

The Dynamic Tales of Ravi's Expedition in the Novel *the Return*: - A Study

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Abstract: *In general way, personal ideas or thoughts of real-world life does not look in nuanced manner by directly expressing it in literature form, irrespective of any language. Here the author of this novel K.S. Maniam tries to explain his anecdotes in the form of fiction, though whole plot of this work looks like an autobiographical genre, but this is the author's forethought shrewd beauty and eye-catching gesture for the readers. Here the main protagonist Ravi's fate is complicated by colonialist interventions, plotted within the frame of an autobiographical, but sensuous, disturbing and multidimensional narrative, organized in the form of a Bildungsroman. While the novel follows the moral, psychological and intellectual development of its narrator protagonist Ravi the author's doppelganger, it also charts the roller-coaster "journey" of the larger Indian community in Malaysia: their ups and downs, sorrows and rejoicing of experience, both before and after the nation independence in 1957. This novel (The Return) also talks about tamil Indian ethnicity in the Malaysian countryside lifestyle. It is the authors first novel which mainly deals with cultural struggle and identity. Literary theory concepts like colonialism, postcolonialism, existentialism, hybridity, feminism, diasporic, etc. are nicely explained in this article.*

Keywords: - *Autobiographical, Bildungsroman, Doppelganger, Anecdotes and The Return.*

Introduction and Plot

About Author - Subramaniam Krishnan widely known as K.S. Maniam was born in 1942, In a working class Tamilian family in Bedong, a small countryside town in Kedah located in rural areas of northern Malaysia. Like many immigrants, his family had migrated from India to Malaya peninsula around 1916. Being a prolific writer, Maniam wrote three Novels, plays and short stories. His first novel was *The Return* Published in 1981, Second novel *In a Far Country* Published in 1993 and Third Novel

Between Lives was published in the year 2003, Along with Novels he also wrote his two famous play *The Cord* (1983) and *The Sand pit: Womensis* (1990). He also authored numerous short stories some famous ones are *The Eagles* (1976), *Plot* (1989), *Haunting Tiger* (1990) and *A Stranger to Love* (2018). He is inaugural Recipient of Raja Rao Award for literature and is bestowed for "Outstanding Contribution to South Asian Diaspora" and was awarded in the year 2000. He was Associate Professor in

English at the University of Malaya, Kuala-Lumpur. He died on February 19th, 2020, after brief battle from bile duct Cancer in Kuala-Lumpur.

Plot

This is an unpredictable moment. This is a hopeful time. The Japanese are no longer in control. As the Communists are forced farther into the jungle, the map of Malaya, which was formerly blotted black in Communist-affected areas, is gradually turning white. At the same time, White people are fleeing because the flag of independence will be raised in 1957. A once-secure world, its ideas, and its behaviors will also change because of these political shifts. Never again will things be the same.

This is the tale of Ravi, who felt constrained and held back by traditional beliefs and customs while growing up in a community that was predominately made up of immigrants. His curiosity and frustration drove him to venture outside of Bedong, Kedah's small-town passions and expectations and discover a wider world beyond the small-town passions and expectations of Bedong, Kedah. Ravi manages to pull up his roots to fly to England for his education, but he must return. Ravi returns to a family that is still trying to plant its stake in the soil of Malaysia. For all his efforts to distance himself from the family, for all his determination to have different dreams from those of his family, Ravi cannot escape his blood-ties, his cultural roots. Ravi was led away imaginatively by Little Red Riding Hood and Ernie to dwell amidst buttercups and snow but is drawn back to the madness of a father cracking up because his claim to the land must go up in smoke.

Trough and Crest of Ravi's Spectral Voyage.

Maniam's first novel *The Return* was published by Heinemann Asia in the year 1981. A young, English educated Malaysian Indian comes back from further education in Britain to confront the dual realities of the Malaysian landscape and his Indian communal family, the two are barely compatible, for the principal characters spend most of the novel in a failed attempt to put down Indian roots in Malaysian soil. Indeed, the early chapters constitute a hymn to Indian ethnicity. Maniam's past memory of his family spent in glamorous Indian sub-continent. The narrator had never then seen provides dramatic, ironic contrast to the worst conditions where Malaysian Tamils lived on the rubber estates near Bedong. As one of the critics has pointed out, that the text is so plenty with Indian symbols and characters that readers could be forgiven for inferring that British Malaya was a mostly Indian preserve. There are some scattered references to Chinese shopkeepers, but really none of the facts led Malays, who made half of the population in peninsular land. As per Margaret Yong, she observes, the work "vibrates with the emotional associations of a subject finally understood". Maniam wrote stories related to Nataraja, the cosmic dancer of Hindu mythology or Shiva as 'Lord of destroyer/dancer' whom true believers regard as responsible for the creation of the universe. He wrote regarding Saraswathi, the Hindu Goddess of fertility, procreation, purification and wisdom. He explains about the festivals like Pongal, the first day of the first month in the Hindu calendar, of Thaipusam, means the Hindu tribute to Lord Subramaniam, whose

Tamil name is Murugan, the ‘divine child’ believed to have the power to drive away illnesses. Thaipusam is a superstitious festival of repentance and ritual purification, the key feature of which is the carrying of kavadi (basket-bearing like weight machine). Deepavali, the Hindu festival of lights, is held on the day of the New Moon as per Hindu calendar. All the lamps of a household are lit up to celebrate the reappearance of the Sun, which has been hidden during the rainy season in India by the evil water-spirits. In Mahabharata Lord Krishna rescued people from sufferings affected by the demon Narakasura, and they lit up lamps to symbolize the victory of light over the dark, and good over the evil. Such events helped them to transform and transcend remote plantation existence for an occasional day at a time. Festivals such as Deepavali and Thaipusam also serve to bring together the Indian tamil ethnicity by gaining its identity as an ethnic minority in peninsular land.

