

The 'Translocal' Nationalism of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora: A Reading of Selected Short Stories of V.N. Giridharan

Gnanaseelan Jeyaseelan

Introduction

A growing Canadian writer in Tamil, V.N. Giridharan, places the reader of his short stories in the isolated Northern American dominated culture of Canada as well as in the struggling homeland soil in Sri Lanka. His exploration of the effects of asylum-seeking as well as immigration in Canada on the most vital and cherished components of traditional Tamil culture and Tamil homeland of Sri Lanka – from where he had moved to Toronto at a very early age – is pervaded by wry irony and satire. His treatment of character, however, is not without pathos and a prescription for cultural enervation and eventual prevalence of translocal consciousness which is, as explored by Sriskandarajah (2004), the consciousness of

linkages within the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora so that, despite being numerically small and geographically dispersed, it has emerged as a vocal and influential force in shaping political developments in Sri Lanka. The diaspora's economic, cultural, and political importance in relation to the Tamil community in Sri Lanka has also increased. (p. 496)

Further he succinctly demonstrates the causes behind the boom of these literary and non-literary support by observing that

the collective self-identification of a diaspora as a distinct community in a triadic relationship with host society and home society also has political implications. Collectively, the diaspora community is strategically positioned to engage in both immigrant politics (say, to better its situation within the host society) and homeland politics (say, to better the situation in the land left behind). The latter, a form of "translocal" political involvement, has come to be labeled as 'long-distance nationalism' (Anderson, 1998) or 'diaspora nationalism. (ibid. p.496)

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These themes are perhaps more relevant today than ever before since the Canadian Tamil population is undoubtedly better able now to empathize with certain tensions informing the migrant experience as V.N. Giridharan depicts it. Perhaps his stories are the illustrations of Sollors' description of

the complex psychology of national and ethnic affiliation, “ethnicity ... is a matter not of content, but of the importance that individuals ascribe to it” (1986).

The short stories translated by Latha Ramakrishnan are under analysis here. The writer is a novelist in Canada. He has his publications in Tamil Nadu as well. Indira Parthasarathy, a popular writer of Tamilnadu, had included the story ‘Co (w)untry Issue’ in the book titled ‘Paniyum Panaiyum’ (‘The Snow and The Palmyra’). The Singapore Government had prescribed his novel ‘Pondhu Paravaigal’ (Birds of burrow’) for the students of Tamil. In addition, he is the editor of a literary website: pathivukal.com.

History of Sri Lankan Diaspora

The origin of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora could be traced back to the Northeast of Sri Lanka, called Ceylon during the colonial period. While Sri Lanka’s total population (around 20 million) is differentiated along ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional lines, the Sri Lankan Tamils are identified as a distinct community. However, it is in the context of growing political conflict in Sri Lanka that the formation of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora numbering around 7,00,000 should be seen. In the decades after independence, rivalry between the island’s minority Sri Lankan Tamils and the Majority Sinhalese became the source of intense violent confrontation. The Sinhalese perceived the Tamils to have been a privileged minority during the colonial rule and began to discriminate against the Tamils in the Sinhalese-dominated state apparatus. Several incidents of anti-Tamil violence, such as the 1983 riots in the capital Colombo that resulted in the death of an estimated 3,000 Tamil civilians, led to fear and anxiety among the Tamils that their human security was at stake in Sri Lanka. Consequently, the island descended into a separatist civil war between the Sri Lankan armed forces and several Tamil militant groups, which turned much of the northeast into a war zone (Sriskandarajah, 2004). In its first two decades, Sri Lanka’s civil war claimed at least 60,000 lives directly, and resulted in death, destruction and displacement in the northeast. These insecure situations forced the Tamils to seek asylums in the West. Sriskandarajah (2004) says that it is likely, therefore, that one in every four Sri Lankan Tamils now lives outside Sri Lanka and that as many as one in every two Sri Lankan Tamils has been displaced.

