CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
The field of Indian Writing in English is a vast and vibrant one in terms of proliferation and outreach, both in India and outside of it. Some of the major concerns that various writers engage with in their works are quest for identity, gender and family issues, history and historiography. Scholarly discussions deal with similar subject matter. Within the critical circuit a lot of debates center around the issue of ‘authenticity’ of this body of writing, which is also connected in some ways to the issue of legitimacy of representation and the relative merit of Indian English Writing vis-à-vis the regional writing or Bhasha writing of India. Even though questions about the extent of ‘Indianness’ of English writing in India have always been asked, there is a discernible difference in the line of interrogation over the years. The Indianness, for example, of Raja Rao or A. K. Ramanujan has never been questioned in the way that Salman Rushdie’s or Amitav Ghosh’s has been. This difference is due partly to the shift in the themes and concerns of writers and their geographical-cultural location.

The Indian English writers’ ilk is a teeming one. Some are settled in India, others are living abroad, while some divide their time between India and outside discoursing about the nation from a distance. Some of them are even second generation immigrants settled abroad. There are writers who admit being uncomfortable with the Indian Writers in English label. Jhumpa Lahiri, for example, an author of Indian origin living in the United States is not at ease with being included in the Indian writers in English category (Leyda, 66). In the earlier stages of Indian English Writing the concerns of writers mostly revolved around social issues, problems of the downtrodden or the middle class. Writers strived to express the cultural ethos of the traditional Indian society. Critical energies too remained focused on realist
ideologies and judged texts based on their success in giving expression to the prevalent social realities. With writers settling abroad or those dividing their time between India and abroad, contributing substantially to this genre, the scope of themes and concerns widened from purely Indian to global/transnational. Their works brought together global and local happenings, one reflecting on the other; and were premised on an interweaving of cultures and concerns. Salman Rushdie has said in his *Imaginary Homelands* that it is a folly to try to confine an author within the passport of a country. The discourse of displaced people challenges established concepts such as those of home, nation, belonging, native, alien etc. Earlier binaries of neat East-West distinctions are problematized in these works. Critical focus too has shifted from examination of colonial hegemonic representations and now engages with marginalized positions in the post-Imperialist nation.

Rapid developments in the fields of trade, market, commerce and telecommunication technologies, together with cultural exchanges at the global level are creating a paradigmatic shift in people’s understanding of selfhood, belonging and identity. A lot of authors today constantly attempt to obliterate the fixity and the essentiality of identity, and of belonging to a particular culture or a single nation. They are challenging the understanding of nation, the idea of a fixed space-time limitation. A large number of authors now write novels that are floating in multiple inter-connected yet subjective spatial and temporal frameworks. Yet they cannot evade compartmentalization under such headings as ‘Indian writing’ mainly because they write about India, though they may not be confined to Indian themes and realities. This disarray of impressions and dichotomy of debates
has rendered the very idea of Indian Writing in English problematic. Objections are continuously raised regarding the veracity of representation and the right to speak for, by those who stay abroad and write about India.

Makarand Paranjape writes in his essay, *Common Myths and Misconceptions about Indian English Literature*, that it is quite logical to expect that genuine ‘Indian’ work can be produced only by an author who resides in India because works of an author are undeniably shaped by their socio-cultural position (134). Nayantara Sehgal, in her essay *Some Thoughts on the Puzzles of Identity*, points out that the writers who are enjoying the ease of living in the West while writing about India and its problems are wrongly shaping our identity for us. With all these debates in the background, it seems necessary to study the idea of identity with respect to the changing approach to the text’s and the author’s cultural location, affiliation and perception. Indian English Fiction is an immense treasure trove of narratives that give expression to the cultural ethos of the prevalent social milieu. In fact, the edifice of Indian English Fiction stands on the triad of place, culture and identity that defines and renders shape to it. Contemporary fiction, as pointed out by Dr. G.A. Ghanshyam, owing to the influence of the diaspora is replete with musings of ‘home’ (38). In other words land holds an eminent place in Indian English Fiction as a symbol of ‘home’; revisiting one’s roots keep the individual grounded and connected to the native land and links her to the past through the inherited cultural ethos that she carries within the self.

Land and culture are essential elements that constitute an individual’s identity. However, these newer identities, which are quite often seen as
being fragmented, ruptured, hyphenated, and palimpsestic in nature, require new descriptions and new approaches within the field of creative literature and literary criticism. One such approach would be to investigate the premises on which the identities are being negotiated. Even at the time of Indian independence there was no straightforward emergence of a homogeneous concept of Indian identity. Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore, for example, can be seen as two leading yet somewhat dissimilar voices in terms of conceptualizing the idea of India. While Tagore’s conception militated against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one’s own people from the others, arguing against India’s segregation in relation to the world; Gandhi’s was a more insular approach. At the same time the refusal to privilege any one identity was common even at that time. Thus, identity is seen to involve choice and is subject to the circumstances in which the particular identity is privileged. A spatial approach to identity provides the necessary platform for understanding diaspora texts and their ‘representative’ role. Diaspora is an exemplary case of cultural formation within the interconnected world, capturing human mobility and (re)settlement not as opposite points, not as cause and effect, but rather as co-existing elements of a world connected through flows and networks or, as Arjun Appadurai puts it, through ‘scapes’. Location makes a great deal of difference even in the construction of imagination, as also on the conception of identity. Location here is of course qualified not just by geography but also by the social, cultural and political ramifications of changing locales.

This chapter begins with the background, felt need and scope of the study. A research of the issues of representation, questions of agency and the complex interaction of the variegated geographical-cultural backdrop surrounding
Indian writing in English leads to the key questions raised by the study. The second section discusses the texts taken up for study in some detail providing a rationale for the choice of texts. The key terms of the topic have also been contextualized and outlined in their usage in the current study, in this section. The third section provides the “Literature Review” where key theoreticians, social scientists and critiques have been discussed. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework, critical approach and methodology of the research. In addition to postcolonialism as a reading practice and theories about the diaspora, critical discourses that have informed this research are reader-response criticism, new historicism and comparative reading; though the focus will be on the literary texts rather than the theories.

The fifth section, “The Contemporary Scenario” traces the major issues that Indian writers of fiction engage with. The representation of the nation is a theme pervading most of the works including the earlier ones. However, the later novels problematize the post-independence nation itself in their representations, focusing on the deconstruction of history and historiography. The texts under study deal with persistent problems of discrimination, marginalization, hierarchy and oppression within the working of the nation-state and in the institutionalization of trenchant nationalism. In concluding, the structure and layout of the thesis has been outlined.
1.1 BACKGROUND, FELT NEED AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The debate surrounding the Indianness of the Indian English novels is an extensive and continuing one. The Indianness of the Indian English novel is seen as a veritable touchstone against which its authenticity and worth has come to be measured. Prominent critics like K.R.S. lyengar wrote that, “It stands to reason that what makes Indo-Anglian literature an Indian literature, and not just a ramshackle outhouse of English literature is the quality of its ‘Indianness’.” While the earlier writers were seen as innately confronting this ‘anxiety’ in their bid to remain ‘rooted’, as mentioned by Meenakshi Mukherjee in her essay ‘The Anxiety of Indianness’; in contrast, post-1980s Indian writers in English are seen as capitalizing on their nationality while basking in the celebration of the nation as an ‘imagined’, hybrid, multiple entity. Post-1980s, the debate surrounding the concept of ‘Indianness’ and the representation/construction of India in Indian English novels, have acquired a new dimension. This has been attributed to the peculiarly diasporic nature of those works. Many writers like Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chaudhuri, Gita Mehta, Vikram Chandra are living abroad and their works look at life in this country from a ‘distance’; or others like Arundhati Roy, Shashi Tharoor, Githa Hariharan are based in metropolises and their works have been accused of remaining grounded in metropolitanism. Most of the earlier Indian English novels borrowed the European trend of social realism in the novel form; however they were deeply rooted in the native soil. Beginning from Bankim Chandra’s novel Rajmohan’s Wife which has been variously read as a national allegory, the works of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan depicted the
emotions, feelings, hopes, aspirations and diverse problems of the Indian people. Their novels demonstrate what was widely seen as Indian sensibility, culture, tradition and philosophy.

