

The Internationalizing of Culture Space

Contributed by David Davidar, for the Canada India Foundation
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Recent surveys have shown that South Asians comprise the fastest growing minority population in Canada and I can only assume from this statistic that people from the Indian subcontinent find this country to be a very congenial place to live in. On the cultural side, which is the area I can claim to have some insight into, South Asians have been making their mark on Canada for several years now, but what I find particularly telling is the way India, which in geographical terms is about as far away from Canada as possible, has begun to seep into the mainstream. When I first got here a little over four years ago and was presented, so to speak, to Toronto's literary community at a glittering occasion at the Carlu, I made a speech which opened with my assessment of one of the most successful novels published in Canada in recent times, *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel. What I found interesting about the book, which won the Booker Prize and other international acclaim, was that it was among the most interesting novels I had ever read about India and the place of religion on the subcontinent. It was an important indicator of the close ties between the Indian subcontinent and Canada that the novel was written by a French Canadian out of Montreal.

Over the past decades, there have been several Indian Canadians or Canadians of Indian origin such as Rohinton Mistry, Moyez Vassanji, Anita Rau Badami, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Anosh Irani, Ameen Merchant, and others who have carved out a very secure place for themselves in Canada's literary pantheon. Rohinton and Moyez have won Canada's top literary award the Giller and the others I have mentioned have also been critically acclaimed. I find it interesting that their subject matter is often about the home country; an increasing number are starting to write about the Indian diaspora and in the years to come, I have no doubt they will write about Canadian mainstream subjects however the Canadian mainstream is to be defined in the future.

I personally find Canada to be among the most interesting countries in the world today because of the way it has dealt with immigration and the co-existence of various minority groups. Our own time has seen a greater shift in populations across the world and a more massive interlocking of east and west, north and south than ever before. One of the greatest challenges facing modern society is how to best deal with issues such as interracial relationships, modern trade, religion, globalism, and so on and so forth. Writers, musicians, stand-up comics, actors, directors, dancers, and every other form of cultural personality you can think of will necessarily have to reflect all these changes in society and this is true of Indians in Canada as well. I find this 'internationalizing' of the cultural space in this country and in India very exciting and I keenly await the innovative literary forms and narratives that it will give rise to.