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Identity crisis

Canada has experienced the heaviest influx of immigrants with many recent immigrants having come from the nations of Asia. These Asians are typically faced with varying degrees of prejudice, resistance, and exclusion from the dominant culture and must also straggle to find a space for their

own indigenous tradition and ideology in the new home. These have become increasingly prominent literary themes. The quest for self-definition and the generational divide among members of first and second generation Tamil immigrant families and communities have encouraged many to revisit the homeland during the recent Ceasefire Agreement period (2002). R. Dharani (2004), a critic writing on V.N.Giridharan's fiction has this to say:

There is an other group of writers who represent the tenuous nature of freedom of the Tamils and tend to reflect not only of the deep and sturdy roots of their struggle in an alien land, but also of the growing and deep felt need of Tamils, living as political refugees to go back to their roots - in search of their own identity. Some had given expression to this need in English. The literature of these people is called 'Pulam Peyarnthor Literature' (the literature of the expatriates). (www.geotamil.com/ctamils R_DHARANI_ON_VNG.htm)

V.N. Giridharan reveals the altered fiber of a community that has tried to adhere rigidly to the traditional ideals of an idealized Tamil culture in a North American nation that physically serves as home, yet remains insistently alien. Recognizing the ambiguity of the boundaries of diaspora, he presents the plight of the diaspora which can not still feel a homeland as a place that has to be imagined by nurturing a sense of communal distinctiveness, socially though not geographically. Under these circumstances, the imagination of "home", however, does not have to take the shape of a particular community rooted in a particular sort of place, whereas modernist theories of nation conceptualize nations as a particular community rooted in a specific place, geography, or physical setting (Billig 1995).

Whenever the homeland people who have their relatives and friends in the immigrated countries contact them over the phone or letter, the immigrants never fail to express emptiness, a sense of boredom resulting from the mechanized life style and a reservation to mingle with the host community resisting assimilation into their socio-cultural framework. Though they express a yearning to be in their mother land within their familiar social and physical setting, their priority for personal, political and economic security lures them to settle in these new lands.

The long-hour monotonous odd jobs and labors do not satisfy their fundamental longings for socio-cultural identity. They are not able to find themselves a political identity in their host countries. These are the identities which can give fulfillment and complete meaning to their personal and social life. As a result, their social conscience pushes them to see a wide gap

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between what they feel as a 'wild freedom' in their new land and what their kith and kin feel as a 'wild fiefdom' in the homeland. This gap creates a vacuum in life in the west and instills a thrust to practice a long distance nationalism and culture in their host land. It also persuades them to support the political struggle financially and instills in them a moral commitment to the political resistance in their homeland.

Locating the story in the homeland context

In the short story **An End and A Beginning**, a unique turning point takes place in the plot and theme which is very radical within the setting and the context of the socio-cultural standards of the Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka. The story is about two childhood friend-a young married woman Yamuna living in Jaffna and a young bachelor Rajendra working in Colombo during the relative calm period "after the exit of foreign battalions". During the conflict, people living within the intensive conflict affected Northeast were rarely allowed to travel to the southern Sri Lanka and those who travelled would be either employees working in the public and private sector establishments in the South, or traders or would-be migrants planning to leave the country. It would them take years to pay a visit home. It is when Rajendra comes back to his village in Jaffna from Colombo that, the story unfolds: his childhood friend Yamuna, now married and a mother of a child, is facing a family crisis due to her becoming a sexually abused victim of a soldier.

அவளது கலியாணத்துக்குக்கூட நான் போகவில்லை. மோதலும் இரத்தக்களரியுமாக நாடிருந்த சூழ்நிலையில் நடந்த அந்தக் கலியாண தினத்தன்று சந்தேகத்தின்பேரில் கொழும்பில் கைது செய்யப்பட்ட இளைஞர்களில் ஒருவனாக நான் இருந்த நிலையில்... இந்த இருவருட்களில் எத்தனையோ மாறுதல்கள். ...வாழ்வே ஒரு மோதல்தான். தப்பிப்பிழைத்தல் தான். இந்த மோதல்களிற்குள் இன்னுமொரு மோதலாக தப்பிப் பிழைத்தலாக.. நடந்து முடிந்த சம்பவங்கள். இன்று மழை விட்டும் தூவானம் விடாத நிலை. (ஒரு முடிவும் விடிவும், அமெரிசா: சிறுகதைகளும் குறுநாவலும் ப. 49)