The burden of ‘Indianness’ also falls on Indian English writers (and not just the diaspora) because of the obvious fallout between the medium and the cultural and social life it seeks to represent. Indian writers writing in English have always been questioned about their choice of language. M. Prabha, in her book The Waffle of the Toffs questions if Indian English writers are “usurping the cultural space of the nation themselves” (10). The fact that the genesis of Indian writing in English is in the colonial domination of India by the British has not in the least faded, and this idea of English language/literature being a part just of the colonial legacy seems to persist. In fact, for Indians English language is a falsely placed symbol of cultural superiority, education and erudition, betraying the existent extent of the hegemonic control that the erstwhile Empire exercises on the minds of the people even today. Salman Rushdie notoriously commenting that the best literature in India was being written in English, calling “Indo-Anglian” literature the most valuable contribution India has made to the world of books, only adds to the alienation of English from Indian languages. It is to be examined whether these accusations and ideas stem too from the ideological stance of the writers in their respective works, leading to certain stereotypical constructs not only of individuals and groups but also of the nation.

The nation has been extensively narrativized in the postmodern novel. In India the novel’s genesis can be traced to a time when the nation was grappling with questions of national identity and (anti-colonial) nationalism
was beginning to take shape. Thus, these issues found expression at the time in the novels of both English and other Indian languages. Whereas novels in most Indian languages other than English seem to have moved on to deal with other more ‘local’ concerns; the Indian English novel is still engaged in its pursuit and problems of depicting the ‘discursive space’ of India. The myriad ways in which such a discourse unravels to reveal the writer’s ideology and/or the question of agency could be of vital interest, especially when studied in contrast to the works of other India-based writers writing in English as well as other Indian languages. The essentializing of India in the one can quite interestingly be contrasted to the stubbornly heterogeneous entity of the other. Partha Chatterjee problematizes the very birth of the nation-state in its “obliteration of the fuzziness of communities” (25). It seems that the diasporic novel too readily prescribes ‘international’, ‘cosmopolitan’, ‘multicultural’ solutions to very ‘local’ problems that exist in the here and the now, and that have to be grappled with on an everyday basis.

David McCutchion, an English academic and a pioneer in various strands of scholarship in Indian studies, once asked “Whether a truly Indian novel is at all possible (17).” The context in which this comment was made is essentially the absence of a genealogy of the novel tradition in India in the event of the genre and the language both being a European import. Consequently the notion of ‘Indianness’ and something qualifying as ‘Indian’ presupposes an essentialist ‘India’ with its substantive lineaments, against which the verisimilitude of the novel in question is then measured. In opposition to such essentialism, diaspora writers valorize the memory narrative, privileging their ‘fragmented’ rediscovery of the physically
alienated country as having inherent resonance, objectivity and value. However, there is the need to investigate such literatures in the growing context of a global environment where rapidly increasing communication networks have in fact brought the diaspora closer than ever before to their homelands. A sense of cultural similarity or continuity is clearly perceived even as one moves beyond the geographical borders of the country. Curiously enough most writers living in the ‘First World’ have their artistic interests located almost inevitably in the ‘Third World’. The need to revisit the homeland may be a result of nostalgia, anxiety, guilt or sometimes a sense of alienation in the adopted home. Whatever be the compulsion, more often than not these works are a denunciation of the estranged homeland in one way or the other. Also, having in mind a potential audience to which the novel would cater determines the theme, as well as the structuring of the work. Whether the critiquing of India in the works of writers like V.S. Naipaul is a reflection of the longing for homeland needs to be debated. The construction of ‘homeland’ in these literatures has to be understood in the light of the contexts of representation. Thus, to begin with the question of what this ‘Indianness’ is about arises and how it is related to the quest for identity. By the mapping of certain spaces like religious-secular spaces; familial space; the space of minorities, women, etc. these writers endeavor to convey a sense of India. Whether these spaces are simply representative in nature or can be seen as constructs has to be probed.

Postcolonial literature, especially the novel genre boasts of a large number of migrant writers coming into its fold. So much so that ‘expatriation’ has become intrinsic to postcolonial literatures. The discursive space of the novel form allows for the ‘melting pot’ experiences of these ‘writer-
travelers’ to unfold with ease. This is so especially in the case of Indian writing in English where the world publication and publicity scene is dominated by such names as Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, etc. These writers have achieved worldwide recognition for their works of fiction which were received with great enthusiasm and huge signing amounts in the publishing world. With the exception of Arundhati Roy most of these ‘famous’ writers have moved from one country to another at some point in their lives. These writers respond to immigration in their works either in a direct manner, by writing about characters that have been transplanted; or treat immigration much less directly, by writing about characters who believe themselves to be very much at home. Thus their works have been critiqued broadly from two opposing standpoints- either as being resistant (anti-colonialist) in nature; or as being complicit with anti-national cosmopolitanism. Most of the current body of critical studies about these works takes up extreme positions. They either valorize the universal humanist position of these writers celebrating hybridity, global citizenship, secularity etc. vis-à-vis their works; or they denigrate them on the basis of the ‘privileged’ positions these writers occupy.

The authors taken up for discussion -Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh- were born in cities that were arguably the cultural-commercial hubs of India. While Rushdie was born in Bombay, Seth and Ghosh were both born in Calcutta. They have thereafter moved on to live in various cities across the world and quite easily qualify as cosmopolitans. Rushdie’s first novel, Grimus, a part-science fiction tale, was generally ignored by the public and literary critics. Midnight’s Children (MC), his
second proved to be an epochal novel that brought India much greater visibility in the world literary scene and the author was placed in the limelight, fetching him the Booker in 1993 and the Best of Bookers in 2008. He is a prolific writer with a number of novels to his credit- *Shame* (1983), *The Satanic Verses* (1988), *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001), etc. Interestingly, while Rushdie has received huge number of prestigious awards from across the world, besides receiving knighthood, he is conspicuously absent from prestigious award lists in India except for the Crossword Book Award. In contrast, Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth were both awarded the Padma Shri by the Indian government in 2007. Ghosh received the Sahitya Akademi award in 1990 for *The Shadow Lines (TSL)* amongst other awards in India and abroad for a number of his works comprising both fiction and non-fiction. Vikram Seth is a polyglot having command over Welsh, German, French in addition to Mandarin, English, Urdu and Hindi. He is most versatile when it comes to the choice of subjects as well as form of his works; from writing poetry, novel in verse, a libretto to the longest novel in a single volume his oeuvre is remarkably diverse. *A Suitable Boy (ASB)*, his second novel, despite its formidable length became a bestseller and propelled Seth into the public spotlight, especially in India.

This thesis examines the context of location in relation to constructs of identity in Salman Rushdie’s *MC*, Vikram Seth’s *ASB* and Amitav Ghosh’s *TSL*. The study attempts to analyze the articulation of selfhood achieved through its engagement with space and its narrativization; explore the ways in which these depictions overlap to map representations of nation; and examine whether these representations ‘stand for’ India or ‘reinvent’ India?
Furthermore, the issue of agency is discussed in the light of the political and cultural implications of these writers’ migrant experiences that are shown to have a bearing on the aesthetics and geopolitics of these representations. Some of the questions that the thesis asks are: Does the cultural-geographical location of the writer shape the aesthetics of the work? If so, to what extent? In what ways does the diasporic experience influence the (re)presentation of mediated and inter-connected spaces? How is a character, who does not share the author’s diasporic location and experience, depicted? Do the works cater to a Western readership by presenting a palatable version that is only purportedly transnational? Or, are the writers lapsing into a master narrative of universalism?

