



## Changing Landscape and the Loss of Identity: An Analysis of Aazhiyaal's *The Mother and The Goddess of Night*

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### Abstract

*The term “Diaspora” has originated from the Greek word “diaspeirein” carried by the meaning of “disperse” or “scatter”. Though the term diaspora and its literature is initially associated with the Jews, the Tamil diaspora literature has also been acknowledged into the academia of the world literature and it is achieving its new paradigm in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. Exclusively, after the end of civil war in Sri Lanka in (2009) it has attracted the attention of the world. This present paper critically, endeavors to study the poem “The Mother and the Goddess of Night” (2013) (2015) by Aazhiyaal in the context of how the geographical change of landscape leads to the loss of identity.*

**Keywords:** Aazhiyaal, Poems, Tamil Diaspora Literature, Loss of Identity.

*“The sea has drained away  
Tamil has no territory  
Kinships have no name” Cheran (2013:127).*

The study of identity crisis is a much altercated issue in diaspora and colonial literature. For the diaspora people identity crisis becomes crucial in the context of “migration is a one way trip. There is no “home” to go back to” (Stuart Hall, 1996: 115). The scattering of people and communities is not a new concept but an age-old practice with reference from the Bible. Exclusively, The Jewish community on its racial discrimination, Indian indentured labourers and African slaves based on Transatlantic Slave Trade, scattered with trade, migrations during the early colonial days across world irrespective of geographical boundaries and subject of diasporas are some of the vibrant ones in the contemporary diaspora literature. The term “Diaspora” has originated from the Greek word “diaspeirein” carried by the meaning of “disperse” or “scatter”. Though the term diaspora and its literature is initially associated with the Jews, the Tamil diaspora literature has also been acknowledged into the academia of the world literature and it is achieving its new paradigm in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. Exclusively, after the end of civil war in Sri Lanka in (2009) it has attracted the attention of the world. This present paper critically, endeavors to study the poem *The Mother and the Goddess of Night* (2013) (2015) by Aazhiyaal in the context of how the geographical change of landscape leads to the loss of identity.



Aazhiyaal was born on 1968 in the district of Tirukōṇamalai in Sri Lanka. She has completed her studies in English Literature in Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women in Madurai in Tamil Nadu and also in The University of New South Wales, Australia. Having completed her education, she has served as a lecturer for five years in the department of English in the University of Jaffna. She has widely travelled and finally settled in Canberra that is the capital city of Australia. As she started her writing career from 90s, so far she has published three collection of poetry titled உரத்துப்பேசு, (Uraththu Pesa,) துவிதம், (Thuvitham), கருநாவு (Karunavu) and also a collection of Translation Poems of the Australian Aborigines, titled பூவுலகைக் கற்றலும் கேட்டலும், (Poovulagai Katralum Kaettalum).

While traditional models of identity draw all articulations of landscape into a commonality of time and space, along with the concept of home, the potential of minority migrated communities to intervene in such spatially and temporally bound, as well as homogeneous, constructions of home has had crucial implications on the narratives and discourse because the nation has reinforced “the homeland” a myth that is entrenched in the popular imagination and memories. As “the diasporic space is the quintessential late 20th-century space, a space in which the terms of modern immigration, exile, loss, nation, subject, and citizen are negotiated and reinvented for various uses” (Okwui Enwezor 1997:88) “It is one of the unhappiest characteristics of the age to have produced more refugees, migrants, displaced persons, and exiles than ever before in history, most of them as an accompaniment to and, ironically enough, as afterthoughts of great post-colonial and imperial conflicts. As the struggle for independence produced new states and new boundaries, it also produced homeless wanderers, nomads, vagrants, unassimilated to the emerging structures of institutional power, rejected by the established order... And in so far as these people exist between the old and the new, between the old empire and the new state, their condition articulates the tensions, irresolutions, and contradictions in the overlapping territories shown on the cultural map of imperialism” (Edward W. Said, 1993:402) especially in Sri Lanka and the condition of the Tamil people is much pensive and inexpressible in words due to hegemonic oppression and the civil war, the people are made to migrate and their path becomes never ending as “there is no longer any stability in the points of origin, no finality in the points of destination” (Cohen 1997: 175).

