

Musings of Mannarkoil Professor: amalgamation of nostalgia and Indianness**1.Dr. Kadri Nashrin. A**Lecturer at Bhavan's Sheth R.A. College of Arts and Commerce, Ahmedabad,
Gujarat. India.**2.Ahmed Jasim Mutar**Ph.D. Research Scholar, S.D. School Of Commerce, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad,
Gujarat. India.**Article Received:** 15/09/2026**Article Accepted:** 16/10/2026**Published Online:** 17/10/2026**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.10.262**Abstract:**

The diaspora is a community of people who have been migrating from one geographic location to another in search of a better life. This movement plays a significant role in diasporic works and creates nostalgia in their lives. Words like homesickness, longing, wistfulness, remorse, reminiscence, etc. are also used to describe nostalgia. Nostalgia and Indianness have been two of the significant themes in Indian diasporic literature. In addition, nostalgia is not only about past memories but also helps immigrants in rebuilding and reshaping their lives in the host land. One could contend that nostalgia and Indianness are closely intertwined. Indianness is not just about India; it also reflects the lifestyle, culture, and customs of Indian people. However, there is no specific definition of Indianness. Diasporic people attempt to assimilate into a new culture without losing their identity in a foreign soil because they have strong ties to their customs and cultures. This research paper tries to explore the fusion of nostalgia and Indianness in a memoir, *Musings of Mannarkoil Professor: Now and Then Here and There*, by an Indo-Canadian author.

Keywords: Nostalgia, Mannarkoil, Indo-Canadian, writer, Indianness, Musings of Mannarkoil Professor

Introduction

'Diaspora' is the term used to describe groups of people, such as members of a certain ethnic or religious group, who migrated from one place but spread to other places (Britannica). Migration occurs occasionally for every living being on the planet. Poor economic conditions, conflict, poverty, the environment, human trafficking, and other factors are some of the causes of migration. The demands of humans have changed over time as well. People leave their home countries for developed nations in search of a better living and a more promising future. It's generally referred to as one aspect of the "diaspora." According

to the United Nations, the Indian diaspora, one of the largest in the world, is estimated to have 18 million people residing outside their mother land in 2020 (Hindustan Times. 2021). Unfortunately, we do not know with certainty when the first Indian immigrant or immigrants arrived in Canada. The first observation of Indian immigrants in Canada occurred when their number reached 45 in 1905. The number increased to 387 in 1906. However, there was significant growth in 1907, when the number reached 2,124, and in 1908, it increased to 2,623. During these four years, there were 5179 immigrants overall (Josh.1977.45). Since Canada was a British province and Indians were British subjects, Indian emigrants initially preferred settling in Canada rather than America. Indians' exploitation by the Sahukars and the British Empire and their poor economic conditions were the main causes of migration. Indians lured to migrate to Canada with the hope of a prosperous life and an urge to get rid of their terrible situations in India.

History demonstrates that people relocate in nearly every case to make circumstances better in life. It has been fascinating to explore the journey of Indians' migration to Canada. India is known for its unity in diversity and is one of the world's oldest civilizations. 'Indianness' is an amalgamation of Indian customs, traditions, and way of life rather than a notion. Indianness has been one of the important themes in Indian diasporic literature. Indian diasporic writers share their experiences of host land, alienation, loneliness, dreams of a better life, bitter and sweet nostalgia of their past life in India, and so on. Nostalgia plays a significant role in diasporic writings; without past memories, authors would not be able to share experiences of their past life which they spent in India. The relation of nostalgia and Indianness in Indian diasporic writings is like two sides of a coin. One can say that nostalgia and Indianness are closely intertwined. In the memoir, *Musings of Mannarkoil*, an author explores his bitter and sweet nostalgic feelings of India when he has already settled down in Canada.

Memoir: a tool to represent Indian nostalgia

'Memoir' is derived from the French term 'mémoire,' which means 'memory' or 'written records'; however, the French term 'mémoire,' originates from the Latin word 'memoria,' which means 'memory' or 'remembrance'(Openetymology). A 'memoir' is a nonfiction book that explores a specific theme or period from the author's life, not their entire life story. It is different from an autobiography in focus and aim; memoirs teach, give inspiration, and invite the reader into a shared human experience. The purpose of writing a memoir is to inspire or reveal a new perspective of life. In a memoir, the author himself is a protagonist and shares themes of life. The author shares his personal experiences with the readers, from which the readers can take benefits and inspiration(Rexford Sarah, 2026).