Thiayagarajah, Yamuna's husband, unable to bear the shock of his wife's present state begins 'treating her with utmost disdain and contempt at a time when his support and companionship were needed by her the most'. He abandons her. Rajendra cannot bear this atrocity:

இவளிற்கு இந்த நிலை வந்திருக்க வேண்டாம். எனக்குள் ஒருமுறை கூறிக்கொண்டேன். பாழாய்ப் போன சமூகத்தின் மேல் கோபம் கோபமாய் சலிப்பும் வெறுப்புமாய் வந்தது. அவளது

கலியாண தினத்தன்று சந்தேகத்தின்பேரில் கொழும்பில் கைது செய்யப்பட்ட இளைஞர்களில் ஒருவனாக நான் இருந்த நிலையில்

இந்த நிலைக்கும் இந்தச் சிந்தனையோட்டங்களும் நடைமுறைகளும் அல்லவா காரணம். (மேற்படி பக். 47, 48)

Rajendra takes a radical decision—a decision which, he knows, everybody would generally oppose, that is, to marry her.

Here, the interesting idea is that a diasporic writer fictionalizes the traditional themes of chastity of women and sanctity of marriage from a western radical point, in the setting of the Sri Lankan conflict. The writer might have acquired this radical thinking of marrying a divorced or abandoned woman, especially a mother, from his host country where this is taken for granted. It is noted that among the Sri Lankan Tamils marrying a widowed woman is an appreciable thing and many have exemplified it, but marrying an abandoned and sexually abused mother in Sri Lanka is really radical thinking! But by making the character Rajendra, who is not a migrant but a native, carry out this radical act, the writer locates his translocal radicalist thinking within the Sri Lankan society and through, the character, the writer expresses his yearning for a social transformation to take place in Sri Lanka.

Generally for the homesick immigrants, their countrywomen embody the fidelity and acceptance that elude them in a hostile new land. This nostalgia drives them to create a romanticized ideal of these women onto which they project their memories of and desire for their homeland. But in this story, the writer sees his homeland's victimized woman from a new perspective of radical reform.

Locating the story in the diasporic Context

'Co(w)untry Issue' is a story about a character called Ponnaiya, who, on his way to get his vehicle serviced, sees a cow fighting for its freedom in the middle of the main road. It has escaped from the nearest slaughterhouse and is now blocking the road. Some including the slaughterhouse men are trying to chase it away from the road. Ponnaiya is really astonished to watch the cow fight to get away from these people and to be free. This evokes the memory of his own native land, where his people are treated in the same manner. Here the cow struggles for its freedom from its slaughterers and wants to go back where it lives with its family. The choice for the cow is to oppose the crowd or be put into the slaughterhouse again. Ponnaiya finds it a heart-rending because he too has witnessed its pathetic situation and empathizes with the cow:

ஊரில் இருப்பவர்களின் நினைவுகளும் எழாமல் இல்லை. இந்த மாட்டைப் போன்ற நிலையில் இருப்பவர்கள் எத்தனை பேர்...? அரைகுறையாகத் தப்பி மீண்டும் அகப்பட்டவர்கள் தப்புவதற்கு

the interesting idea is that a diasporic writer fictionalizes the traditional themes of chastity of women and sanctity of marriage from a western radical point, in the setting of the Sri Lankan conflict

முடியாமல் சமாதியாகிப் போனவர்கள்... ஒரு மா(நாட்டுப்) பிரச்சினை, அமெரிக்கா சிறுகதைகளும் குறுநாவலும்) பக். 2526