Whilst underlining the inherent tensions within the texts that problematize located, exclusive formulations of national and/or cultural identity, the thesis attempts to deal with the slippages and politics of identity constructions. Even though these texts challenge the reductive processes of homogenization at work in the formation of national-cultural identities, their tendency to foreground transnational lifestyles and identities is discussed and debated. What, therefore, are the new positions that are opened up or unsettled or even promises unfulfilled in these writings with regard to less articulated selves? Does their rhetoric lend agency to the marginalized ‘within’ the nation, as much as ‘without’? The sweeping aside of traditional boundaries with the emergence of multiplicity, pluralism and heterogeneity can bring promises of previously submerged voices being heard. However, even in discussions about identity politics there is always the danger of lapsing into essentialism and fundamentalism. Indeed, for Robyn Wiegman, ‘the discussion of identity throughout the 1990s has been characterized by
‘intellectual exhaustion’, with the main contributing factor being ‘the failure of any individual identity rubric – race, gender, sexuality, nation, or ethnicity – to function in isolation’ (805). Lot of contemporary writing engages with the struggle between homogeneity and heterogeneity in the narrative construction or representation of identity, and explore the conflicts that arise from an intersection of multiple selves in a given space and time. Much of these conflicts arise from power struggles both within regional groups and internationally. Therefore, local as well as global forces are to be reckoned with in these imaginative narratives.

James H. Wandersee, an American educationist involved with pedagogy and research, provides insightful analysis of the connection between cartography and cognition, suggesting that “cartography links perception, interpretation, cognitive transformations, and creativity.” Wandersee states that map making serves four basic purposes-to challenge one’s assumptions; to recognize new patterns; to make new connections; and to visualize the unknown (89). Thus the word ‘mapping’ here incorporates a whole new paradigm of knowledge processing. Mapping is a metaphor for both connecting and overlapping knowledge structures. Thus it is a valuable heuristic in exploring the undercurrent of tensions that inform the representation and construction of identities in Indian English fiction as a resultant of the writers’ ‘diasporic’ sensibility as much as by the locus of the text. Adapting and assimilating to the new culture along with an unavoidable degree of acculturation is the inevitable consequence of ‘dislocation’ and subsequent ‘relocation’. Crisis of identity at some point during this transition seems the fate of most diasporics. Thus much of this body of literature oscillates between a pursuit to ‘grasp’ the self and the dynamics of ‘escape’
and ‘nostalgia’. Concepts of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ are problematized and reframed within the postmodern understanding of the relation between space and culture. Thus, the ‘mapping’ of the complex concepts of location and identity would rather than implying a definitive closure in the understanding of these issues, trace the fluidity of these subjects vis-à-vis the contrasting and comparative framework of the three texts under study.

Postnational and postcolonial literature while delineating the ambivalent nature of identity and depicting it as non-essentialist and always in flux, also un_masks the constructed nature of ‘history’ and ‘nation’. Yet again it runs the risk of exaggerating the degree of constructedness of these referents. No amount of deconstruction of these concepts can deny the oppression of groups of people, both materially and psychologically, or negate the violence that affects lives in the wake of ethnic, nationalistic, or cultural consciousness. That said, while fiction writers strive to convey the ‘reality’ of India, it is in constant flux and evades absolute representation. With the Indian English literary scene being dominated by writers who are located abroad, a nuanced understanding of the relationship of such writers to their homeland vis-à-vis their works needs to be undertaken. Both Rushdie and Ghosh are writers of the expatriate community; however their ideologies as also their works reflect different and differing sensibilities. While Rushdie belongs to an era closer to the experiences of Partition and communal strife, such tensions are not unknown to Ghosh. What then can the divergent nature of their works be attributed to?

Place, whether real, imagined or symbolic is neither neutral nor passive, but an active part of the discourse on identity. While representing/identifying the
self, it is imagined to be in a certain specified space with identifiable coordinates. Identities and representations are multiple and contingent and so are the spaces in which these identities are negotiated. Furthermore, these spaces are not only geographical but also imagined, drawing on cultural affiliations and connections. Thus, the term location encompasses the cultural as well as geographical tenets of the self. Quite often a split is detected between the representations of India from the geographically delimited subcontinent, and representations produced by migrant writers of Indian origin, living in the West. The ‘location’ of the writers may be seen as an important co-ordinate of distinction here.

1.2 LOCATING THE TEXTS

Concentrating briefly on the writers living outside India, or those dividing their time between India and abroad, it is found that from the late 1970s, as a result of earlier post-Partition Diasporas to North America and Europe, representations of India in the English novel have been increasingly shaped by the experience of migration. In post-colonial critical parlance this has been dubbed the literature of ‘not-quite’ and ‘in-between’, and can be summarized, briefly, as a writing which problematizes located, exclusive formulations of national and/or cultural identity, through a focus on ‘culture clash and metaphysical collision’ (Boehmer 232). For Salman Rushdie, the most well-known proponent of this genre, the idea of the former empire ‘writing back to the centre’ encapsulates a type of literary counter-attack, in which the English canon is redefined, formally and linguistically, by writers from the ex-colonies. Moreover, because migrant writers such as Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, and Rohinton Mistry all live and work in
the West, their writing also inevitably writes back in the opposite direction, drawing on, and creatively reshaping, childhood memories of the homeland. Importantly, in their complex mixing of places and histories these writings can also be seen to obstruct the very terms of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ through which colonialism formerly operated.

This literary genre has had considerable influence in shaping the tastes of a Euro-American publishing market and readership, producing idiomatic, culturally coded depictions of the nation. The hybrid, migrant aesthetics of writers such as Rushdie has been readily pressed into service as part of a wider theoretical accoutrement of post-colonial theory – most obviously in terms of Rushdie’s sensitivity to the unified narratives of nation and history, and his attack on the binary categories around which difference is asserted, which coincides with aspects of post-structuralist thought.

*MC* provides ample scope for discussion and debate of the various issues it raises or alludes to. As a novel that has been variously called quintessentially postmodern by some critics (Hutcheon) and postcolonial by others (Slemon), tries as per authorial claims to ‘imagine’ India as an ‘insider’. The work calls for a nuanced reading against the grain, keeping in mind the socio-political environ in which the novel was created and the one it attempts to recreate. Against the example of Rushdie's creatively displaced depiction of an imaginary homeland in *MC*, can be balanced a seemingly more located literary expression of Indian identity, Vikram Seth’s *ASB*. On the subject of thinking about ways of narrating nation and identity in relation to a location in diaspora, Vikram Seth is less explicit than the other two writers of this study. He, nevertheless, engages with several important issues that are
concerned with the reconfiguration of the nation; and the re-presentation of the ways in which the nation is imagined from various perspectives, especially those that are defiantly non-conformist interpretations of history, citizenship and culture. While the texts in this study collectively set out to interrogate the homogeneities and integrities of national identity from differing perspectives, for each of the authors under study, diaspora holds different resonances, be it in the sphere of literary aesthetics, cultural practices or lived experiences. The shared yet counterpointing concerns of these novelists poised with their individual strengths and emphases have determined the choice of these writers specifically. Collectively, this group of writers allows the investigation of the ways in which their texts represent national and cultural identity from the specificities of their plural and partial location in diaspora. In the case of each writer, it will be seen that diaspora, whether as a cultural and political aesthetic or a textual strategy, creates a new space for negotiating a complex and variegated conception and representation of national and cultural identity.

The ‘authenticity’ of novels such as \textit{ASB} are deduced on the basis of factors like their translatability into the vernacular Hindi as opposed to a polyglot novel like \textit{MC} can be limiting in its assumption of an essentializing ‘Indian’ idiom. It is important rather to understand if \textit{ASB} seeks to melt the ‘Otherness’ of India for the Western reader by constructing humanist aspirations common for both the East and the West? Or is the objective merely to explicate, resulting in the affirmation of difference rather than going on to become revelatory too, that is, unveil a universal humanity in spite of superficial cultural differences? Further, such inferences also bring one to the issue of ‘Indianness’ itself and to the literary value of a line of
inquiry of texts revolving around this concern. Is the ‘Indianness’ of Indian fiction, some essential, irreducible quality which brings disparate writers such as Ghosh, Rushdie and Seth together? The identity constructs in these novels is deeply connected to the writers’ (cultural) location and affiliation, namely that of the diasporic entity-riven by two cultures and two nations-engaged in the ensuing tensions of dislocation and relocation. While investigating the author’s ideology vis-à-vis the text, the importance of ‘paratextual’ elements of power play and the politics of representation and agency has also to be taken into account.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The 1980s was a hallmark era in the history of Indian English literature with regard to the burgeoning amount of attention it received from the global literary fraternity. Indian writers became more and more of a common feature on the Booker and the Commonwealth Prize shortlists. Indian English novels gained international reviews and became part of international curricula. International publishing houses overwhelmingly took to publishing the works of Indian writers. Back home this furor surrounding Indian English literature was met with mixed responses. While early responses emulated those of the western reviewers, there was a lot of skepticism and even harsh criticism. One of the important debates that emerged from the criticism of these works was the issue of ‘Indianness’ and ensuing questions of representation and identity construction, foregrounded by the largely diasporic identity of some of the writers in question.

