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Memory, Trauma and Diasporic Narrative in Vassanji's *The Magic of Saida*

Abstract: In his latest novel *The Magic of Saida*, Vassanji has depicted the story of a diasporic's engagement with the land of his birth and his eventual return to the place where he truly belongs. In the paper, I have presented the thesis that the migrant's movement away from the land of his birth, and his separation from his mother and his beloved was a traumatic event, which forever haunts his existence. By making use of the theories propounded by the trauma theorists and new research conducted by various scholars in the field, the paper studies the impact of trauma on the life of the protagonist and shows how the narrative of the protagonist itself becomes a form of healing the traumatic wounds and coming to terms with his traumatic past.

Keywords: Diaspora, History, Migration, Narrative, Trauma

M.G. Vassanji's latest novel *The Magic of Saida* is written in the same vein as his earlier fiction and could be categorized under the rubric of diasporic fiction. However, this time the motif of love becomes the driving force behind the narrative. The titular African woman is the childhood friend of the narrator protagonist Kamal who is of mixed ancestry having an African mother and an Indian father. Kamal's father had deserted his mother and he had no memory of him. Later he had to leave his African mother as he was forced to live with his

Indian relatives so that he could adopt Indian ways and become an Indian. This put an end to Kamal's relationship with Saida as well as his African life except only for a brief interval when he came back to Kilwa before joining university. Though Kamal became an Indian, adopted Indian ways, married an Indian woman, and during Ugandan exodus like many Indian families he too shifted to Canada for a better and secured future, yet, he could never completely oust the African inside him. After spending thirty-five years of his life in Canada as a successful doctor, Kamal returned to Africa in search of his lost love. The narrative recounts that search and Kamal's earlier life spent in East Africa and Canada, and also presents an account of the history of East Africa during German colonization. Most part of the novel is narrated by a publisher to whom Kamal tells his story.

In the paper, I argue that Kamal's separation from his mother, his beloved, as well as his African self was a traumatic event that became a causative factor in shaping his later life. The trauma of separation of the lover from the beloved and the migrant from the homeland is an underlying theme in the narrative of the novel. The paper focuses on that trauma and the traumatic memory that it generates, and tries to draw symbolic parallelism between the beloved and the homeland of the protagonist. There is also an attempt to establish autobiographical links in the novel as the paper presents the thesis that the return of the narrator protagonist to his homeland represents Vassanji's own desire to return to his homeland (East Africa and India) and acknowledge the past—a task that he tries to accomplish repeatedly through his fiction. For the purpose of this paper I have drawn from the works of different trauma theorists beginning from the works of Cathy Caruth and moving on to some latest formulations in the field of trauma theory.

Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma is based on an analysis of the post- traumatic stress disorder:

there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (qtd. in Caruth *Trauma* 4)

Caruth further specifies the pathology by referring to the “structure of its experience”:

The pathology consists [...] solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. (*Trauma* 4-5)

This is the effect of trauma as Caruth has described it. It is a confusing psychological state of collapsed understanding. The traumatic event registers itself as a non-experience at the time of its occurrence, and is not grasped completely by the mind. It is experienced only in its belated repetition. Moreover, the event cannot be recalled at will; rather, it emerges insistently in the psyche of the individual as a possessive influence. Caruth’s concept lays emphasis on trauma’s unsettling of temporal structures and a resulting crisis of history:

If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. (*Trauma* 5)

Caruth’s emphasis on trauma’s disruption of time and history is based on Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit*. It refers to the ways in which certain experiences, impressions, memory traces are repeated at a later date. The traumatic event is not fully acknowledged at the time of

its occurrence and “only becomes an event at some later point of intense emotional crisis” (Whitehead 6).

In contrast to the traditional approach, contemporary approaches in literary trauma theory present alternative models and methodologies that emphasize the narrative and expressive aspects of traumatic events. The critics who diverge from the classic model suggest that severe experiences cultivate multiple responses from the individual and the community and the value attached to such experiences depends on a variety of individual, social, and cultural factors, which are not static. The new model of trauma theory is skeptical about a universal pathological concept of trauma and viewing literature as a closed psychoanalytic system. Rather, it lays more emphasis on the “study of the relationship between language, the psyche, and behaviour without assuming the classic definition of trauma that asserts an unrepresentable and pathological universalism” (Balaev 4).

