

Journey Towards Self – discovery: A Reading of M.G.Vassanji’s *The Book of Secrets*

**R.Christobel Merlin Mahil (Reg. No. 17223164012011) Research Scholar,
Scott Christian College (Autonomous), Nagercoil, Kanyakumari – 629 003, Tamil Nadu,
India.**

**Dr. A. Nisha, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Scott Christian College
(Autonomous), Nagercoil, Kanyakumari – 629 003, Tamil Nadu, India.**

**Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627
012, Tamil Nadu, India.**

Abstract

Journey to a new place adds enthusiasm and eagerness. The way the voyage is treated in literature encourages physical mobility, psychological reawakening and emotional development. Migrants mingle the experiences in the foreign and motherland to bloom out as a new. The study aims to present the challenge faced by the migrants in Vassanji’s *The Book of Secrets*. It analyses migration as a successful component of people whose need, including employment possibilities, are not met in their native countries. People who have travelled across far-off regions of the world in search of work often strive to establish root and a sense of settled security. In reality, they are being blown to pieces by ambiguous insecurities. The study investigates the journeys that migrants take the process of self-discovery and the construction of identity in a society where choices are made, order are given and policies are started.

Keywords: Journey, Diaspora, Migrants, Self-discovery

The journey plays a fascination role in the life of migrants. The absence of opportunity, advancement, prosperity and self-fulfilment forces one to make an inescapable voyage to a prosperous place. It is also a potent representation of a character’s journey toward another form of self-realization. Gifted and intelligent people are forced to seek out a location where growth, exploration, invention and recompense can be obtained. Hard work at home typically yields low pay. Huge numbers of migrants enter a new country and aspire to live prosperous lives. Movement towards a new land demands saying goodbye to the former things and welcoming newness. It provides an opportunity for personal development, which leads to growth i their lives and forces a passionate pursuit of novelty.

The diaspora has been the focus of writing from the third world that provides voice to those who have travelled to far-off part of the world in quest of new homes. Diaspora is seen as a complex phrase with a variety of connotations in the modern context. At present, diasporic experiences bear witness to numerous overlapping ideas. As migrants live in multiple places geographically, the diasporas can be characterised as transnational. Charles Nolin argues that the migrants in the work go through a process in which they begin from “ignorance of or misconception about himself and ends up more knowledgeable about himself and the nature of the world” (182). Nolin, a migrant writer explain migrant’s transition from a small environment to a larger one, most frequently form the village to the city. The migrant’s journey takes him through a variety of settings, circumstances,

difficulties, struggles and victories that refine him just like gold does when it is purified in a furnace.

M. G. Vassanji, the prolific African Asian Canadian writer explores themes of journey, individual independence, ambiguity and contradiction in ethnicity and cultural survival. His own tale begins to take shape. He recreates the history of the displaced and writer about the non-heroic, oppressed, marginalised and hyphenated. Vassanji, who immigrated to Canada in 1978 to work as a research associate and lecturer at the University of Toronto, at present lives far from his native Tanzania and occasionally travels back there. The history of the dislocated is chronicled and rewritten by him on his own experiences. His compositions contain a sense of wonder and surprise. He is a storyteller who uses history as a tool in his narratives to set out on a journey of discovery of roots and reasons.

The underlining theme in Vassanji's works is journey. Human race, birds, animals have been moving due to external pressure or internal motivation. This movement spans the cultural and social as well as the physical spheres. Journey makes an immigrant move physically. Physical travel can also serve as a metaphor for one's progress toward self-individuation. In order to embrace diversity, plurality, even contradiction and dichotomy in both interpersonal and social interactions, journey constantly attempt to renew itself with greater tenacity. Vassanji describes the voyage of the Shamsis, an Indian Muslim immigrant community that relocated to the British-German border, as well as the events that appear in Pius Fernandes' diary in *The Book of Secrets*. In the book, every human charter makes progress toward a comfortable place. The action of the story take place moving throughout the cities of Mombasa, Voi, Kikono and Nairobi in Kenya, as well as Moshi, Taveta, Tanga, Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar in Tanzania.

The migrant is forced to face the reality of migration and discovering of themselves in *The Book of Secretes*. Vassanji introduces Pius Fernandes, a retired educator who in 1988 discovered an ancient diary in the rear of an Eat African store. Alfred Corbin, a British colonial administrator, wrote it in 1913. The recorded and the order of events in the diary help him to take a journey. The narrator tell migrant are tracked like a wild animal in a foreign and mysterious land as "a trail that if followed would reveal much about the lies and time it witnessed and tell us why the diary finally surfaced where it did" (8). The novel depicts colonial habitation that spans seventy-five and three generations. exemplifies what Pratt calls" the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contract with each other and establish ongoing relations"(6). The main characters in the novel are in some sort of quest or journey, whether it be epic, psychological, emotional or physical, in search of a solution, solace, meaning or even the identity of migrants.