Search for identity, identity crisis and identity politics are recurrent leitmotifs in a number of works produced by Indian writers experiencing
cultural transition of sorts. Contemporary criticism adopts diaspora and displacement as a critical tool in order to analyze the complexities of identity, connections and representations. Stuart Hall, in his work *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, puts forward the theory of the ‘circuit of culture’ that analyzes meaning production in the light of language as media of representation. In his analysis he demonstrates the mutability and multiplicity of meaning. Issues of representation have been lucidly dealt with by Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak in her seminal work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* For instance she problematizes the voicing of the oppressed native woman’s predicament both by the British and the locals as being fraught.

The politics of representation is also connected to ideas of ‘belonging’ or ‘unbelonging’ as the case may be. The concept of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ have been explored by John McLeod, Robert Cohen, Avtar Brah and Salman Rushdie amongst others as a ‘mythic place’ constructed by the imagination. Such considerations entail the understanding of spatiality and its relation to culture. In the work *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, Humanist Geographers offer an alternative understanding of the concept of space as a cultural construct. The geographer Yi Fu Tuan propounds place as being subjective and as something that does not have scales attached to it. Such an understanding is subservient to tracing the relation between diaspora and National Culture. However, this relation can yet again be off-set against the deliberate distancing of the ‘homeland’ in the works of diaspora writers; coupled with the idealizing of the hybrid metaphor in such works as Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* betray a certain cultural politics pertaining peculiarly to the diaspora. Also, national culture has to be
understood in terms of globalization on the one hand and the renewed forces of nationalism and ethnicity on the other. The ideas of derived nationalism propagated by the likes of Benedict Anderson in *Nation as Imagined Community*, and the assertions of theorists like Arjun Appadurai that we now live in globally imagined worlds and not simply in locally imagined communities are constantly challenged in the face of ethnocide and internal factionalism. Moreover, the recurring feature of ‘home’ or ‘homeland’ is invoked in connection with ‘belonging’. A stimulating debate is provided by Rosemary Marangoly George in her book *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*—“At the everyday level of discourse, nationalism as we know it becomes too restrictive a term because it devalues (or else gentrifies) ordinary, everyday, subaltern, ‘non-official’ experiences of home” (38). The idea(s) of India and problems of national identity have to be tackled from multiple perspectives without the unnecessary privileging of one over the other.

H. S. Komalesha in his book *Issues of Identity in Indian English Fiction: A Close Reading of Canonical Indian English Novels* as the title tellingly suggests, traces the making of contemporary post-national identities within the cultural production of India and in its English Fiction. He writes that “the notion of identity in Indian English Fiction is marked out in the interplay of history, culture, caste, religion, place, language, nation and nationalism” (23). However he goes onto differentiate between ‘micro markers’ such as caste, religion, language, etc. that was averse to the nationalist project and ‘macro markers’ of identity such as history, nation and nationalism that were naturalized by early nationalist literature in their anti-colonialist zeal. Postnational and postcolonial texts such as those initiated by the Subaltern
Studies group inspired by Ranajit Guha, a distinguished historian, problematize and deconstruct such essentialized terms of reference of the earlier literatures to reveal their constructed nature. Guha suggested that while Subaltern Studies would not ignore the dominant, because the subalterns are always subject to their activity, its aim was to "rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much research and academic work" in South Asian studies.

In an essay entitled ‘Indo-Anglian as Anglo-Indian: Ideology, Politics, and Cross-Cultural Representation’, Makarand Paranjpe while arguing that “the end of the empire, likewise, signals a transfer in fiction power” goes on vehemently to urge: “The fictional territory that is India must be repossessed by those who live here and belong here. They must assert their rights to have the deciding say in how it is represented in literary artifacts.” Salman Rushdie on the other hand is entirely dismissive of any such questions of assertion by calling literature as ‘self-validating’.

Meenakshi Mukherjee raises certain pertinent questions in her essay ‘The Anxiety of Indianness’. As the title of the essay suggests there is a certain angst associated with the Indian English novel’s authenticity in terms of representing the nation, especially in contrast to the novels written in other languages (Add to this the burden of expatriation and the accusation of being twice-removed doesn’t seem far!). Mukherjee’s assessment of the anxiety in earlier writers like Raja Rao, Anand and Narayan stemming from “their own desire to be rooted” is in contrast to the later writers’ succumbing to “the pressures of the global marketplace”.
The noted critic, C. D. Narasimhaiah’s analysis and evaluation of the works of writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor and Arundhati Roy in his essay ‘Spurious Reputations’ is as significant as it is scathing and unsparing. While ASB is accused of being replete with “unredeemed trivia”, Rushdie is condemned for his “love of jejune word-play”. He asks of the reader “What does the novel realize after all? What emerges from it in terms of history or literature? … What does it mediate in terms of experience?”

The above questions raised by C.D. Narasimhaiah are apposite in assessing the value of a work though on a subjective level; thus calling for an interpretive, more than an evaluative examination of these works. The rendition of the novels in their particular contexts in terms of reader-response is of prime importance because of the kind of issues they both deal with and raise. A vast gamut of literary attention has been paid to Salman Rushdie’s novel MC in terms of contexts, themes and aesthetics.

While most early reviews of the novel both in India and abroad were quite enthusiastic, to say the least, about the ‘new’ kind of novel; there were a few that voiced, albeit feebly, notes of “exasperation”. Norbert Schurer in his Reader’s Guide to the novel highlights a number of the celebratory reviews as well as critical comments that came with its publication. To mention a few- The New York Times Book Review called it “a continent finding its voice”; while Guardian found it “full of life, colour and poetry, and the love and dread, of country.” As noted by Schurer, Anita Desai provides the most acute review of the novel, recognizing the Western as well as Eastern tradition in which the novel can be placed, as also discerning the political undertone of the work. However, Aleid Fokemma points to two significant angles of the novel that have received most amount of critical attention, with
a third dimension that has generally been ignored. According to her, the Western literary tradition of postmodernism that the novel emulates in various ways have been dealt with at great length; as well as the novel’s seeming exoticization or ‘Orientalist’ approach has come under the scanner. However, she points out that it is the political dimension of the novel that has largely been ignored. This view, however, holds true only partially. Though a number of reviewers and critics refused to see MC as a “political tract” (Nanporia in *Times of India*), most have acceded the political undercurrent in the novel due to its engagement with issues such as treatment of history, representation of the nation and national identity. However, it is yet to be explored whether Rushdie has a political agenda in the novel and whether he espouses certain causes? What urges Saleem Sinai to embark on his quest for ‘meaning”? Does Rushdie explore his and Saleem’s identity/identities through the length of the novel with a particular end in mind? If yes, does he achieve this end?