He wants to buy the cow and take it to his own apartment, but knows that would be impossible. Further, he identifies his life in the living is similar with the present plight of the cow. He realizes that he cannot help it in this land, which is not really 'his'. If it had been Jaffna, he could tie the cow in the backyard thus saving it from these slaughterers, but it is not possible in his narrow apartment. At last, the tragedy comes to an end when the cow is shot with a tranquilliser and taken to the slaughterhouse again. Ever after, Ponnaiya feels strongly for the cow. Its determined fight for freedom makes him vow not to eat meat in future as he had done while in Sri Lanka. There is a symbolic allusion to the oppressive forces of the Sri Lankan majoritarianism and the indifferent attitude of the International Community towards the Tamil's plight:

மாடு தன்னுயிரைக் காப்பதற்கானதொரு ஜீவமரணப் போராட்டத்தில் ஈடுபட்டிருக்கின்றது. இதை அடக்க வேடிக்கை பார்க்க படம்பிடிக்க ஒரு கூட்டம். ஒன்றிற்கும் செயல்படி முடியாத இயலாத கூட்டம்! (மேற்படி 27)

Further the spread of slaughterhouses alludes to the increase in oppressive violent forces on the globe in various forms: on ethnic, colour, and religious lines. The narrator reveals that the diasporic community has a necessity to accept and adapt to these forces in the globe:

இடப்புறத்தில் கனடா பக்கர்ஸின் ஸ்லோட்டர் கவுஸ் பெரியதொரு இடத்தைப் பிடித்துப் படர்ந்திருந்தது. ஒவ்வொருநாளும் நூற்றுக்கணக்கான மாடுகளைத் துண்டு போடும் பெரியதொரு கசாப்புக் கூடம்.

பொன்னையா இயற்கையிலேயே சிறிது கருணை வாய்ந்தவன். ஏனைய உயிர்களின்மேல் அன்பு வைக்க நினைப்பவன். ஊரிவை இருக்கும் மட்டும் சுத்த சைவம் தான். இங்கு வந்ததும் கொஞ்சங் கொஞ்சம் மாறிவிட்டான். 'இங்குத்தைய கிளைமாட்டிற்கு இதையும் சாப்பிடாட்டி மனுசன் செத்துத் துலைக்க வேண்டியது தான். (மேற்படி ப. 54)

There is a symbolic allusion to the oppressive forces of the Sri Lankan majoritarianism and the indifferent attitude of the International Community towards the Tamil's plight

The story 'Manhole' unfolds the tragic tale of the life of most of the refugees who live in the manholes. There are two characters-an Indian Refugee, and a Nigerian taxi-driver, who is happy to address himself as 'chief'.

'எனக்கென்ன... நான் எப்போதுமே ஓ. கே. தான்' என்றுவிட்டுச் சிரித்தான். அருகிலிருந்த சாமியும் சிரித்தான். இவன் உண்மையிலேயே ஒரு 'சீவ்'. இவனது சொந்த நாடான

நைஜீரியாவில் இவனை நம்பி, இவனிற்குக் கீழ் மூவாயிரம் பேர்களிருக்கின்றார்கள். இவனது இனம் நைஜீரியாவிலுள்ள பல ஆதிக் குடிகளில் ஒன்று. ஒவ்வொரு முறையும் இவனது ஒப்புதலிற்காக பத்திரங்களை இங்கு அனுப்புவார்கள். இங்குள்ள பல்கலைக் கழகமொன்றில் பட்டம் பெற்றவன். 'வின்ரர்' இல் இங்கு டாக்ஸி ஒட்டுவான். 'சமர்' என்றதும் நைஜீரியாவிற்கு ஓடிவிடுவான். இவனது மக்களிற்கு இவன் இங்கு டாக்ஸி ஒட்டுவது தெரியாது. தெரிந்தால் இங்கிருக்க விட்டு வைக்க மாட்டார்கள். இவனைப் போல் வேறு பல 'சீவ்' களும் டாக்ஸி ஒட்டுவதாக ஒரு முறை இவன் கூறியிருந்தான். (மான்ஹோல், அமெரிசா சிறுகதைகளும் குறுநாவலும்) பக். 2526 ப. 11)

The pain of living away from the homeland is reflected in a different perspective, which includes the blacks, and the Indians in addition to Sri Lankan Tamils. The empathy shown mutually among them is really heartening. What binds them together is the identity crisis of living as refugees doing odd jobs. They were well off in their country with social respect and they found some meaning in life over there. The mysterious Sami (saint) sitting on the manhole, looking sarcastically at the Parliament building, is an apt description of symbolic value, decrying the significance it has to 'the real natives' of Canada and the callous disregard for the refugees settled in the country politically, culturally, and economically.