In the field of literature, trauma studies have made a significant contribution as it highlights the construction of subjectivities in modern, fragmented societies. Modern societies are fraught with the stigma of wars, terrorism, displacement, etc. and have come to be defined by traumatic events that have affected people at individual as well as collective level. Laurence J. Kirmayer et al. argue that trauma has become “a narrative theme in explanations of individual and social suffering” (1). Stef Craps and Gert Beulens in their work on postcolonial trauma novels underline the importance of trauma theory “for understanding colonial traumas such as dispossession, forced migration, diaspora, slavery, segregation, racism, political violence, and genocide” (3). Criticism based on trauma studies explores what Geoffrey Hartman calls “the relation between psychic wounds and signification” (257).

As it is seen trauma studies now encompass within its limits even those events which when they occurred were not as drastic or violent as taken up by earlier theorists but quiet events which had a subtle negative impact on individual or collective consciousness. T. M.

Luhrmann, in examining the traumatized self refers to events he calls “more mundane quiet traumas,” which work in a different way but leave deep marks on the self. He adds, “some injuring events are dramatic and soul-destroying, some are quiet and humiliating” (158). Similarly, Deirdre Barret states that those so-called “common traumas” that take place in the course of normal life, such as divorce, bereavement, or a life threatening illness, are not seen as harmful as rape, child abuse, or wars. And yet, they lead to grief, shock, and a feeling of insecurity that enables them to be defined as traumas (5).

From the above discussion, it can be inferred that migration and diaspora belong to the category of traumatic events, which create a divided self and lead to a fragmented identity. Displacement and physical as well as psychological uprooting from the place of origin becomes traumatic and the impact of this trauma on cultural adjustment away from home further problematizes emigrant adjustment and survival. The migrant is caught up between the old and the new world, between the past and the present, between the homeland and the country of adoption. While s/he tries to adopt in the new land, the psychological and the cultural pulls of the homeland constantly draw the migrant towards the land that is left behind, in which case, moving forward becomes a not so easy task. The migrant becomes a hybrid self, occupying what Bhabha calls a liminal space that causes him/her to forever dangle in-between the two spaces of the old and the new homes. In *The Magic of Saida*, Kamal becomes a victim of this pattern of survival. He had already lost the country of his ancestors as they had migrated from India to East Africa and being a second generation Indian in the land of Africans he is regarded as a foreigner.

Kamal's misfortunes, however, are largely due to his mixed ancestry. Born of an African mother and an Indian father he becomes neither a complete Indian nor a complete African. Kamal belongs to the category of *chotaro*, who were children born from African women who were kept by Indian men for the gratification of their physical needs. These women

since not legally married and racially unacceptable were deserted as time arrived for the men to settle down and get married within their own caste with racially legitimate wives. Though there is a proclaimed marriage and a family photograph of Hamida with her husband and son that states that there might have been an emotional attachment, nevertheless, Hamida was deserted all the same. However, it is not a fatherless childhood that haunts Kamal's memories as he recounts the days of his youth, instead, Kamal though inquisitive about his father is more attached towards his mother and his African ancestry. As the narrator informs, "though he did have companions to play with. But essentially lonely and very attached to his mother. They were a unit—Hamida and her son Kamalu" (24). Kamal felt more inclined towards his Africanness and he "could never get the African out of him, even when he washed himself with bleach to get his muddy brown out" (MOS 28).

Kamal's early childhood and youth which are considered the formative years of one's self and identity are delved deep in African ethos and African surroundings. His only link with India is an absent Indian father, who because of his absence remains part of an enigmatic past and a hidden, and only partly familiar ancestry. In such a scenario, when his mother compels him to leave Kilwa and go to his father's relatives to become like an Indian, it comes as a shock for Kamal. Describing the severe experience, he says:

What do you do when your world suddenly comes to an end, when those tender insecurities, those delicious fragile times of temporary want and despair, those moments of pure laughter, those minutes of mysterious poetry, those timeless delights in your mother's bosom are all of a sudden torn away from you? You stare ahead at a frightening wasteland without love. (182)