A large and growing body of literature has investigated various aspects of the novel, notably its use of language, stylistic technique (magic realism), allegorization, intertextuality, engagement with historicity, feminist perspectives, etc. Rushdie’s indebtedness to both western and eastern literary traditions is another significant debate which has kept critics pre-occupied (Cundy, 96). This issue acquires increased importance when viewed against the author’s stance as a Diasporic ‘translated’ self. Masood Ashraf Raja provides an insightful analysis of this issue in his essay “Salman Rushdie: Reading the Postcolonial Texts in the Era of Empire.” He draws attention towards “the location and historical context of the author and the politics of the critic” while attempting to ‘inundate’ a text- a term he uses for the
deconstructive reading of a text by positing it against theoretical and historical knowledge. However, Raja’s analysis takes off from Timothy Brennan’s understanding of Rushdie as a ‘cosmopolitan’ writer standing in opposition to the nationalist ideology. According to Brennan -

In the interplay of class and race, metropolis and periphery, ‘high’ and ‘low’ . . . cosmopolitans have found a special home, because they are both capturing a new world reality that has a definite social basis in immigration and international communications, and are at the same time fulfilling the paradoxical expectations of a metropolitan public…But more importantly, they are writers for whom the national affiliations that had been previously ‘given’ as part of the common worldview of the Third World Literature have lost their meanings. (38-39)

Such a definition presupposes the normativity of nationalist ideology. Rosemary Marangoly George in a review of Brennan’s book problematizes his use of the term ‘nationalism’ while raising pertinent questions about it:

For instance, he could have asked if Rushdie's antipathy to nationalism is due to his cosmopolitanism or because, as a member of a minority community, he is influenced by the ugly, even murderous, role nationalism has played on the Subcontinent in excluding entire communities and minority groups, in arousing communal hatred and dissent. (84-5)
Some critics like Harish Trivedi “have resented that Western critics and academics treat Rushdie as if he invented India or gave the continent a voice”. Thus Rushdie’s fiction has either been celebrated as an epitome of cultural hybridity and its aesthetics or as typical of cosmopolitanism and its associated socio-political and economic dynamism. These tensions and conflicts are quintessential to ‘diaspora’ writing in general and can be read into *MC* too. This study will attempt an investigation of the ways in which the author’s location as a diasporic can be mapped onto the ‘phobic’ spaces within the novel.

Amitav Ghosh’s second novel, *TSL*, has probably received the most amount of critical attention in comparison to his other, by no means unnoticed, novels. Most of the criticisms draw attention towards the novel’s engagement with postcolonial and postmodern issues. Novy Kapadia sums up the themes and concerns of the work - “the search for identity, the need for independence and the difficult relationship with colonial culture, the rewriting of the colonial past, an attempt at creating a new language and a new narrative form and the use of personal memory to understand a communal past.” However, in the attempt at grappling with the traumas of a colonial inheritance Ghosh has been accused to have taken resort in a utopian ideal of universal humanity and of “postulate[ing] a global theory of the colonial subject” (Robert Dixon, 96). A.N. Kaul too has criticized Ghosh’s novel for being “over-ambitious” and escapist, slipping into “plain sentimentalization” and “end[ing] up attributing value and a higher reality to a sort of amorphous romantic subjectivity.” He aligns Ghosh with the likes of western scholars such as Ernest Gellner, Elie Kedourie, Tom Nairn and Benedict Anderson for his unilateral viewing of nationalism as “an invention
and a force of destruction.” John Mee differs in his analysis of the work, taking off from Kaul’s reading of the “romantic trope of transcendence” as mainly attributable to a purportedly logical and linear conclusion of the novel in the “glimpse… of a final redemptive mystery.” Considering the novel’s “chronological and spatial disorientation”, Mee points out the fallacy of such a reading. He further argues that – “The novel valorizes … an idea of imagination that grasps and seeks to bridge or work across rather than transcend differences.” This point of view can also be validated by considering Ghosh’s affiliation with the Subaltern Studies group that focuses on the specificities of cultures and histories.

Ostensibly there is abundance of affiliation between the respective authors’ concerns as evidenced in Midnight’s Children and The Shadow Lines, yet their crafts are totally divergent. Preoccupation with the ideology of nation and nationalism, rendering of historicity, role of memory in (re)creating narratives, metropolitanism, etc. are some of the issues that are embedded in both the texts. However, the texture of these concerns come through as completely different. Priya Kumar in her comparative study of Rushdie and Ghosh draws attention to the different versions of cosmopolitanism offered by both. While Rushdie’s is a “tendency to dissolve differences altogether in its desire for a world without borders, and paradoxically, to its inability to move past the modernist category of the nation-state.” Ghosh, according to her “offers a more complex account of the intermeshing of religions and cultures, one that is not limited by, and indeed exceeds the bounds of, the nation-state.”
The bulkiness of the novel and the advance it received brought a lot of attention to Vikram Seth’s realist fiction, *ASB*, even before it was published. The book’s UK publishers Orion sent out promotional statements comparing the novel on various accounts to Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, Eliot’s *Middlemarch* and Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. The novel received glowing reviews from literary periodicals such as *Guardian*, *Times Literary Supplement* and *London Review of Books*.

In spite of its realist narrative mode Seth’s novel has been seen as a political allegory. Neelam Srivastava critiques Seth’s appropriation of the realist mode in “naturalizing what is in fact a carefully constructed ‘imagined community’.” Dirk Wiemann in his book *Genres of Modernity: Contemporary Indian Novels in English*, illustrates how Seth merely creates simulations of reality while mostly engaging with constructs rather than a totality of either the society or of the nation it seeks to represent.

Comparisons of Seth’s novel to *MC* become inevitable due to the sharp contrast in the treatment of a similar theme, namely post-independence India and the family motif. Pointing out Seth’s departure from other post-Independence Indian English writers, Anita Desai comments that “he writes as if Salman Rushdie had never written *MC*.” They have been contrasted in their use of language (James Wood), form (realist/magic-realist), treatment of historical material, etc., in spite of the ostensible similarity of their vision of projecting the viability of a secular multicultural nation as opposed to a purist state divided on communal lines. In a *Times Literary Supplement* review, Pico Iyer has called Seth’s novel “a counter-Rushdie epic.” Another point of comparison between the two novels is their translatability into other Indian languages. Whereas *ASB* was found to be compatible to translation in
both Hindi and Bangla, *MC* posed a number of difficulties. The translatability factor of the novels has been used as an index for measuring the authenticity and rootedness of the respective works by a number of critics, most notably among them the English and Hindi literary scholar and critic Harish Trivedi. In a book review of the Hindi translation of *ASB* (*Koi Accha-sa Ladka*), Harish Trivedi not only reveres the Hindi translation as an act of “cultural recovery” but also praises Seth for writing a novel that lends itself to being “recovered” in this manner. He attributes the authenticity of Seth to the fact that his novel rings even better in Hindi than in the original English version. He writes:

> Of all the spectacularly successful Indian novelists in English of recent years, it is *A Suitable Boy* which is the most deeply embedded in the theme and the context which it depicts, and the most intimately complicit in a local language. Seth’s English has a doubleness, a twice-born sanskar and resonance of cultural heritage, which should be the envy of some other Indian novelists in English such as Rushdie and Roy. (89)

Though these novels have been analyzed with regard to various common issues such as their treatment of history, ideas of nation and nationalism, search for identity; these issues have not been considered in relation to the ‘location’ of the writers. The writers respond in and through the works to their own needs and compulsions as required by the geographical-cultural adjustments undertaken. Their ‘position’ calls for not so much a rejection as a challenging of the national imaginary. In this study the texts are analyzed
within a comparative framework, bringing to light their undercurrents of specific diaspora concerns such as return to roots, primacy of family and obsession with genealogy, problematizing of identity, etc. with a continuous reference to authorial ideology and point of view. The geographic location as well as the cultural affiliation of the writers has a bearing on the representation/construction of characters and by implication national identity; their examination in a comparative framework throws up interesting conclusions. Thus, the study involves researching into the problematic of identity construction in relation to the cultural/geographical location of the text as well as the author. Although identity construction/representation is a ubiquitous tenet in literary explorations there is not much that has been explored by way of its relation to the questions of place. Concepts of space and place are becoming an increasingly important rubric in the mapping of identity, especially in the context of mobility both within and outside a delimited territory. In order to trace the inter-relation between displacement and identity construction from the vantage point of modern day diaspora writers, literary cartography is a valuable heuristic.