"ஹாய் 'சீவ்' எப்படியிருக்கிறாய்" என்றான். ஆயிரிக் 'சீவ்' அமெரிசா 'சீவ்' வைப் பார்த்து குசலம் விசாரிக்கின்றான். சாமியின் இனத்தவர்கள் ஒரு காலத்தில் அமெரிக்கக் கண்டத்தையே ஆண்டவர்கள். ஆண்ட பரம்பரையின் வாரிசுகளில் ஒருவன் இன்று சிறுபான்மைக்குள் சிறுபான்மையாக வாழ்ந்து கொண்டிருக்கிறார்கள். (மேற்படி பக். 11, 12)

The refugees have to find their own ways of survival in the distant wealthy land which alienates them individually and collectively, not recognizing or valuing their identities at all levels-human, familial, social, political, cultural and economic 'living and being' in Canada. Wit and humour are displayed in the native white Canadians calling everybody-no matter which part of South Asia they come from-'Indians'. This mere over-generalized, indifferent naming suppresses or hides the diversity of linguistic, ethnic, national, religious and social identities they have. At last, Sami dies in the manhole itself in isolation, devoid of any respect and meaning either for his living or for his dying. Only the refugees feel pity for the fellow-refugees, nobody else. The story winds up with a paradoxical juxtaposition of the glowing light of the Ontario Parliament building with that of the darkness of the manhole.

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The story ‘**Husband**’ further illustrates the condition of migrant labourers doing odd and ordinary jobs in these lands of hope and prosperity. In a code language they have evolved among themselves, ‘playing guitar’ means ‘washing the dishes’ in a restaurant. Here the dish-washer recalls his friendship with Greeks, before coming to the restaurant. He identifies his Tamil people with the Greeks in talking about their past glory. The narrator is now exposed to the vagaries of winter in Toronto. This strange and extreme physical climatic condition is compared with the figurative climate of conflict in his homeland. He begins to think of his homeland nostalgically.

இன்று நம்மவர் சீரழிந்து கொண்டிருப்பதற்குக் காரணமே நாட்டு நிலைமை தான். நாட்டு நிலைமை தானே எல்லோரையும் ஓடஓட விரட்டி வைக்கிறது. அதனால்தானே பிரச்சினைகளும். நாட்டு நிலைமை மட்டும் சீராகட்டும் தற்போது நடைபெறும் சீரழிவுகள் அரைவாசியாகக் குறைந்துவிடும். என்று நண்பனொருவன் கூறிக் கொண்டிருந்தான். (கணவன், அமெரிக்கா: சிறுகதைகளும் குறுநாவலும் ப.43)

The story also focuses on the suspicion of the narrator about his wife. This points to the psychologically and culturally torn situation of immigrant male refugees whose spouses, while being illegally smuggled in, are, many a time, sexually harassed or abused by the agents of the illegal human trafficking. This creates suspicions among the males who are continue to map their cultural identity exclusively on to the chastity of women and thus, hesitate to marry non-Tamils. Ironically, this too forces them to morally support the cultural revival, one of the many offshoots of the Tamil nationalist struggle in Sri Lanka.