The term "nostalgia" was coined by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer (1688/1934) Identifying the symptoms experienced by Swiss mercenaries serving European monarchs. Hofer recognised several signs and symptoms of nostalgia, including crying fits, anxiety, palpitations, anorexia, and insomnia (Wildschut et al., 2008). Nostalgia is a longing for a place of origin that either no longer exists or never existed at all. Nostalgia is a feeling of

loss and relocation (Boym 4). Nostalgia is often linked to childhood memories, rural areas, and natural surroundings; both these aspects play a crucial role in the development of nostalgia.

Indo-nostalgic literature presents an image of India that highlights its rich cultural heritage. The culture reflected in the country's art and literature mirrors the people's way of life, their outlook, social structures, values, and customs, as well as their needs, ambitions, and aspirations for the nation. Literature is a valuable medium for understanding a country's culture and exploring its diverse perspectives. In the Indian context, 'Indianness' is far more than just a concept or a word. Any literary work that originates, evolves, and transforms on Indian soil brings to the fore the values and history that define Indianness. It is worth noting that Indian English literature encompasses not only authors who write about India while living within the country but also those who write about it while residing abroad. Undoubtedly, Indian literature written in English has garnered significant international attention in recent times, thanks to the efforts of diaspora writers of Indian origin. Furthermore, evidence suggests that these diaspora writers incorporate themes rooted in their native culture into their works. By bridging one tradition with another and one home with another, they create a new world.

The author of *Musings of Mannarkoil*, Gopalan Srinivasan was born in the Mannarkoil village of the Tamil Nadu. He completed his doctoral studies at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) in 1980. Before relocating to Canada, he spent several years working at IIMA. He enrolled in the Fredericton Business Faculty at the University of New Brunswick (UNB), where he taught for more than thirty years. He currently lives his retired life in Mississauga, Ontario, with his wife, Kalyani. (IIMAwimwian).

A confluence of nostalgia and Indianness in *Musings of Mannarkoil*

Gopalan Srinivasan, in his memoir, *Musings of Mannarkoil*, talks about that Canada is different in every aspect of India-in social life, traditions, cultures, life style, and etc. The author shares his experiences in a funny and witty way, he talks about 'lack of last name' syndrome in South Indian people, especially Tamilians, in Canada (Srinivasan, p.1). Generally, in South India, people write their father's name, village, caste name along with their names; the author writes his name G. Srinivasan, in it 'Srinivasan' is his first name, and 'G' is stood for his father's name 'Gopalan.' The author thinks that to add village name in name it would look like a full address, so he did not include another 'M' for his village 'Mannarkoil.' According to author, if he wrote his name 'Mannarkoil Gopala Iyengar Srinivasan' it would sound like a full address. The author also shares that his nick name at home was 'Mohan,' because he was born on the second October, the birthdate of Mahatma Gandhi. In the U.S.A., the working South Indians find out the unique solution for the problem of the long name, they abbreviated their first name and made it the first name, and used the longer version of the first name as the last name, as in Bala Balachandran, Kas Kasturi, and the like. The author started using Sri Srinivasan (Srinivasan, Gopalan. p.2). The author

discusses his love for pencils and how his father taught him to write; it was on the day of Vijya Dasmi; and his father held his index finger and wrote the first word, "Hari Om." Until now, the author uses the same index finger to punch the letters on his keyboard and touch a computer screen. He recalls that before he started writing on a real slate, he wrote on a slate made of rock, using a tool for writing on a slate called 'kuchchi' in the deep southern district, while in Madras, it was referred to as 'Palappam.' When he demanded a real slate, his demand was neglected by saying, "for the amount of writing you do, this is more than enough," or, "you cannot carry the weight." However, he was always promised a new slate for the next grade. (Srinivasan, Gopalan. p.12). He was really startled to see the usage of pencils in Canada; most of his students used pencils for their notes, assignments, and exams.