1.4 CRITICAL APPROACHES

The theoretical perspectives that have a bearing on the study are taken to present themselves by way of methodology in this text-based research. Postcolonialism as a reading practice and diaspora studies inform and guide the flow of discussions, given the very genesis and nature of the works taken up for study. Other theoretical considerations that have a bearing on the analysis are reader-response theory, new historicism and comparative literature. In order to understand the postcolonial context of the novels
analyzed in this study and more so of the very conception of identity it would be apt to begin with an overview of the general concerns of texts placed in this category of writing. Further, it would justify the adoption of this critical method as a reading practice.

**1.4.1 Dominant issues in postcolonial studies**

Postcolonialism can be said to have been theoretically instituted in 1989 with the publication of *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, although its impetus may have been in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* published some ten years earlier in 1978 or even the anti-colonial critiques of the likes of Frantz Fanon and Ngugi Wa Thiongo. Its inception is in the period of colonization itself since its aim is to contest oppressive structures informed by colonialist ideologies. Thus the word ‘post’ is to be understood ideologically rather than chronologically. Literatures that emerged from their experience of colonization to either challenge or subvert Eurocentric modes of discourse and representation have been classed as postcolonial. However, the enterprise of postcolonial literature is fraught with ambiguity, complexity and even guilt.

Literature was, as pointed out by Ashcroft et al. “central to the cultural enterprise of Empire…. So when elements of the periphery and margin threatened the exclusive claims of the centre they were rapidly incorporated.” This could only lead to furthering of the dominant discourse. The adoption of English as a language of the colonized was viewed by some as being rather complicit than dissenting. Much of the resentment against
English in India had to do with how it came into India, via the East India Company. Thomas Babington Macaulay’s notorious ‘Minute on Indian Education’ proclaimed the goal of having “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.” A similar debate surrounding the language of the decolonized nation was current in Africa as is evident in the works of writers like Ngugi (‘On the abolition of the English Department,’ 1972). Thus the development of postcolonial literatures became problematized. The colonial encounter resulted in the creation of a class of writers who were, in spite of being aware of the native culture, affiliated to the masters in terms of language and even sensibility. G. Griffiths’ A Double Exile published in 1978 while discussing postcolonial writers, talks about their ‘double exile’. They are “exiled culturally from the sources and traditions of that language [English] and linguistically from the landscapes and peoples they write about.” Thus directing attention to the “location of cultural production” by pointing out “the liminal position of a large number of authors” as Dieter Riemenschneider mentions in Postcolonial Theory: the Emergence of a Critical Discourse.

On the other hand there are writers who have appropriated the English language to suit their own purposes. Raja Rao’s explication in the Foreword to his novel Kanthapura is an apt and oft quoted example of such an enterprise:

One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own…. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a
dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful… (5).

The colonized people not only experienced such linguistic ‘displacement’ and the need to reconfigure their mode of expression, but they were physically dislocated too.

Colonialism involved mass movements of people, both colonized and colonizers from one place to another, as a result of migration, slavery or indentured labour. Whatever the reasons may have been it led them to be exposed to alien cultures and its ensuing troubles of adaptation and accommodation, very often resulting in identity crisis. D. E S. Maxwell considers the crisis of identity resulting from the issues of dislocation or displacement as central to the condition of Postcoloniality. The process of settlement, intervention or a mixture of the two is connected to the dialectics of displacement. These movements evolved a culture and discourse of their own commonly referred to as diaspora. The body of literature that developed from this community is prolific and miscellaneous, and has been dealt with in some detail.

The obvious reaction to colonial oppression was resistance to it which took the shape of anti-colonial nationalism in many of the colonized countries. Much of the early postcolonial literature is reflective of this movement; esp. the Indian English novel genre can be seen as nationalistic in nature and content. This literature has been described as the ‘literature of the ascendant spirit’ by Ben Okri. The spread of Empire was not only through overt political and economic force, but equally through covert cultural subjugation of the colonized people. The hegemonic oppression of the colonizers
normalized the ruling-class Weltanschauung to justify the social, political, and economic status quo as natural and inevitable, perpetual and beneficial for everyone. Thus as Elleke Boehmer writes in his book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*:

Nationalist movements have relied on literature, on novelists, singers, and playwrights, to hone rallying symbols of the past and the self through which dignity might be reasserted. The well-known image of the oppressed speaking out of silence has meant a willed intervention by colonized people in the fictions and myths that presumed to describe them. (6)

Thus to begin with postcolonialism enabled the re-interpretation of ‘classical’ English texts that sought to represent the ‘Other’. The very tenets of canon-formation were questioned and certain ‘received’ texts were re-written. Hence the process of the empire writing back involved both ‘re-reading’ and ‘re-writing’ as John McLeod points out in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism* (139).

One of the most outspoken critics of postcolonialism as a field is the historian Arif Dirlik, whose 1994 essay “The Postcolonial Aura” suggests that the postcolonialist world view concurs with that of American and European vested interests:

[**T**he term postcolonial, understood in terms of its discursive thematics, excludes from its scope most of those who inhabit or hail from postcolonial societies. It does not account for the attractions of modernization and nationalism to vast numbers in Third World populations, let alone to those marginalized by national incorporation]
The efficacy of postcolonial theory, however, lies in its adeptness in assessing the extent and implications of the colonial encounter. It stands for the contestation of both colonial domination and its legacies. Thus it begins, as pointed out by Gyan Prakash, in *media res* rather than at the end of colonialism. Many historians have undertaken studies which reveal that rather than being passive receptors of colonial power even the colonized had agency within their own history. Sara Berry reveals how, “Africans took advantage of officials’ interest in tradition to offer evidence favourable to their own interests” and often managed to gain access to productive resources (334). Therefore as Robert Young writes Postcolonial theory offers a “reconsideration of (colonial) history, particularly from the perspectives of those who suffered its effects, together with the defining of its contemporary social and cultural impact (4).”

The fact that Indian English novel writing found its impetus in the anti-colonial movement is quite paradoxical. Even while adopting the language of the colonizer it sought to resist and even subvert the literary-cultural hegemony exercised by the imperial authority. However, the process of ‘writing back’ has mutated and needs to be examined and reviewed in the light of the current scenario of globalization and neo-colonialism. Thus, thinking in postcolonial terms would imply thinking relationally and contextually. It would involve subjecting the text to critical historical and experiential tensions and contradictions to arrive at a meaning. Issues of
representation and identity construction cannot be understood or resolved in isolation from the larger cultural, political, social, and economic contexts. It is here that postcolonialism is efficacious in figuring out the impact and wide-reaching consequences of the civilizational interaction between India and the West, especially of our recent history of colonialism and of neocolonialism. However before using this as a tool or starting point for one’s investigation, it is imperative to understand the workings of postcolonialism itself and to find the usefulness or otherwise of such an approach.

As pointed out by Ingrid Johnston and Jyoti Mangat in their work *Reading Practices, Postcolonial Literature, and Cultural Mediation in the Classroom*, the postcolonialist reading method offers possibilities for challenging and disrupting binaries as ‘here-there,’ ‘white-black,’ and ‘center-margin’ and assists in moving beyond a “discourse of cultural containment towards a more radical engagement with difference.” Its objective is “less to promote debates over polarized entities” and more to consider “how the aesthetic and the political intersect in the study of literary texts.” Making use of Homi Bhabha’s theory of locating cultural differences in the ambivalent, fluid “interstitial spaces” between these locations, they consider reading “in-between” the aesthetic and the political as an effective tool that enables one “to consider the complexity of cultures and other such subjugated knowledges.” This implies that postcolonialism has to be viewed as an ‘aesthetic practice’ rather than a moment/period in history as pointed out by John McLeod. Postcolonialism is concerned with the effect of colonization on people, cultures and societies. Its study involves critical analysis and deconstruction of the dominant discourses on history, culture,
literature of the former colonies of European imperial powers. Western (cultural) imperialism imposed its might not just by brutal force, but by insidiously disseminating Eurocentric hegemonic discourses in the colonies. While the ‘oriental’ was represented as the exotic and inferior ‘Other’, everything ‘occidental’ was assumed to be normative and preeminent. Postcoloniality would therefore involve, to begin with, rejection of Eurocentric discourses/master-narratives; etching of a counter-narrative with the aim of fighting back their way into a world history written by Europeans; disestablishment of Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values; followed by expansion of literary canons to include colonial and postcolonial writers. Thus postcolonial literature is most essentially about finding a voice and dealing with issues of representation.