In the story **The Homeless**, the narrator encounters a *bushy moustached* middle aged South African man, Clarke who holds a *plastic container with a label written as ‘Clarke for Toronto Mayor’*. The man is determined to contest *the election of Toronto Mayor* though he is homeless and dwells *on the streets*. This surprises the narrator and, on further inquiry, the South African reveals the secondary treatment the refugees get here. By winning the election, he hopes to fight for the emancipation of the refugees in the city. The narrator, amused at his decision, compares his saying to a lunatic’s statement taken from a fictional Sri Lankan comic story, but finally realizes his worth. “*Though Toronto city is bustling with activities, the narrator perceives it in chaos*”. Thus, he alienates himself from this immediate environment and views the brave albeit poor Clarke as a rebel fighting against the injustice meted out to them. The narrator identifies his social homelessness with Clarke’s physical homelessness. Clarke’s determination to fight back symbolizes the Tamils’ determination to fight back in their

The man is determined to contest the election of Toronto Mayor though he is homeless and dwells on the streets

homeland. In the past he had been a drug seller and a pimp but now he is a changed man. He says:

அதன் பின் தான் உணர்ந்தேன்..காசு தான் வாழ்க்கை அல்லவென்று..தற்போது என்னுடைய நோக்கமெல்லாம் மக்கள் அனைவரையும் நேசிப்பது தான்..உண்மையாக நேசிப்பது தான்... உனக்குத் தெரியாது...மேலும்...' என்று நிறுத்தினான். 'என்ன நிறுத்தி விட்டாய்...?' ஆர்வம் ததும்பக் கேட்டேன். 'நான் இந்த சிக்னலில் பிழையாகக் கடந்தால் நிறுத்தப்படுவேன். அறிவுரைகள் கூறப்படுவேன். காவல் துறையினர் கண்டால் என்னை விடமாட்டார்கள். உன்னையும் தான்.. ஆனால் ஒரு வெள்ளையினத்தவருக்கு இவ்விதமானதொரு நிலை ஏற்படுமென்று நீ நினைக்கின்றாயா? வந்தேறு குடிகள், சிறுபான்மையினர் அனைவரும் நன்கு பாதிக்கப்படுகின்றார்கள். அவர்கள் அனைவருக்கும் நான் உதவ வேண்டும். அதற்காகத் தான் நான் இந்தத் தேர்தலில் போட்டியிடவுள்ளேன்...' (வீடற்றவன், http://www.geotamil.com/ctamils/vng_stories.html)

Like Clarke, he too yearns for a change in the life style of the diasporic community! It symbolizes a thrust for altered socio-cultural and translocal political practices in Canada. The narrator says:

இந்த மாநகர் ஒவ்வொரு நாளும் இத்தனை வருடங்கள் கழிந்த நிலையிலும் எனக்குப் புதுப் புது அனுபவங்களைத் தர மறந்ததே யில்லை. இதனை அறிதலென்பது முடியாத செயல் போன்று பட்டது. கடலின் ஆழத்தை விட இதன் ஆழம் அதிகமாக விருக்கலாமென்று புதியதொரு பழமொழியினை உருவாக்கும் அளவுக்கு ஆழமானதாக எனக்குப் பட்டது. (மேற்படி)

Here, he is struck by both the positives and the negatives of the city life in the West. The diversity of human identity seems to him really a diversion from a real life purpose for people like him—the asylum seekers. The development seems to him a subtle discrimination against the powerless, the landless, the homeless, and the jobless. In this story, the writer insists on the concerns of the diasporic literary writers addressing the issues of the land of settlement relating to the diasporic community as being apart from the concerns of traditional immigrant literature, which has become suspect precisely through its tendency to reinvent “nationalism” in order “to substantiate politically motivated feelings of peoplehood” (Sollors, 1986).

In the story titled **Mice**, the narrator encounters the problems of cockroaches in his apartment first, and later, when he moves with his family to another apartment, he encounters the problems of rats. To pacify his wife, who complains about this, and to safeguard his child, he tries to catch the mice using mousetraps. One day, he stealthily watches the movement of a

கடலின் ஆழத்தை விட
இதன் ஆழம்
அதிகமாகவிருக்கலா
மென்று புதியதொரு
பழமொழியினை
உருவாக்கும் அளவுக்கு
ஆழமானதாக
எனக்குப் பட்டது.

