

RESEARCH ARTICLE

CULTURAL STRADDLING: DIASPORIC READING OF KAKKANADAN'S  
"KAVERIYUDE VILI"

---

**Anuranj C K**

Assistant Professor

Department of English

MGGAC, Mahe

---

Kakkanadan is a writer from Kerala, writes fiction, especially novels exclusively on the cultural problems of individuals. The novel *Kaveriyude Vili*, translated as Cauvery Calling belongs to the category of Migrant Literature. Even though the novel is still not translated into English, the Malayalam version got wide acceptance across boundaries after some reviews came up regarding diasporic relevance which the novel holds. Kakkanadan was not given enough acceptance, that was given to prominent Malayalam writers like M T Vasudevan Nair or OV Vijayan, still a group of readers is behind him because of his flexible use of language and writing of complex issues.

*Kaveriyude Vili* was published in 1988, read by some during those days, re-read by thousands after twentieth century. The novel concentrates upon one character, the protagonist, Kathirvelu, a native of Tamilnadu who is settled in Germany. It was the journey through Tamilnadu led Kakkanadan to write this novel and abled to situate the plot at Tamilnadu. The novel occupies a crucial space among unknown diasporic novels since it is deeply discussing the brimming themes of identity and culture.

As a migrant, Kathirvelu stays and works in Germany, he doesn't have a feeling of home at Germany. As a neighbor to Cauvery, the holy river for Hindus in India, Kathirvelu struggles between two cultures. His soliloquy throughout the novel gives hints to this problem. Culture is inseparable from location, writes masters in the field of diasporic writing. Therefore, the mental stigma and the psychological trauma to go back to the native culture is significant in this novel, especially to Kathirvelu. Kathirvelu is always in a dilemma, or if rightly points out, continuously staggering with his cultural identity as he often confronts questions concerning mother tongue, native culture and customs so on. He is working in a printing press at Germany with the nostalgia of homeland and Germany is the host land where the entire plot unfolds, he compromises between two cultures. The novel begins by having a discussion on the cultural problem, whether which culture is greater one as far as an immigrant is concerned. Kaveri

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

becomes a symbolic representation of imaginary homeland for Kathirvelu. Kathirvelu happens to have thoughts of the customs and festivals once he had while in his native village. Sometimes he retreats into his inborn culture, sometimes appropriates the foreign culture. After all, the novel is all about the staggering of our protagonist between two entirely different culture. Vaiga, another river he always reminded of, is flowing through his consciousness as a cultural symbol.

Mnemonic revival of the past or the imaginary travel to the native place is the safest asylum for Kathirvelu. In such a way, Kathirvelu's identity is not a quality that is inherent or stable inside him. There are occasions where Kathirvelu directly discusses cultural problems like role of males in the kitchen at different cultures. In India, the space is patriarchally attributed to women, but in Germany he understands the value of kitchen chores; the problem continues while he starts to adapt the German language. He was taught the German language by one of his colleagues and the first sentence he studied in German was 'guttentag' and 'end shu idignceevitte' which means thanks and please be seated respectively. From the tabula rasa to the ambiguous state of mind while acquiring a foreign language is a topic of study for cultural studies theoreticians. Since the language makes the construction of identity possible, Kathirvelu's identity gets a hybrid form in the initial stage of his German life. He could not abandon his *chenthamizhu*(the pure Tamil), he uses it in several occasions; the words like Akka, Atha etc. has been used at many parts of his conversation while in Germany.

The diasporic consciousness is constantly in a state of existential angst. Subject's unresolved positionality in relation to the homeland as well as host land creates severed identity. Identity today is created against a complex matrix of references; a person's citizenship, geographic origin, food habits, residence, gender, caste, class, politics etc. enter into a complex interplay. The ongoing movements of world confront certain issues and raises questions to the humanity and we are supposed to answer it. Thus, rather than highlighting the conventional modalities that define and restrict identity, it becomes necessary to take a rejuvenated look at relocated identity, conceptualized in the context of new mental and physical homes.

The concept of identity is central to diaspora theory, its focus being the concern of representation. It also becomes a topical issue in the contemporary study of culture with its many ramifications of ethnicity, class gender, race and sexuality. In the modern era of globalization, the experience of migration and the erasure of geographical borders necessitate the need to postulate sound concepts on theory of identity as contemporary identity is fluid and delimited. The movement from one country to another entails the setting up of home, of roots in a new place. Moreover, the restricting tendencies of nationalist discourses, the norms by which the

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

people of a nation are confined and unified exclude the migrants from being accommodated in a new home.