However, what is noteworthy here is also the underlying fact of colonialism as the point of departure for all of postcolonial transactions; it becomes the ‘determining moment’ of the colonized countries. Therefore in a way making the experience of colonialism central to any endeavor at making sense of one’s identity—inextricably linking their lives to the erstwhile masters. Frantz Fanon writes in his *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to Black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect. How do we extricate ourselves? (59)
In this sense post colonialism is ‘backward looking’. At the same time ignoring the far reaching influence of colonialism and the existent extent of neo-colonialism could be dangerous, leading to a self-congratulatory existence in a make belief world. It is perhaps the discursive spaces that negotiate between the extent and expanse of neo-colonialism on the one hand and progressive decolonization on the other that offer a possible break away, if not a solution.

As an umbrella term postcolonialism has often been accused of universalizing and homogenizing discrete historical and cultural experiences. Edward Said’s 1978 published *Orientalism*, a seminal work on orientalist discourse too has been accused of moving readily across time and space without considerations for the specific economic and political contexts.

This study focuses on subjectivity and identity, aiming to avoid any oversimplifications about cultural difference and plurality in reading practices, and aims to ask questions about who speaks, for whom, under what conditions, and to what ends. Such considerations necessarily deal with the problematic of literary production within the economies of the international marketplace, and with what Deepika Bahri has termed “the functional economy and orientation of the postcolonial text” (p. 285). In fact, postcolonialism in its engagement with specific colonial encounters can be contrasted to the more generalizing discourse of multiculturalism that draws upon ideas of liberal humanism based on tolerance, understanding, plurality and diversity. Postcolonial discourses address specific historical colonial legacies and the tensions that emerge therein from cultural differences.
Postcolonial literatures, which encompass a huge variety of international writing, attempt to challenge the dominant literary and cultural discourses of the west and to critique the persisting discursive and material legacies of colonization. While distinguishing cultural products that are produced in a postcolonial space from that of other spaces Paul Sharrad writes in an essay from the book *Writing in a Post-Colonial Space* that, “the field as generally defined seems to carry the general sense of anti-imperialist struggle for cultural self-determination” as opposed to those that “fail to convey any sense other than their self-confident, unquestioned and self-determining worth.” In this sense the postcolonial project combines both theory and praxis. Such a project by implication calls for a confluence of theoretical critiquing (Poststructuralism) as well as materialist philosophizing (Marxism), as pointed out by Leela Gandhi in her book *Postcolonial Theory*. She writes: “Thus, the postcolonial critic has to work toward a synthesis of, or negotiation between, both [Poststructuralism and Marxism] modes of thought” (ix).

The process of ‘reading’ a postcolonial literary text focusing on identity construction as the term of reference, would necessarily involve its being read in the light of Reader-response criticism. Though deploying reader-response theory is implicated in various ways such as through the use of psychoanalytic lens, feminist lens, or even a structuralist lens. What these different lenses have in common when using a reader response approach is they maintain "...that what a text is cannot be separated from what it does." Thus, the role of the reader cannot be omitted from the understanding of literature because they do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text rather they “actively make the meaning
they find in literature" (Tyson 154). At the same time readers and critics who share a close cultural proximity to the text may not always be at an advantage while interpreting it or assessing its value. Reed Way Dasenbrock states that “[t]he informed position is not always the position of the richest or most powerful experience of a work of art” (p. 39). Overwhelming concern with stereotyping and affirmation of the text to their awareness of cultural representations may sometimes distance the reader/critic from the text. Mikhail Bakhtin’s “Discourse in the Novel” suggests that theories of meaning and identity production depend on dynamic interactions between individuals and texts. According to him, it is the areas between reader and text, individual and culture, where significant understanding can take place. Bakhtin also sees reading as a negotiation that takes place between a reader, a text and a larger cultural milieu. For Bakhtin, language is always dialogic and always emerges within a social context. In much the same way a melee of reading practices conflated and overlapping each other that inform and guide the analysis of any given literary text, given the very contested nature of the text and the context(s) against which it is being read.

1.4.2 Theorizing Diaspora

The term ‘diaspora’ relates to geographic dislocation (the OED etymology of the word Diaspora being “to disperse”) and in the classical sense was related to the Jewish experience. The scattering of these people was always connected to an experience of victimhood and trauma. Gradually the term became a general metaphor for all those groups or even individuals who were geographically displaced from their homelands or all those who designated themselves as belonging to this category (Cohen, 1). William
Safran’s article in the journal *Diaspora* brought the Jewish experience under the social scientific paradigm while connecting it to those others who were similarly torn from the ancestral home under dire and painful circumstances, and continued to relate to the lost place in various ways. However this also resulted in the inclusion of widely varying experiences to be clubbed under the rubric of this umbrella term. In *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies*, for Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin the diasporas are an inextricable consequence of the process of colonization. As slaves or indentured labourers, they too suffered from trauma and victimization.

In this avatar the diaspora experience can be seen as bearing affinity with “the underlying paradigmatic case of the Jewish experience” as Robin Cohen posits, further stating “many other ethnic groups were experiencing analogous circumstances due perhaps to the difficult circumstances surrounding their departure from their places of origin and/or as a result of their limited acceptance in their places of settlement.” Such a diaspora lived lives as ‘resident aliens’ in their adopted land. However, their spatial identity becomes an insidious yet overwhelming reality which distances them from the ‘homeland’. This situation has often been analogized to that of Trishanku, the character from the Indian epic Ramayana who went ‘embodied’ to heaven but had to settle at a place midway between the earth and the paradise. In other words they become ‘nowhere men’. This is a skewed vision of the vast diaspora experience and can at most be a case in point. Once again to quote Robin Cohen “the diasporas are in a continuous state of formation and reformation”. Also differentiation has to be made between the old diaspora and the new. The former belonged mostly to the group of indentured laborers who left the homeland in duress, while the
latter would include the group of people who migrated voluntarily in search of better opportunities in the First World. Therefore, the early Indian diaspora writings such as those of Seepersad Naipaul, Santha Rama Rau, B. Rajan, etc. reflect deep attachments with the motherland. While the later diaspora writers like Ved Mehta, Bharati Mukherjee, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai etc. tend to inhabit the ‘liminal’ world of multiple, hybrid subjectivities fraught with the tensions of migration.

Cohen writes about how from the mid-1990s diaspora became ‘chic’ and that ‘everybody who was anybody wanted to be part of one’ (8). The idea of there being the possibility of diaspora without migration as in the case of gays and queers was also taken up in various academic circles. Thus the distinctive features of diaspora started blurring in the proliferation and stretching of the term to the service of various agendas. Therefore the question of representation became inextricably seminal to Diasporic literature. In the introduction to the book *In-Diaspora: Theories Histories and Texts* Makarand Paranjpe theorizes the relationship between diasporas and homelands, showing that it is not just the homeland that creates diasporas but that diasporas also create the homeland. The growing popularity of the term, the changing relations between diaspora and their homeland due to growing networks and communication have all contributed to making the term a contested one. The trajectory of numeric and economic growth of the Indian diaspora has been on a steady increase so that today they are a force to reckon with even in terms of socio-cultural and political influence not only in the country of adoption but also in the country of origin. Their literature is prolific and good marketing strategies have also gained them wide readership thereby increasing the imperative of assessing
and analyzing diasporic creativity. The ‘location’ of these texts and the point of view or perspective of the author is of prime significance in dealing with questions of representation and identity construction in the works of writers who stake a claim to this category or are perceived as such.