Usually, in India's small villages, a hairdresser comes to the home for a haircut with his tools or does his work on the roadside. In his childhood, the hairdresser, Paramasivan, came home for his father's haircut. He opened his toolbox inside their verandah. He unloaded articles from his bag one by one slowly, as a magician would do: an aluminium bowl, a brush with a white handle with the name Palmolive (popular those days), a knife, and a thick leather-like thing to sharpen the knife as it made clapping noise. It was a show by itself (Srinivasan, Gopalan.22). After his father's haircut, it was his turn; he ran to his mother and reminded her, "Last time you said I could go to the salon," to which she would calmly reply, "Next time". (Srinivasan, Gopalan.24). In contrast, when the author went to the salon in Canada, he saw a small child from India getting his haircut; his mother was on the side holding him, and the father in front of him was showing a comic playing on his phone while the boy was getting his hair cut. The author was about to tell him, "Kido, it was not that fun in my days" (Srinivasan, Gopalan. p.29).

The author highlights the differences between local village post offices and those abroad—such as the workspace, the variety of stamps, mailboxes, and so on. However, he noticed a striking difference during a visit to a post office in Canada; a person standing in the queue informed him that the individual at the very front was the province's Premier (a position equivalent to a Chief Minister in India). He found this hard to believe, as back in Madras—where he came from—he could not even imagine a Chief minister standing in line at a post office and paying for stamps out of their own pocket. In addition, the surroundings of the post office would be blocked by police for the public. That was when he realised he had not moved to another village but to a foreign land (Srinivasan, Gopalan. pp.69-70). In India, children ride a bicycle without any safety measures, whereas in foreign countries, children have to follow safety rules. The author shares his experience of learning to ride a bicycle in India, and it is a completely different experience to teach his daughter to ride a bicycle in Canada. He explains that bicycles in Canada come with training wheels—making them effectively four-wheeled—and are designed with the correct height, eliminating the fear of falling. He only needs to keep a close watch on his daughter when the training wheels are removed; he feels a sense of disappointment that she cannot experience the thrill associated with learning to ride a bicycle in India (Srinivasan, Gopalan. p.83).

The author recounts an amusing experience from his time in Canada; once, when suffering from a headache and some hearing difficulty, he consulted his friend's daughter, who is a doctor. She used the term 'idiopathic'—medical jargon meaning the cause is unknown—but due to his hearing issue, the author thought she was saying 'idiot path'. At the author's insistence, a friend's daughter referred him to a specialist, and after an examination, the specialist diagnosed him with 'Mannarkoil syndrome'. Upon learning the diagnosis and the full details, the author returned to his friend's daughter; she laughed and explained that it was simply another way for doctors to say, "We don't know." She told him that if a patient insists, doctors refer them to a super-specialist with a note stating that the patient will not accept 'no' for an answer, and the doctor simply names the condition a syndrome after that patient. The author was astonished to hear this, and she advised him, "Don't overthink it; otherwise, you'll get a headache." She explained in detail that there is a note saying, firstly, they tried to name it after Gopalan, but Gopalan Syndrome was already taken. Therefore, they ruled out the possibility of 'Srin Syndrome' and considered 'Mannarkoil Syndrome'. Furthermore, they had observed that there was a great deal of activity in your brain when a word, 'Mannarkoil', was spoken(Srinivasan, Gopalan. pp.136-137).

Gopalan Srinivasan in his memoir, *Musings of Mannarkoil*, he shares his fond memories of India—reminiscing about his childhood and school days, the South Indian lifestyle, and the differences between Indian and Canadian culture and lifestyle. From his memories, we can conclude that even though he lives in Canada, Mannarkoil still lives within him.

Conclusion

The diaspora movement plays a significant role in diasporic literature and evokes nostalgia in the lives of the diaspora. Nostalgia is associated with old memories of one's native place; these memories can be both pleasant and painful. 'Indianness' has been a significant theme in Indo-nostalgic literature. Generally, the pursuit of a better life and poor economic conditions have been the primary reasons for Indians migrating to Canada. Indians are deeply connected to their culture and customs; therefore, assimilating into a new culture is not an easy task for them. They are always oscillating between their country of origin and the country in which they are living.

Gopalan Srinivasan, in his book of memoirs, *Musings of Mannarkoil Professor: Now and Then Here and There*, recounts his experiences of living in Canada in a delightful and entertaining manner. The journey from India to Canada must have been long and far from easy for him; yet, he describes it in a way that allows readers to appreciate the story of his struggles and hard work. The author shares details of his life from childhood through to retirement—covering everything from names, surnames, his South Indian life style, description of his small village, college, pens, and pencils to school addresses, and bicycles. He talks about his distinct lifestyle in Canada and also feels disappointed that his children are missing out on the exciting experiences and fun moments he himself enjoyed during his childhood in India.

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