Even in his later life when it was revealed to him that he was bought from his mother at a price, he could not forget her and his early childhood memories are a recounting of his life with her. As the narrator himself feels, "He [Kamal] had insisted that he had not forgiven her, and she

did not need him, and I could just believe that. But he had not broken with her, I knew that too. How vividly had I heard him recall her” (276). Apart from his wish to meet Saida, Kamal’s return to Dar is inspired by a wish to confront his mother, as the narrator infers:

He had said it was Saida who had called him back, but it was very obvious to me when I heard him speak of his childhood that he came also to confront his mama, even if that meant only to return to his birthplace and recall her in his mind. (92)

Kamal’s love for Saida is another instance of assertion of his African self. Saida was an African—daughter of Hamida’s friend Bi Kulthum. Her grandfather, Omari bin Tamim, was a great poet. Kamal and Saida were childhood playmates and as children they shared a special bond of friendship with each other. Saida was Kamal’s closest companion and “imaginary comforter” while he was living with his Indian relations. She was his only solace in days of loneliness as Kamal grew up with his memories and his imagination. As he describes, “I imagined her as she had been, and yet older so she could understand me. I would tell her, ‘Thank God I have you, Saida. Tonight I feel most miserable, and I have no one else.’ And I would say other things that are too embarrassing for me to relate” (220). Kamal and Saida became lovers when Kamal returned to Kilwa before joining university. The emotions which were relegated a backspace in Kamal’s consciousness in the intermediate years reappeared with all the energy and intensity when he saw Saida again. His spontaneous reaction and overwhelming crisis of emotions is captured in these lines as he asks himself:

Whence this emotion now, uncontrollable; these childish tears rolling down his cheeks? All he had lost and missed and imagined in Dar, all that had been torn away from him became the burden of his sudden wave of grief. The familiar streets of Kilwa, his mama at home, the sound of the sea and the poet . . . and Saida. (243)

The suppressed emotions came rushing back bringing with them the memories and pain that Kamal thought he had long forgotten. The past he thought was dead became alive with a single breach of memory and reminder from the past.

The consummation of childhood love after a period of long separation strengthened the bond between them: “In their lovemaking was . . . the joy and relief of coming home to each other; the pure passion of possession and love” (MOS 248). It was during this visit that Kamal had promised Saida that he would return for her. Meanwhile he went back to join university in Uganda. Later he married an Indian woman, became a doctor, and settled in Canada with his wife and two children. Outside the country of his birth, in another land, the issues of identity and belonging become more insistent and past becomes more calling. However, it is his African heritage that he is more obsessed with once he moves outside his own country. Instead of being an Indian in Canada, he calls himself an African. Ironically, it is a past that he cannot share with his family, as they are not willing to accept his African connection and slave ancestry.

For Kamal, the struggle for belongingness and identity is a lifelong process. Being of mixed blood, he was neither a complete Indian nor a complete African. He voices his dilemma to his mother, whose explanation further complicates his situation as she answers Kamal’s questions about his real identity. She tells him, “you are an Indian who is more African than all these Africans walking about. And a better Indian than all those Banyani shopkeepers.” The answer becomes the “riddle of his life,” “casually thrown” at him by his mother (36). Kamal’s movement from Kilwa to Dar signifies a psychological uprooting from one place and culture in order to accept another in which though Kamal gains materialistically but fails emotionally. Even during his stay in Canada he thought of himself as an African (222), having undergone only an “unfinished” transition into a Canadian. When after thirty five years of his stay in Canada he goes back to East Africa his emotional condition is a proof of “how incomplete and unsuccessful a conversion he went through from African to Asian—more precisely Indian,”

which as the narrator says was “the whole point of his story” (215). The problem with Kamal is that he has to repress his African self at every stage of his life. When he was a child, he was sent to his Indian relations against his wishes. In a sudden and conspiratorial move, he was thrown from one world into another, which were totally different from one another. In Dar, Kamal is very close to the African tailor Sabini who was like a father figure to him. However, the relationship could not survive for long as Sabini went away leaving him lonely and helpless. Saida, his only connection left with Africa, was not allowed to meet Kamal when she came to Dar with his child. Even politically, Kamal was more affiliated to Africa. He could not help but cheer Idi Amin whose decision to expel Indians from Uganda had brought havoc over the Indian community who were left with no other option but to leave Africa and migrate to some other country. The narrator sums up Kamal’s identification and allegiance to Africa in the following passage:

It was the Golo in him who sent up the partial cheer for Idi Amin. It was the half-caste who had identified with the house servants (“boys”), flinched at their abuse and humiliations, and suffered his own share of them in school. It was the boy who had cried for his African mother and his special friend in Kilwa. He recalled his horror and shame when he saw a young African woman coming out of his uncle’s back room. He had been reminded of his mother—and wept at night because he was nothing but a half-caste bastard. (261)

Kamal’s movement away from his African home in Kilwa, his mother, and his beloved to an Indian home and Indian relations signifies a movement away from his essential Africanness towards an adopted artificial Indianness. The transformation though initiated at an early stage remains incomplete and as was realized at a later stage also unsuccessful. Kamal’s life becomes the case of, what Salim refers to in *The Gunny Sack*, “a healthy young shoot—a lively sapling with a lot of energy and promising many new things” but transplanted “in an uncaring soil”

(280), where it was doomed to be dead. Though Kamal survives, but only at the cost of repressing his African identity. He did as he was instructed by his mother “to be a good Indian. A Mihindi. To speak their language, to sing their songs, say their prayers.” However, the question persists in his consciousness “[w]hat then of the African Kamalu?” (229). The pain of leaving all that he identified himself with at a very young stage of his life was a traumatic experience for Kamal. Though he lived with the pain, it left an indelible mark on his consciousness, which instead of fading away with time and age became more persistent. Childhood trauma and its impact on Kamal’s later life as he thinks about his past is visible in the following passage:

It would seem to Kamal later that unlike his ordered life in Canada, his childhood existence had been some conjuror’s creation, with the ability to change shape, parts of it to disappear like smoke, leaving behind only the indelible impressions on his mind and heart, utter bewilderment and sorrow.
(237)

The impressions and memories followed him to Canada so that the more he is repressed the more he is obsessed with the world he has lost, searching Kilwa in old books and library manuscripts, displaying emotionally his euphoria of discovery, feeling the hold of the past on his consciousness, deciding to write a family history, and even searching for any telltale signs of African ancestry in his children. However, his obsession was confined to his thoughts and his study, as none of his family members was ready to accept African or for that matter slave ancestry. This is how his children react when he produces his old family photograph: “The shock on Hanif’s face—he was eleven then—was cataclysmic” and he exclaims, ““Me, African? That black woman in that weird outfit, my grandmother? You’re lying. No way.”” “Utter rejection by his private-school son” (29). By mentioning Hanif’s age, Kamal provides an excuse for his son’s detachment, perhaps hoping for a later reconciliation. However, his any

wish to make his children accept or even understand their African ancestry is thwarted by his wife Shamim who tries her best to make them into complete Indians by introducing them into Indian culture and religion. As a result, “Glamorous India” won over the “dusty town in Africa.”

Kamal’s link with India was only through his absent father whose only memories were captured in the sole family photograph. All that he came to know about him was secondary knowledge acquired from his mother. He comes to know about his ancestor Punja Devraj from the poet Omari bin Tamim and later his own research. Curiosity leads him to Gujarat—the land of his ancestors. Kamal’s search for his father reveals to him that he had returned to Gujarat from East Africa and had a family there. For Kamal, it was a past that had discarded him and it had no place for him in it. He says, ““I think I’ve put India to rest—and come to terms with my father”” (276). It was his mother—his African past—that he could never forget.

At the shrine of Sidi Sayyad, Kamal was disturbed by the presence of a young woman with a child. The “deep sense of unease” (280) that he felt at that time was because the young woman reminded him of Saida. However, it was only later that he came to know the cause of his uneasiness. Because of the trauma of separation that he had suffered in the past, Kamal is disturbed by any reminder of that past.

Cathy Caruth has written in her book *Unclaimed Experience*:

Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that it’s very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on.

(3)

Kamal’s memories haunt him and he is unable to repress the urge to go back in search of his lost love. “The town has long possessed him . . . always known as a home to spirits, it let loose a spirit to come and haunt him” (MOS 13).