Letter is always belonging to the category of literature that can contribute many meaningful insights, in reference to its functionality of being a medium of communication. The development of new technologies, the birth of cyber world kept aside the letter in some extent, it doesn't have the function as it had. When this novel was written, or the character, Kathirvelu was living in Germany, was the time of migration started, especially in India. Therefore, in the novel, the letters from his home are reiterating the mnemonic aspects of his root culture with full of nostalgia as Kakkanadan explains through Kathirvelu:

“Letter is not a reading, but a journey through the paddy field, through the banks of river, through the sides of primitive temples, through Tamil arts, through Tamil history, through the geography of Tamilnadu- a great journey.” (Kakkanadan 51)

The dichotomy between two different cultures in accordance with their belief system is contracted by the character as novel develops. Moreover, mother's letters give him a peculiar ecstasy, since all those letters are enriched by the cultures of Tamilnadu with divine elements. As a dedicated devotee of Hindu Gods in India, mother's letters bring the chance to have a comparison between two cultures. Germany is a country which adores only one God, a monotheist country, believes in Christianity and have all customs related to it. Yet Indian with majority of Hindus, or Kathirvelu is having Hindu ancestry, always in remembrance with many gods since Hindus are believed to be polytheists.

The complicated identity in process is called as 'third time space' by Vijay Mishra,

Within a nation-state, citizens are always unhyphenated, that is if we are to believe what our passports say about us. In actual practice the pure unhyphenated generic category, an unproblematic identity of selves with nations. For these of us who are outside of this identity politics, whose corporeality's fissure the logic of unproblematic identification, plural multicultural societies have constructed the impure genre of hyphenated subject.” (Mishra 433)

It is not easily created as Mishra pointed out; there is always a straddling between two different cultures, yet the subject's selection of identity is inclined to his root culture, the umbilical relation towards the Tamil culture as far as Kathirvelu is considered. Cultural straddling- for which no theoretician has so far given any epithet with a technical hue is one such way of living and operating a foreign land. Regarding the efficacy of these varicolored survival strategies, a consensus can be attained only through a comparative analysis. Kathirvelu's such

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

dilemma in straddling is there, even then he has this word; “if you are either in Germany or in Tamilnadu, mother is always mother.” (Kakkanadan 43) Thus, it can be concluded that third time space is not a mixture two unrelated cultures or identities, but physiologically you might be present in foreign land but psychologically you are more biased to the home land.

Salman Rushdie’s concept of ‘imaginary homelands’ debased the contours of geographical and political space, charting new boundaries of the refigured concept of global home. Nowadays the term like ‘multilocality’ has attained the status of cultural value rather sticking the same conventional method of root culture. A person’s citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, politics, profession etc. enter into a complex interplay. Rather than highlighting the conventional modalities that define and restrict identity, it becomes necessary to take a fresh look at the relocated identity, conceptualized in the context of new mental and physical homes. The novel has a hero or the other self of Kakkanadan, which is Kathirvelu. Kathirvelu’s inexplicable attachment with Tamil culture is discussed through the monologue of Kathirvelu. The protagonist is reminded of the Tamil literature, the ancient poetry which acquired from his father; *Akananoor*, *Nattinai Kurundokai*, *Chilappadikaram* are reverberates in his thoughts while he come across the German Poet, Henrich Heney, and his love for his literature:

“I think the German language is strange one, but I deeply inspect it, I can’t think about other. Because my heart will be broken and the blood flaws with joyness.”

Multiculturalism had given rise to pluralistic society, which challenges the monocultural system. Man moves, meets others, settles, demolishing linguistic and cultural gap in the possible ways. A common strategy among diasporists is to classify diasporic social formations by identifying new structures of being of an uprooted ethnic collectivity as it oscillates between homeland and host land.

**References**

- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Rentledge, 1994.
- Kakkanadan. *Kaveriyude Vili*. Mathrubhumi Books, 1958.
- Mishra, Vijay. *Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorising the Diasporic Imaginary*. Routledge, 2007.
- Mishra, Vijay. *What was Multiculturalism: A Critical Retrospect?* Melbourne UP, 2012.
- Panikker, K. N. *Colonialism, Culture and Resisitance*. Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society*. Hoggarth Press, 1993.