Nostalgia for the homeland being the prime theme in diaspora literature exists only in memory. As expatriate writers tend to sentimentalize the native landscape in a retrospective view, Aazhiyaal has expressed that she and her daughter has disappeared-a symbolic representation of loss of her identity and also she rushes in search of her daughter represents her quest for identity. Usually, in the context of diasporic identity, Search for home, identity, space and location ends in loss and failure, yet she gives an optimistic note of ending in her poem that she has found her daughter and the optimistic view sheds “light on how identity, hybridity and transnational communities are influenced by transnational relations across space” (Bailey, 2001: 423).



In simple terms identity means distinguishing oneself from other. One of the important aspect and perspective of identity crisis across diverse cultures is where one belongs, or how associates himself or herself with the landscape and place. The change of landscape impacts individuals' perception and change their value as they struggle to maintain connections with their new landscape as it is constantly contested and revamp a relation to individual experiences, social understanding, and political circumstances. Diachronically, it reconstructs the linguistic and cultural identities of migrated people. With different categories of landscape, the identity of the individual is asserted based on their belonging to geographical locations as “the term “diaspora” is inherently geographical, implying a scattering of people over space and transnational connections between people and places. Geography clearly lies at the heart of diaspora both as a concept and as lived experience, encompassing the contested interplay of place, home, culture and identity through migration and resettlement” (Blunt 2003: 282)

Landscape or forensically geography is associated with Tamil writings ever since *Sangam literature*, for instance, Tholkappiyar, in his famous book *Tholkappiyam*, Tamil poetics, divides “into five main types, each associated with a particular landscape, tinai, and a system of images associated with that landscape” (Lakshmi Holmström, Web) because “Considering the literary usage of, Mutalporul, Karupporul and Uripporul are the three important constituents by which the *thinai* (landscape [my emphasis]) of a poem is determined” (Manavalan, 1998: 5).

Hence, “the poetics of landscape continues to haunt Tamil writing. Of course, modern writers don't seek to replicate it, but rather, to glance at it, allude to it, dialogue with it, or even reconfigure it. That is the exciting bit. So we get in their writing cityscapes of alienation, snowscapes of exile and diaspora, landscapes of the imagination, fantasy worlds. But we also get confrontations and collisions between these different perspectives and worldviews; between the old and the new” (Lakshmi Holmström, Web). There are five *thinai*, as explained by V., Balambal “*kuṛiñci* (குறிஞ்சி)—mountainous regions, associated with union, *mullai* (முல்லை)—forests, associated with waiting, *marutam* (மருதம்)—cropland, associated with quarreling, and *neital* (நெய்தல்)—seashore, associated with pining. The fifth—*pālai* (பாலை), or desert, associated with separation—is described in the *Tolkappiyam* as not being a naturally existing landscape” (qtd by Wikipedia). As “each *tinai* was closely associated with a particular landscape, and imagery associated with that landscape—its flowers, trees, wildlife, people, climate and geography—was woven into the poem in such a way as to convey a mood, associated with one aspect of a romantic relationship” (Wikipedia) the description of the landscape by Aazhiyaal in her poem *The Mother and the Goddess of Night* (2013) (2015):

"Wastelands of snow

wastelands of snow (my italics)

only wastelands of snow



will I grant you all,"  
she fumes within,  
as she walks on and on.  
A snowstorm flings down  
a million, million needles.  
The earth freezes, water freezes,  
light darkens.

“*Wastelands of snow*” represents her loss of identity, her detachment from the land where she is that the landscape is unfamiliar in the list of five *thinai* and “so changing landscapes are also about changing identities” (Lakshmi Holmström, Web). The uproot of the culture, language, literature is clearly expressed in her poem. There are seventy million of the Tamils scattered around the world. “Such as the Armenian, Chinese, Greek, Indian, Kurdish, Palestinian, Parsi, and Sikh, whose experiences of expatriation, institution building, cultural continuity, and refusal to relinquish their collective identities have demarcated them from mere immigrants” (Safran, 2005: 36) language, landscape and culture are three facets of the same identity, and language is a major cultural element for the Tamils.

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