There is no more substantive symbolization of an Indian past than in the character of Maniam’s grandmother, the woman known as Periathai (Big Mother), the pedlar who had a firm bend at her back, so symbolic of aged people having more life experience. For the young Ravi (Rough narration based on Maniam himself). Self-reliant Periathai took on mythical proportions. The story of Periathai serves to confirm Edward Said’s view of narrative as “the method colonized people use to gain their own identity and the existence of their own history”. Bravely, she tells Ravi never to let anything break his confidence, but she also fails to establish legal ownership of the piece of land, where she resides in Malaysia, for she had “no

papers, only a vague belief, and a dubious loyalty”.

Formal education is another key factor in *The Return*. Ravi first attended the Tamil-medium Primary school on Riverside Estate near Bedong. There he found Murugesu, who turned out to be more tempting magician than teacher. He found the Tamil Primer with its marvelous tales of Elephants, Deer, Snakes, Mongooses, Dogs, and Cats; and he found the lines of curving, Deep Tamil writing that unfolded an excitingly unexpected and knowable world. After a year, Ravi was sent to the English-medium school in Sungai Petani, with its colonial themed design, efficient Chinese clerks, silent rooms, rows of desks, square-lined exercise books, pictures of daffodils, seen throughout the vicinity of the school premise. Later schooling was done in Ibrahim English school was the domain of Miss Nancy, the teacher who was the guide of Ravi through the remainder of his primary education, she has intoxicatingly fair complexion, raven hair, frilled skirt, dark colored blouse, and a loud voice. Miss Nancy was obsessed with fantasizes like Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and bodily hygiene. Ravi’s life was drastically molded in her school vicinity. Order, cleanliness, and individuality became his defining characteristics. For Ravi, the realm of school and home began to part away dramatically, and he came to view his Indian domesticity with disdain, employing negative terms like ‘darkness’, ‘futility’, ‘filthy’, and ‘primitive’. When his father, Kannan (Naina) eventually agreed to Ravi’s request for a toothbrush, the Chinese shopkeeper cannily observed that Ravi would be a real Englishman

now. When slashed by the Tamil laundry-supervisor for talking with some visiting English children, Ravi resolved in one dramatic moment to escape from Bedong. “I turned away from the God who ruled my people”.

It was his father’s considerable success in the laundry business, the additional work of his mother and stepmother on Riverside Estate, as well as his own educational achievements in secondary school that eventually made his escape from Bedong, Kedah, and the Malay peninsula possible. Rather than remaining just a dhobi’s son who “could never dream of being bigger”. Ravi obtained a rare scholarship from the Indian High Commission in Malaysia to finish his school and undertook two years of teacher-training in England. Sadly, this achievement meant a further part away with his parents. Ravi did not share his father’s desperate will to drive some interest into the countryside business, nor did he agree with his father’s change of appearance, symbolic residence on the jungle fringes, or tragic assertion of dignity through self-immolation by fire. It was only in the death his ashes were poured in the river, that Naina became a part of Malaysia.

There is some debate as to the factual basis of *The Return*, with some critics terming it as autobiographical, Maniam himself denies it multiple times and sometimes says, “coincidences rather than events”. Maniam’s particular attachment to his own grandmother certainly bears fruit in the character of Periathai. In his introduction to the Skoob Books Edition, C.W. Watson regards *The Return* as the story of “the dynamic journey of self-discovery of an Indian boy growing up in

Malaya and gradually moving apart from his family and immediate surroundings”. Maniam himself is more cautious, observing that the “protagonist Ravi's life may bear similarities to

my own, but they are only look like. He believes there is always a dialogue between the writer and the work he produces. Consider the decision to take young Ravi out of the Tamil medium school in Bedong and send him to Ibrahim English school in Sungei Petani. The novel stamps itself that Ravi’s stepmother, Karupi who was the decisive influence here. Maniam also says that going to English school was his own wish to find a world (center) of fulfilment away from the rubber estate. Hating what he terms “the isolation of a backwater culture existence”, Maniam recalls that he “stood up and said he would go to an English school or no school at all”. “There is, in any case, little doubt that Maniam was able to attend English school because of his parents’ dual incomes from laundry and plantation, and from his father’s own upward social mobility.

Although readers are restricted to view Bedong from the viewpoint of the escaping. He is not the most captivating or intriguing character in the novel. Rather, this honour goes to the semi-mythical grandmother Periathai and Naina, the industrious worker and successful laundry operator, who discovers an intense personal spirituality and, in the spirit of the real Hindu ascetic, or sanyasi, removes himself from worldly concerns in pursuit of inner calm and tranquility of mind.

Conclusion

Here all the generations of the settled diasporic community try to adopt and inculcate the

migrated land culture, but never forget their root tradition from which they belong. Here every generation migrant leaves their homeland place thinking that they are in dystopian world and hoping for the betterment of their

livelihood, so believing in migration to another land will enables their utopian world thoughts, but it's a worst decision like a mirage, realizes it after the hardship in the settled migrated land.

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