mouse and its attempts at reaching the food at the dining table by working hard to climb the table. Philosophically, he reflects and wonders at its determination, speed and hard work in attaining its objective. This story bears many symbolic allusions to the Sri Lankan Tamil conflict and the revival of their language and culture. His wife symbolizes the revival of their language and culture in Canada; for, the narrator says:

கனடா வந்து ஆறு மாதங்களிலேயே பலரிற்குத் தமிழ் மறந்து போய்விடுகின்றது. என் மனைவியோ கனடா வந்து ஆறு வருடங்கள் ஓடியும் இன்னும் சுத்தமான யாழ்ப்பாணத் தமிழில்தான் கதைத்து வருகின்றாள். தமிழ் மறந்தவர்களைப் பற்றிக் கூறினால் 'இதெல்லாம் சுத்தப் புலுடா; பம்மாத்து; சுத்துமாத்து' என்பாள். (சண்டெலிகள், அமெரிசா: சிறுகதை சுளம் குறுநாவலும், ப. 35)

He finds a similarity between the struggle of the mouse and the struggle of the Tamil refugees in Canada to establish themselves and that of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. He reflects:

இந்தப் பிரபஞ்சத்தில் படைக்கப்பட்ட ஒவ்வொரு உயிருமே தனது வாழ்நாளில் இயலுமானமட்டும் முயன்றுதான் பார்க்கின்றது சுண்டெலியைப் போல் ஏன் என்னைப் போல் என்றும் வேண்டுமானால் சொல்லிக் கொள்ளலாம். நாட்டில் பிரச்சினை மூண்டுவீட்டதென்று சொந்த மண்ணைவிட்டு வந்ததிலிருந்து இன்றுவரை எத்தனை வழிகளில் எத்தனை முயற்சிகள். ஒன்று சரி வந்தால் இன்னுமொரு முயற்சி. ஒன்று பிழைத்து விட்டாலும் இன்னுமொரு முயற்சி. எத்தனை அதிசயமான பிரமாண்டமான பிரபஞ்சம். புதிர்கள் நிறைந்த பிரபஞ்சம். (மேற்படி 37, 38)

While describing the struggle of the mouse, he uses many conflict terms to allude to the struggle of the Tamils: unbearable troubles, attaining the grace to accept defeat and valiantly moving over, untold agonies, added to our woes, to find some solution to this burning problem, to meet in the battlefield, various strategies awarded for victory in warfare, to know about our enemies, The more we gather valuable information about them the easier their capture could be. He wonders at the constant, repeated struggle of the mouse:

சிலவேளை அது தன் முயற்சியில் வெற்றியடையலாம். அடையாமற் போகலாம். அதற்காக அது தன் முயற்சியைக் கைவிடும் வகையைச் சேர்ந்தது போல் தென்படவில்லை. இறுதி வெற்றி கிடைக்கும்வரை அல்லது களைத்துச் சோரும்வரை அது தன் முயற்சியைத் தொடரத்தான் போகின்றது. இந்தச் சின்னஞ்சிறு உயிரிற்குள்ள்தான் எத்தனை நூதனமான வைராக்கியம்! (மேற்படி 38)

இந்தப் பிரபஞ்சத்தில்
படைக்கப்பட்ட ஒவ்வொரு
உயிருமே தனது
வாழ்நாளில்
இயலுமானமட்டும்
முயன்றுதான்
பார்க்கின்றது
சுண்டெலியைப் போல் ஏன்
என்னைப் போல் என்றும்
வேண்டுமானால்
சொல்லிக் கொள்ளலாம்

The short story ‘**Where are you from?**’ deals with the critical issue of political alienation. The immediate question the ‘native’ White Canadians the immediate question ask whenever they meet asylum-seekers is, “Where are you from?” Here too, the narrator, a taxi owner cum driver, encounters two ‘natives’ asking this question. The narrator, now a Canadian citizen in a legal sense-it has been ten years since he came from Sri Lanka-is sickened by this socio-culturally painful question, which reminds him of the bitter truth that the immigrants don’t belong to this land. He does counteract the natives by asking them the same question, for they too came here as settlers some centuries ago. However, while attempting to reveal the bias of the ‘natives’ towards the non-natives in terms of the land of origin, the writer also wants to reveal another hard fact-that the recently settled asylum seekers too are biased because they ask the same question when they meet a fellow immigrant from Sri Lanka; thus exposing the fact that they do not identify themselves with the land in which they have settled. The writer might indeed be warning us that “unless identity politics can transcend the nation, escaping the bounds of the homeland, the radicalism of the challenge to old images and narratives is critically constrained within the assumption of nationalism” (Gilroy, 1993).

