asian Canadians together though they express different sensibilities within the “Visible Minority Group”

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Focusing upon Romanticism in terms of Subjectivity, love of nature, emphasis on the inherent dignity and novelty of man, interest in the past and simplicity in theme and treatment, I am trying to analyze influence of romanticism of the South Asian Diasporic Writing in Canada. I have selected the following text for the illustration of above mentioned statement.

Author	Text
M.G Vassanji	The Gunny Sack and No New Land
1. Yasmin Ladha	lions Grand daughter and other
2. Shyam Selvadurai	Funny Boy
3. Michael Ondaatje	Anil's Ghost

The romantic literature is subjective; it is an expression of the inner urges of the soul of the artist. The artist does not care for rules and regulations, but gives free expression to his/her emotions. It is an emancipation of the individual soul from the bondage of custom. Therefore, "Self" is important, similarly, in south Asian Diasporic Writing in Canada, the search for self identity has been a central aspect of Canadian imagination. The quest for identity is, of course, not a Canadian problem. It is a fate Canada shares with all post colonial or new nations. A major feature of post colonial literature is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post colonial crisis of identity comes into being and the concern is with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between "Self" and place.

In order to find out "self" in adopted place, the South Asian Writers try to strike roots in the new country, think of it as their home. However this does not mean that they wish to blend without trace into the dominant culture. In Canadian context, the search for roots becomes an imperative necessity, a political act. This process involves the resurrection of the history of their communities in the new land and therefore, the South Asian Canadian Writers have become the preservers and transmitters of the collective history of their past.

M.G Vassanji as myth maker and historian as one who is entrusted with the task of reclaiming and validating a past through effective constructs find expression in his first novel, "The Gunny Sack" which traces the history of four generations of Asians in East Africa. His second novel, No New Land is an attempt to tell stories of the South Asian immigrants to Canada. The major object the writer is to show in what ways these South Asian immigrants do and come into reality. He says "I write about my own people without and sense of history and place. A person without history is like an orphan. We know the name of the place.

We stay we know our immediate surroundings, but we tend to look towards a future tomorrow and day after tomorrow of a better future may be. But where is our past? Where are roots?

About the African town Matura Sali Kala in the Gunny Sack says, "It is the town where my forebear unloaded his donkey one day and made his home. Where Africa opened its womb to India and produced a being who forever stalks the forest in search of himselfonly traces of that past are visible (39-40)

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The past is relevant because it is a part of each person's present. For any culture or literature, it is essential to be able to trace back its origins to antiquated time. It allows for just a pride in the ancient lineage and endows a confident sense of having a long established identity. Though South Asian writers provide this kind of map that enables the members of the community to know who they are in relation to what they were.

Yasmin Ladha, South Asian Canadian writer, was born in Tanzania and migrated to Canada in 1978 at the age of twenty. Like other writers she has also tried to provide a map for her people. The book *Lion's Grand daughter and other stories* - consists of ten short stories. This book is an attempt to tell the stories of her youth. Through these stories she has tried to establish the cultural heritage in the new world.

Anils Ghost written by Michael Ondattje is a story about love about family, about identity and the unknown enemy, about the quest to unlock the hidden past. Anil, born in Sri Lanka educated in America, she is an anthropologist sent by an international human rights group to work with local officials, investigating the organized campaign of murder engulfing the island. Her purpose of going to Sri Lanka is to collect the information of the hidden says in his novel, "When the team reached the site at five - thirty in the morning, one or two family members would be waiting for them. And they would be present all day. While Anil and the others worked, never leaving, they spelled each other so someone always stayed, as it ensured that evidence would not be lost again (135).

The next most important characteristic feature of romanticism is love of nature the romantics carry us away from the suffocating atmosphere of cities into the fresh and free world. A host of Canadian writers belonging to the early period and the contemporary alike feel that the region is a vital factor and the particular landscape of the place with its people becomes a 'veritable powerhouse of creating All south Asian writers undoubtedly belong to this group own writer. As O.P Juneja has observed, Looking at the Map of Canada, One finds colorful dramatic patterns of lakes and forest, mountains and prairies which make one believe that Canada has discussed on nature.

The Canadian land with all its regional diversity has been a binding force in the effort to forge a Canadian identity, while it has at the same time, been a hostile force so overwhelming in its implacability that some, at least of Canadian literature has taken as its central theme what Margaret Atwood terms "Survival".

Space, both in the geographical and in the symbolic sense, assumes a powerful force, moldings, changing and recreating the dynamics of the family. Personal, communal and cultural identity begins with place and region. The relationship with place and region seems to have shaped Canada's literary consciousness.

Landscape becomes mindscape. Landscape, Seascape, Skyscape in Canada take on symbolic significance. While mountain, prairie, ocean are powerfully evoked, place also becomes a trope for mental experience.

In case of Vassanji, the Canadian land has become the main force in his writing. He starts his novel *No New land*, with the description of Don Valley, He says, "It looks over dense woods which give the valley its many moods and colors, in the distance, form among the trees.... A golf

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course, which appears mostly deserted on the opposite side, lends its simple geometry to landscape (1).

Like Vassanji, Yasmin has also considered Canadian land for the background of her stories. In one of her stories "Be a doctor" she expressed her feelings of new place. Unlike Tanzania the place is cheap and flat. There are no trees where they live. The roads, are not straight "First, the but dips and you cannot see it, and when you see it, it has begun climbing having upward, slower than tortoise(18) Another most important characteristic feature of romanticism is Melancholy. A romantic is dissatisfied individual. He may be dissatisfied with circumstance of his life, with his age, with literary conventions and traditions of the day, or with the general fate of humanity. Therefore, it is often pessimistic in tone.

Vassanji's second novel, *No New Land* reveals the present. The tenants of sixty nine Rosecliffe Park Drive in Don Mills whose lives illustrate the ironies, the pathos and the hardships of having to live between two worlds, neither of which provides the harmony of a life that the mind imagines and craves for.

Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, a novel written in six stories, is an honest and riveting retelling of a boy growing up during the last two decades of turmoil in Sri Lanka. The book comes out at a time when that country is trying to come to grips with the legacy of violence and authoritarianism. Arjie is a Funny Boy, who prefers dressing as a girl to playing cricket with older brother. In *Funny Boy*, we follow the life of the family through Arjie's eyes. In the north of Sri Lanka there is a war going on between the army and Tamil Tigers and gradually it begins to encroach on families' comfortable life. Sporadic acts of violence flare into full scale riots and lead to tragedy. Krishantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta has mentioned, if you are Sri Lankan, the events which are written about are most difficult and painful and many was the time I closed the book to weep.

past. Michael Ondaatje Thus I can conclude with this that some of the romantic elements such as subjectivity, Love of Nature, Interest in past, Melancholy emphasis on the inherent dignity and nobility of man have been observed in the current diasporic writing in Canada.

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