

Satendra Nandan's Works: Creating Social Consciousness through Literature

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Abstract

Dr. Satendra Nandan is an active politician and an excellent writer. He is a committed writer with a cause. Through his fiction, poetry, essays and short stories he not only tries to eradicate the vices of racism from the society but he also gives voice to the trauma and tribulations of the Indo-Fijians.

His sharp satire, humour and fine poetry reveals the socio-political subjugation of the Indian Diaspora from Fiji. His writing becomes a potent and veritable weapon for the eradication of racial discrimination, demarcation and political marginalization.

The present paper reviews his contribution in the field of literature and social awareness.

Key Words

Social awareness, Racism, Nostalgia, the Indo-Fijian Diaspora, Poems.

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Dr. Satendra Nandan is an award-winning writer and his works exhibit long saga of suffering, survival and strife of Indian indenture laborers in Fiji. His major works are; *Voices in the River* (1985), *The Wounded Sea* (1991), *Faces in a Village* (1991), *Lines Across Black Waters* (1997), *Fiji: Paradise in Pieces* (2000), *Requiem for a Rainbow: A Fijian Indian Story* (2001), *The Loneliness of Islands* (2007), *Between the Lines* (2009). After the coup of 1987, the power of indigenous people increased steadily and Indo-Fijians were marginalized. The state politics was very much disturbed and shattered by the uncertain political conditions, anti-democratic activities and the growing power of indigenous people. Dr. Satendra Nandan thought about his family's security and decided to leave his land of birth- Fiji, to settle in Australia. Nandan was shocked deeply and felt horrified by the Coup. He, with his works emerged as a major voice in Indo-Fijian literature. Ms Nazhat Shameem says in this context;

Prof. Nandan writes for the consequences, moral, social and economic of the exodus after the coups of 1987 and 2000, of the exile of whole communities and of the sense of betrayal suffered. He also writes for the Fiji society and achievements of these migrant people.(Shameem,1)

Moreover, he arrested the attention of critics and admirers with his focus on affliction of Indians in Fiji after the coups. According to Gillian Dooley,

Nandan does not shrink from criticizing his enemies. The chief aim of his writings is not a one sided polemic but a plea for humanity and reason to prevail once more in Fiji.(Dooley,02)

His most notable work *Fiji: Paradise in Pieces* expresses elaborately various burning issues like politics, colonialism, Indo-Fijian experience, tradition etc. Here, Dr. Nandan elaborately explores the causes and consequences of the coup, how it disturbs the current of social life. He brilliantly advocates his own stand as a writer, politician and more importantly as a Fiji born Indian, Dr. Nandan says;

To be Indian Fijian is to be aware of the complexity of our existence. It has taken us almost a hundred years to become integral to the Fiji landscape.(Nandan, 42)

In this essay collection he shows us that the Fijian landscape, atmosphere, culture and tradition which is strongly mingled in Indian community, is a veritable paradise, few years before the coup. Dr. Nandan has captured the realistic picture of the destroyed social

framework and traditional socio-political fabric shattered by the brutal racial discrimination. In the collection of speeches and essays, Dr. Nandan makes his readers aware about the racial attitude of the native Fijian towards Indians who settled there, hundreds of years ago, far from their own motherland, India. He discusses in detail the fate and future of Indo-Fijian community. In this respect Nandan writes;

The legends of Rama, Buddha, Christ and Mohammed help us to live and bring deeper illuminations into our hearts so that we may not regard our suffering and sacrifices as the greatest. In the lives of great souls we see the realities of the human condition and accept our own. It was not a quest for a narrow egotistical identity but a conquest of it so that one attains the larger identity: to lose oneself to gain a community, to lose one's community to gain a whole country, the quintessential idea contained in the Atman-Brahman concept.(Nandan, 34)

Dr. Satendra Nandan exquisitely blends memories, myths, social problems, history and politics of Fiji in his reflective poems collected in *Lines Across Black Waters*. Dr. Nandan with utmost realism records the social displacement of the Indians in Fiji. In this connection, a well-known critic Sudhir Kumar writes:

Satendra Nandan exquisitely translates the various aspects of the diasporic consciousness of the Indo-Fijians into the 36 poems included in this collection in which such diverse elements as contemporary politics, colonialism, ethnic conflicts, identity crisis, relocation of culture, nostalgia or longing for home, feeling of exile, loss and alienation and the prodigious play of mythical consciousness.(Kumar, 84)

This poetic work narrates the age-old era of indenture, when hundreds of Girmitiyas had spent their lives in squalid and suffocating lines. Dr. Nandan retells the saga of sorrow, suffering and sacrifice which the Indian labourers gave in an alien land. They shed their blood and sow their bones for converting an island into a prosperous nation. In *Lines Across The Black Waters* Dr. Nandan says that the girmitiyas crossed the black waters dispossessed and dislocated, lived in hellish hovels and survived the strife of their indenture existence. Thus, he records the era realistically and gives accurate social

picture of that time to the modern generation of Fiji. He narrates the social condition of that particular time, in this way:

Crucifixion is a destiny rare in history.
 This is my destination,
 Here there is no fear
 Stirring spears against lovo stones
 On bare boughs birds tremble
 Like migrants at Sydney airport.
 X X X
 They prodded and pushed him to Golgotha
 The mob roared, applauded. Between two thieves he was crucified:
 Today with me you'll sit by my father's side.(Nandan, 20)

Dr. Nandan in this collection expresses the social histories of transplantation, dislocation and its impact on the modern descendants of girmitiyas:

Kala Pani, black waters, a cross across the seven seas,
 With blood betrayal, grief that never cease...
 From a little village to the dark lines
 Twelve thousand miles, sixty thousand lives.(Nandan, 8)

His major poems in this collection are *Easter 88, A Broken Wheel, A Churning in the Oceania, My Father's Son, Voice in the River, Ballet for a Sea-bird, Gift From the Sea, Tota's Tale, The Visit, The House*. In all these poems, we can find the feeling of nostalgia, social displacement and anguish. In Dr.Nandan's major poems, we can underline the social concern for the Indian community. The modern Indo-Fijian generation becomes aware of the wretched condition of Indian indenture labourers. Poems like; *A Bloodless Coup, Arjuna's Anguish, The Ghost, A Remembrance, The Waves, The Second Banishment*, are written with the prime theme of exile and social trauma. Thus, he wants to create social consciousness among the people of the world. He writes:

The institutions of civil society must be strengthened and supported, including the local academics' associations, law society; public organizations that can make useful noise....Those who do not read their history are likely to repeat it. Those who do not understand it are condemned by it.(Nandan, 148)

His acclaimed masterpiece *Requiem for a Rainbow: A Fijian Indian Story* also depicts realistically the personal, mental and physical suffering, the torture of exile and predicamental state of the Indo-Fijians. He tries to evoke revolt against the corrupt

The Wounded Sea thus becomes a valuable social critique and records the innumerable tortured lives of Indo-Fijians. A feeling of social inequality, injustice and instability explored and exposed by the novel. It arouses a concern for the Indians in Fiji. The world witnesses a suffocated and fractured democracy in Fiji. According to Prof. Seri I. Luangphinit,

As the Nobel laureate Derek Walcott confronts the horror of the Middle Passage (a term that signifies the transport of African slaves to the Caribbean), so too has Nandan faced the demons of history. (para 03)

Dr.Nandan's writing revisits the tragedy of kala pani, the social displacement of hundreds of people from India and then from Fiji. Exilic wandering and suffering the social, racial harassment leads to a fractured isolated sense of identity for the Indo-Fijians is the recurrent voice in all his works. He tries to reflect and react his ongoing commitment to questioning the political and social injustice that has emerged out of the indentured past. He tries to recapture the crushed socio-political structure where individual as well as collective attempts barricaded by the brutal racial regime. Fiji becomes a racial state where:

Our world in Fiji, like many others, has been full of cannibalism and colonialism, savagery and slavery, convictism and coolism, genocide and racism, religious bigotry and intellectual dishonesty, moral hypocrisy and political treachery- these ills have been integral to our seascape. (Nandan, 137)

He shows his readers how the former Fijian society, which was like a veritable paradise now transformed as a dark derelict hell, *"Once it was a place of creation. Now like death, a darkness in the heart"*. Writing in one of his essay, he strongly criticises those people who separate people on the basis of race and politics. He says,

poverty, violence, crime and land use affect people of all races and religions. And so we each have a duty to ensure that race is kept out of politics. Parents must teach their children that no matter what race or creed we can love our neighbours. (para 05).

Dr.Nandan states that these kind of social differences are divisive and have the potential to cause irreparable damage to the society. He emphatically believes that the time has come for leaders of all communities, political or religious to ace a conscious effort to steer people away from race, colour and gender bars which threatens any democratic society. In many of his essays like *Corruption and Society, Education: Quest for a Nation, The Peoples Charter: Vision and Revision, Youth: Challenge and Growth, Ethics: A Civil*

Society, Beyond the Coups, Dr. Nandan discusses his prime concern of social awareness for the betterment of Indo-Fijians. Dr. Nandan stresses here on the importance of ethics in social and political life of a nation and their people. He quotes Gandhiji's famous perception:

It has always been a mystery to me how human beings feel honoured by the humiliation of their fellow beings. (Nandan, 151)

Dr. Nandan through his creative genius makes a hallmark effort to protect and promote consciousness against racial politics, corruption and discrimination in Fijian society. He emphasises that rules, laws, practices, cultural conventions, codes need to be clean and clear from these harmful elements. Racism should not be involved in electoral system. Ethnic Indians should provide their due status and respectable place in Fijian society. According to him we all must discover and protect democracy's quiet and persuasive virtues. Government's task in future is that to give back the sense of a nation to the people of Fiji, restore the faith in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, without racial partiality or fear of dispossession and thus create an ideal society.

To conclude, we can say that the writings of Dr. Nandan are able to evoke the consciousness of a common man. The social aspect of his works inspired democratic feelings in Fiji. He writes against the social vices and thus wants to make a cleansing of society. Thus, in all his works Dr. Satendra Nandan offers a wisdom and hope for the exiled expatriates to mitigate their agonies amidst the fluidity of life and existential despair in Fijian society.

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