Conclusion

The hard, indigestible fact is that after having experienced discriminatory treatment on ethnic and racist lines in Sri Lanka, this Srilankan Tamil diaspora faces the same treatment again not only on ethnic and racist grounds but also on colour lines. This is the underlying cause for their positive as well as negative translocal political practices. On the whole, these prevalent conditions in Canada have made them feel culturally and politically alienated and induce them to engage in translocal nationalist practices which give vent to their pent up, suppressed feeling. However, the characters portrayed in these stories are located neither “here” nor “there” but in an increasingly hybrid space. Therefore, V.N. Giridharan’s work is an instance of the new “intermittent time and interstitial space” in literary studies (Bhabha,1990).

Diasporic literary writing, therefore, has been a medium of relief for these culturally alienated. The literary writers too practise this translocal nationalism through their creative work. V.N. Giridharan’s (2004) statement on his literary career provides an appropriate conclusion to the arguments of this paper:

unless identity politics can transcend the nation, escaping the bounds of the homeland, the radicalism of the challenge to old images and narratives is critically constrained within the assumption of nationalism

எமது புலம் பெயர்ந்த சூழலில் எற்படும் நிலைமைகளையும் அதேசமயம் எமது நாட்டுப் பிரச்சினைகளை மையமாக வைத்தும் என் படைப்புகள் எழுந்துள்ளன. இன்றைய புலம் பெயர்ந்த எமது தமிழ்த் தலைமுறையைப் பொறுத்தவரையில் புலம்பெயர்ந்த நாட்டுச் சூழலிற்கும் புலத்தின் நினைவுகளுக்கு மிடையில் அகப்பட்டு ஒரு வித திரிசங்கு வாழ்க்கை நடத்தும்

நிலைமை. இத்தலைமுறையினரில் நானும் ஒருவன் என்ற வகையில் எனது படைப்புகளில் புலத்தின் பிரச்சினைகளையும், புலம் பெயர்ந்த நாட்டுச் சூழலின் நிலைமைகளையும் சித்தரிப்பதை என்னால் தவிர்க்க முடியாது. நிறப்பிரச்சினை யென்பது புலம் பெயர்ந்து வாழும் சூழலின் முக்கியமான பிரச்சினை. புலம் பெயர்ந்த ஒவ்வொருவரும் எதிர்கொள்ளும் முக்கியமான பிரச்சினை. நாணய எம் தலைமுறையும் இதற்கு விதிவிலக்கல்ல. (எனது கதைகள், அமெரிசா: சிறுகதைகளும் குறுநாவலும், ப. 7)

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Paper presented at the UGC National Seminar Session on "Issues of Identity and Culture in Recent Asian Diasporic Fiction": Department of English, New College, Chennai-14, on March 13th and 14th 2007.

புலம்பெயர்ந்த நாட்டுச் சூழலிற்கும் புலத்தின் நினைவுகளுக்குமிடையில் அகப்பட்டு ஒரு வித திரிசங்கு வாழ்க்கை நடத்தும் நிலைமை. இத்தலைமுறையினரில் நானும் ஒருவன் என்ற வகையில் எனது படைப்புகளில் புலத்தின் பிரச்சினைகளையும், புலம் பெயர்ந்த நாட்டுச் சூழலின் நிலைமைகளையும் சித்தரிப்பதை என்னால் தவிர்க்க முடியாது



Gnanaseelan Jeyaseelan

Lecturer, Vavuniya Campus
University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka
jeya86@hotmail.com