Finally the repressed in the consciousness took over and Kamal decides to grab his African identity and return to fulfill the promise that he had made to Saida—his lost African connection. It was the sound of ringing, the “kinjin kinjin”, associated with the first moment of their love that reminded him of his beloved, his Kinjikitilé. The image provided the impetus and this time he could not stop himself. As the narrator describes:

As he sat with a few associates at the opening day luncheon, under a sun umbrella atop a rock cliff, the ocean below them and scantily clad waitresses hovering around, there came the crash of a tray falling, followed by a momentary stillness. That was all he needed. As he would think of it, the clattering dissonance of the falling silverware recombined in his head to produce one resonating echo: Kinjikitilé. He knew he was called. He must go and find her. (274)

For Kamal, Saida represents Africa—an image he is obsessed with throughout his life and the obsession grows once he is outside Africa when once again his old world is transplanted in alien surroundings. It is in the African ambience that he truly belongs. This obsession is also visible in Kamal’s ravings in a state of delirium after he was poisoned with drugs. Even then, he was referring to “a lover, beautiful like mermaid, called Kinjikitilé” and “a poet” who “was hanged in Kilwa” (1). The two people Kamal was referring to were Saida and the poet Omari—both representatives of the world he had left behind—proofs of the impact of Africa on his consciousness. In this way, the magic of the title refers to the hold that Kamal’s repressed African self had on his being, which ultimately calls him back to confront his unfulfilled promise and the guilt of desertion.

In the novel, it is not explicitly stated that the woman Kamal met was Saida. However, through the hints that the narrative provides it is very clear that the old woman who poisoned Kamal was Saida herself whom he could not recognize when he saw her. It was only later that

Kamal was informed that the woman called Bibi Ramzani was crazy and she called herself Kinjikitilé. The gifts that Kamal once gave to Saida which were found in her hut were additional proofs of the old woman being Saida. She was already dead when Kamal went to inquire about her. The drugs that he was administered by her made him hallucinate about the past. He comes to know about his lost child and Saida's sufferings after he went away leaving her behind. It is here that the narrative moves beyond the logical and the rational. It was a younger Saida who was talking to Kamal and answering his queries which were later confirmed by his uncle's daughter Yasmin. An explanation could be that what Kamal saw were images emanating from his own mind—things which were long repressed in his own consciousness, which erupted when Kamal gave himself completely to Africa, drank the uji, and "Africa invaded him" completely. Poised between the real and the imagined, Kamal saw what he was already expecting to see. This time the pain was Saida's and it was inflicted on Kamal as she narrates her story. The emotions and pathos produce a destructing effect on Kamal as the narrator tells, "And Kamal screamed and screamed. 'Don't tell me more, Saida, don't tell me that!'" (298). Past once again becomes alive and Kamal relives the trauma of desertion and separation from his beloved as she tells him the story of what she had suffered in his absence and the consequences of his unfulfilled promise.

Kamal's narrative is that of a returnee migrant's story. Past and history form an important part of this narrative. A section of the novel titled "... of the coming of the modern age" gives an insight into the history of German colonization of East Africa, Maji Maji rebellion in Tanzania, the African resistance and the Indian contribution in the freedom struggle. Kamal's great grandfather, Punja Devraj, was one among those freedom fighters who were hanged by the German colonizers. Kamal got the first glimpse of this history in the poetry recitals of Omari bin Tamim's historical magnum opus, *The Composition of the Coming of the Modern Age*, which he attended as a child. It was the poet Omari who had hinted at Punja

Devraj's life and works in Kilwa. However, it was later, through his own research that Kamal came to know about the Indian side of his ancestry and realized "how necessary" (131) it was. Kamal's history establishes that allegiances and affiliations are not bound by nationality, and religion serves as a greater tool of cohesive bonding for those who belonged to different lands. Punja Devraj served Pir Sidi Sayyad's wish to convey his greetings to his people in Africa, when he decided to migrate to Zanzibar. Later when he went to Kilwa he agreed to support the aim of the sufi orders in Africa, India, and the Middle East to "preserve Islamic ways from corruption by the Europeans, and therefore to take measures to throw off the yoke of foreign colonialism" (132). By sacrificing his life in resisting German colonization, Punja Devraj proved his allegiance to Africa. Kamal's research thus underscores the valuable contribution of Indians to African history, and questions the rigid identification and categorization based on the discourse of nationality. Kamal's narrative exemplifies how memory, history, and identity are negotiated through representation of the traumatic experiences, how through the process of storytelling, traumatic memories are turned into narrative memories, which function as 'strategies for survival.' As Dori Laub has written in "Bearing Witness" that the effects of trauma can only be undone by "a process of constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially, of re-externalizing the event." She further explains:

This re-externalization of the event can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside. Telling thus entails a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim. (69)

The narrative of the novel is based on Kamal's memories of his life in East Africa and Canada. Most part of the novel is narrated by the publisher narrator, Martin Kigoma to whom Kamal is telling his story. The need to communicate became urgent once Kamal arrived in Kilwa.

Kamal's state of being on his arrival is worth quoting here: "He felt utterly desolate. Not a soul to tell his story to, explain why he had come, why he must see her" (19). The publisher narrator, therefore, provides an outlet for Kamal's troubled consciousness by listening to his story. As he says at a later stage, "We had gone well beyond the therapeutic imperative we started with, when he had simply wished to talk about himself following his drug-induced catastrophe and I made myself available to listen" (275). Thus, the narrative speaks out about traumatic experience of the exiled protagonist, and how storytelling and representational process of suffering and pain acts as a mode of "therapeutic re-enactment" and contributes to the subject's survival and the healing of hidden psychic wounds.

The narrative of the novel is in the form of flashbacks on Kamal's earlier life and past and present frequently intermix giving the impression of disjointed, fragmented narration. Thus, the narrative exemplifies the central proposition of trauma theory that "trauma entails the rupture or dislocation of linear narrative" (Andermahr 6). It is not only the tale of an individual that is recounted by the narrator, it is a mixture of the past, and the present,—a past that Kamal has lived and a present in which the narrator and the protagonist both are together. The narrative appears more as a kind of psychoanalytic session in which the narrator like a psychoanalyst listens, questions, testifies, and provides testimonies from the past to Kamal's story.

Kamal's search for roots, his interest in history and his desire to record the fleeting past are representative of a diasporic's attachment with the home country. It also mirrors Vassanji's own diasporic condition and his interest in the country of his birth, as well as the homeland—the country of his ancestors. Vassanji's ancestors had migrated from Gujarat to East Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Later, Vassanji undertook a second migration from East Africa to North America. In his fiction, he depicts these migrations of his community to the two continents and their ensuing psychological and cultural impacts. Though Vassanji is

still a Canadian resident, he has often visited East Africa and India. Two of his travel memoirs *A Place Within* and *And Home was Kariakoo* describe his visits to India and East Africa respectively. In one of his interviews, Vassanji states the guilt that is associated with absconding, and unfulfilled promises. Referring to *The Gunny Sack*, he says:

[P]erhaps guilt in the book reflects more my own sense of guilt. Of having left and not having enough courage in me to be in Africa without my people, the Indians I grew up with. A feeling of helplessness about not being able to do anything. I think that guilt I carry with me. (Kanaganayakam 131)

Same feelings are visible in Kamal's dilemma about the propriety of his decision of leaving Tanzania to settle in Canada as Kamal repeatedly asks himself, "[d]id I gain or lose by being sent away?" (200) and "Would he have been better or worse off than what he became?" (90). There could be no clear answer in terms of yes or no, however, Kamal did ask this question shows that he physically might have been in Canada but his heart belonged to Africa.

In the present novel Vassanji has moved beyond his earlier fiction to depict a culture of mixed heritage. The novel describes what happens at the zone of contact between two cultures. *The Magic of Saida* takes up from where *The Gunny Sack* has left off—what happens when an African born African Indian, obsessed with his Africanness returns to claim his African heritage. However, there are differences that exist between Kamal and Kala. Kamal appears to be more African than Kala. Perhaps the reason for this difference is that Kamal was brought up by an African mother while Kala was a product of his Indian surroundings, bred of a father having African blood, and an Indian mother. On the other hand, Kamal shares direct links with Africa through his mother. Moreover, Kamal never let forgo her influence from his life as he lived the trauma of separation from her and his beloved, as well as, his authentic African self—all manifestations of the original home, Africa.

Abbreviations:

MOS- The Magic of Saida

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