The journey raises the migrant's knowledge towards self-definition to a higher level. Physical travel emphasizes its worth by knowing and learning new things. The journey starts from the diary, which i written as a trip into the enigmatic beauty of the African continent and the custom of the Shamsi people. Corbin, a local Indian is introduced in the journey. Part One 'The Administrator', begin with the following lines:

We carry within us the wonders we seek without us:

There is all Africa and her prodigies in us. (1)

The first line itself narrates in detail of Corbin's journey toward Kikono. He indicated the new information in which he collects in the foreign land. The diary contains event from 1 March, 1914-24 July, 1914 in fragments. Corbin reaches Kikono and this appeared to him as he approached the town:

The Indians stood in a row, somewhat solemn-looking in white drill suits and red or black fezzes, or in dhoties and turbans. Next to them formed a shorter line of Swahili, in kanzus and embroidered caps, some in waistcoats. There was a third, large group of vendors, servants, and occasional labourers, and, with them, tribesmen and women from neighbouring area. Thus they stood waiting, occasionally looking up, turning or craning their necks towards the road that entered town and would bring the new representative of the King. (26)

Corbin's journey makes him out a new job and his community people. Kikoo, seems to be an Indian haven inhabited by the Sahmsi sect. The town has emerged from a single duka into a prosperous business centre under the leadership of its mukhi Jamali like mukhis everywhere. They are not only paid financially but also with honour and respect and promise of reward. They establish themselves as devoted British subjects and request official township status from the government as a result. The government has despatched an Assistant District Commissioner so they can make up their mind. As a result, Alfred Corbin moves to this community to start this project.

Leaving home is a necessary and inevitable choice. The physical journeys in *The Book of Secrets* represent the character's movement toward self-individuation. When the story begins, the movement starts from various manifestations. According to Jayaram, the migrant carries:

with [him] a socio-cultural baggage which among other things consists of (a) predefined social identity, (b) a set of religious beliefs and practices, (c) a framework of norms and values governing family and kinship organization, and food habits and (d) language. More important, the migrants are not inevitably irrevocably cut off completely from the land of their breed. They themselves may retain physical and/or mental contact with their homeland often characterized by what is called 'the myth of return. (16)

The migrant has to leave cultural heritage, religious faith and practices as well as their whole life style. Their notion is to return to their old land but they remain in their thoughts rather than physical.

The colonial era also saw significant dispersion during British imperialism, when local population in Asian nations were forcibly removed from their homes to labour on rubber or sugar plantations in Europe or built railways. Movement are greatly impacted by a number of elements. They fall under the categorized of economic, personal, demographic

socio cultural, psychological and political elements. Among these factors, the personal factor continues to be a primary driver of migration.

In Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets*, Pipa plans on moving together with his wife Mariamu to his mother who lives in Moshi, a town situated in the German territory. The war has unexpectedly begun, and the borders are sealed. Pipa must serve as a servant for the British and eventually the German side of the conflict. Shortly after, the British are able to take back control of Kikono, which the Germans had previously taken. Pipa works as a messenger to British. The journey gives the couple new jobs to run their family happily. Pipa conveys, "And he would feel a surge of pity for it. Where the beast thinks it was going . . . did it see rewards at the end of its journey, did it hope to meet a mate, did it hope for happiness, children old age?" (15). These voyages not only take the migrant to a new place, but also open up a new chapter and depth of insight in their lives.

Every journey has its own goal and aims. Ali, the son of Pipa, moves to Dar to live with his new family after the death of his mother. The diary informs us, "Dar es Salaam was all that he had been promised it would be . . . Her, surely, was opportunity; yet how was to go about finding it? Who was he in this town, who knew him? A he was to find out; you had to . . . be somebody. Of his savings only a little remained and certainly not enough to go back home the way he had come" (14). This goal is to get away from the poverty which exists in his motherland. Ali is first dissatisfied with his adventure. He is well cared for, exactly different from the one he has today. He therefore intends to flee to England. He elopes to London after getting married to Rita. His father departs from him in order to build a happy life with his new wife. Migrants have the chance to challenge themselves physically, mentally and emotionally as they overcome obstacles and discover more about themselves and their surroundings. Ali gains a lot of new knowledge while migrating.

In *The Book of Secrets*, every main character and supporting cast member moves at least once. While Corbin, Maynard and Mariamu are relocated, Pipa, Pius and Gregory represent the three most intriguing migrations in Vassanji's book. Pipa, who is from Moshi, travels to Tanga, Dar es Salaam and Kikona. He migrates to forget Mariamu, to be married, to avoid German and British agents, to escape embarrassment and eventually, for his own personal reasons. Pipa is a figure that is both restless and homeless. As a result, immigrants in modern literary works create and rewrite their identities to fit into an open, varied, dynamic, multicultural and transnational society.

Vassanji emphasises the significance of the daily commute for self-discovery. Even though it seems minor and unimportant, each person has a special journey to go on. The search of something new helps the migrants to transcend socio-cultural subjugation. It makes them more completely alive with various concepts of life and place, which is the goal of the journey. Being completely aware involves suffering and navigating daily existence has its challenges. However, the rewards for taking the journey are great. Journey improves intelligence and goodness in one's self without worrying about the past. Migrants need to have a coherent, acceptable and constantly revised life story to exist in the social world with a comfortable sense of being a good, socially proper and stable. The journey is not another elf-

improvement project, nor is meant to reach some ideal perfection. It is about finding and honouring what is true.

Works Cited

Primary Source

Vassanji, M. G. *The Book of Secrets*. McClelland, 1994.

Secondary Sources

Jayaram, N., editor *The Indian Diaspora Dynamics of Migration*. Sage Publication, 2004.

Nnolin, Charles. "The Journey Motif: Vehicle and Form, Structure, and Meaning in Mongo Beti's Mission to Kala." *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 2, 1976, pp. 181-194.

Pearson, Carol S. *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live by*. Harper, 1998.

Pratt, Mary Louis. *Mary Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge. 1992.