The experience of dislocation, which is almost always a painful one, is the defining element of a diasporic writer. Vijay Mishra has theorized this in his essay “Diasporas and the Art of Impossible Mourning” when he talks about the melancholy of the diaspora in Freudian terms, as a wound that is never healed. He argues that diaspora is like being ejected out of a mother’s womb; one cannot return to the womb, so one is condemned to a perpetual moving without arrival. The implication is that the diaspora is always migrating without arriving. Uma Parameswaran on the other hand traces four phases of the immigrant experience, stating that:

The first is one of nostalgia for the homeland left behind mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is a phase in which one is so busy adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is when immigrants start taking part in the shaping of Diaspora existence by involving themselves in ethnocultural issues. The fourth is when they have “arrived” and start participating in the larger world of politics and national issues. (2007, 305)

Yet she goes on to accept the relatively small number of those who are able to transit from the third to the fourth phase due to the “rigidity and withdrawal” of the host nation. The endeavor to assimilate with the adopted culture and environment sometimes results in the acculturation (the process of cultural and psychological change that results following meeting between
cultures) on the part of an individual. The process of acculturation itself is varied depending upon individuals. Some adopt the host culture completely and abandon their culture of origin; others fail to adopt the host culture while preserving their culture of origin; and yet others who are able to adapt to the host culture while preserving their culture of origin. Memory of the home also plays an important role in the degree and extent of relocation that becomes possible for an immigrant, conversely nostalgia for home is invoked as a result of the feeling of alienation an inability to adapt to the new culture. The latter becomes occasion for the invention or imaginative recreation of a homeland perhaps as a frozen frame in the spatialized-time of departure or dislocation.

1.5 THE CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO

The Indian English novel sees its origin in the colonial encounter and in the process of nation formation. The genre has been engaging with the idea of nation, identity and social reality ever since its inception. Colonial dissent was espoused in the early Indian English novel. Rajmohan’s Wife, the first English novel to be written by an Indian writer, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, could be seen as a precedent to a host of other later novels that can be read as a national allegory. Sri Aurobindo wrote in his essays in Indu Prakash, that what Bankim was trying to create was nothing short of “a language, a literature and a nation” (“Our Hope in the Future”: 102). The Indian novel in English has attempted in various ways to ‘talk’ the nation. Anti-colonial nationalism and the endorsement of Gandhian values permeated most of the works of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and K.S. Venkataramani. The works of
writers like K.A. Abbas, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Aubrey Menen, Manohar Malgonkar were mostly nation-centered. As Leela Gandhi writes “the social and political upheavals of the ‘Gandhian whirlwind’ and the era of late-modernism in Europe” conditioned a number of Indian English writers and informed their works both thematically and stylistically. Even though written long after Independence, R.K. Narayan’s *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) focuses entirely on a portrayal of Gandhi. The Partition has been another concern to pervade a number of novels, including some fairly recent ones. Most notable among them are Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975), B. Rajan’s *The Dark Dancer* (1958), Shiv K. Kumar’s *A River with Three Banks* (1998), Manju Kapoor’s *Difficult Daughters* (1998), Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *The Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hussain. The East-West cultural conflict in its varying aspects is another concern with which a number of writers engage in their works. For e.g. Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Arun Joshi. The voices of the marginalized have oft found expression in the fictions of their time- be it the story of Bakha in *Untouchable*, Munoo in *Coolie*, the harijans in *Kanthapura*; women’s voices in the works of Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, etc. The political novel was mastered by Nayantara Sahgal in her works *This Time of the Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977). Other novelists such as K.S.Venkataramani, A.S.P. Ayyer, K. Nagarajan, , K.A. Abbas, Manohar Malgonkar, , Attia Hossain, Gurucharan Das, Nina Sibal, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, O.V. Vijayan and several others deal with political issues such as communal problems, aggressive assertion of regional identities, materialism, corruption, social atrocities, power-politics and fundamentalism etc. With
writers like Arun Joshi and Anita Desai we see an inward turn towards the individual’s quest for identity as becoming more important than social exigencies. This existential quest for identity also informs the works of writers like Jhumpa Lahiri and Amitav Ghosh.

Industrialization, urbanization, globalization & modernization constitute minor themes recurrently and consistently treated in the Post-Independence Indian English novel. It can arguably be said that Indian novels in English were forced into a position of speaking the nation given the socio-cultural and historical context in which they were produced. The passage from the period of colonial subjugation to that of political independence, and the present post-independence/post-colonial phase has been fictionalized in the genre. If the history of Indian English novels is divided into pre-independence and post-independence phases then it can safely be said that while the former was a period that produced nationalistic literature with an eye on social reform, the latter saw the rise of post-national fiction. After the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in 1980, Indian English novels tended to problematize the decolonized nation itself. While the Indian social milieu continued to be central to Indian English novels of the 1980s and 1990s such as Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* (1988), Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995), Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) and Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* (1995), such texts also attempted to identify persistent problems of marginalization and oppression in India. Once again it was the culmination of the crises undergone by the Indian polity beginning with the collapse of Nehruvian statism and ending in the Emergency of 1975-77 that spurred the novelists of this period. Rise of communalism and disillusionment with the decolonized nation-state and its
marginalization of various subaltern groups forced writers to bring the state under the scanner. Moreover, this was also a time of growing networks and transportability. More and more people were travelling or even relocating to the West giving them access to western culture and commodity. So also in the academe, postcolonial and postmodern studies had gained currency and momentum in the West and influenced a number of Indian writers exposed to these changes. It could therefore be said that both the specific postnational turn as well as the general paradigmatic influence of the postcolonial – postmodern turn influenced the post-independence Indian English novelists. It is interesting to note here that Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan too extensively travelled abroad, however they preferred to choose the social realities of Indian life as focal points of discussion in their novels and seemed to be rooted in the nitty-gritty of contemporary India so far as their novelistic concerns reveal.

1.6 THESIS STRUCTURE

By structuring the work thematically rather than chronologically the analysis aims to respond to discontinuities in the critical constructions of identities and grapple with the slippages in the attempts to negotiate hegemonic representations, which could result in complicity. It is essential to begin with the exploration of the changing meanings of place and space since that is the main register on which the issue of identity is being examined in this study. This also involves dealing with the changing dynamics of borders and boundaries, with close reference to the texts under study. Claims to the effect of blurring boundaries necessarily lead to an exploration of the
meanings of home, belonging and nationhood, followed by the nuancing of these terms once again in the specific texts. Through various registers such as history, language, form and rhetoric, identities are negotiated in these works. The delineation or representation of certain groups of identities attempted in the penultimate chapter teases open the slippages in these constructions and leads to room for debating the terms on which these works have been foregrounded to begin with. In dividing the dissertation into three major sections dealing with the idea of geography in the context of literature, the homing tendencies of writers in diaspora and identity construction, a kind of order is imposed in the critique of the ways in which the three novels under study deal with the issues of representation at a subjective as well as a macro-level. Although of course these neat demarcations are artificial since the issues dealt with are interconnected and overlapping with each other. The common focus for all of the texts, however, can be said to involve the tensions, confrontations, and maneuvers resulting from the meeting and clashing of disparate identities or groups of identities, since as contemporary writers they are constantly engaged in the struggle between homogeneity and heterogeneity in their imaginative narratives, and in trying to elicit some meaning and coherent understanding in the face of mounting conflicts and confusion over the intersection of different selves within any given space.

The introductory chapter is followed by the section “Landscape to Mindscape”. This chapter, whilst exploring the literary cartography of the texts taken up for study, aims to unravel the diverse ‘spatiality’ at play within the works even though they are ‘located’ in the fictional space that is representative of India. In the context of the postmodern turn in the understanding of space as a social construct, a shift in emphasis from
‘landscape’ to ‘mindscape’ is dealt with, while connecting to the conceptualization of maps too. From being understood as a scientific enterprise maps have now come to be thought of as ‘thick’ texts laden with cultural baggage and as a tool used to rationalize space. The shrinking of otherwise unwieldy places, peoples and cultures to fit them into manageable and neat compartments on the scales of a map is the first step towards ‘systematic’ control over them. Both mapping and literature are connected in their endeavor to recreate spaces and in helping people to make sense of the spaces they or others around them occupy. The description and exploration of spaces is an essential component of literature. The writer in some sense can be compared to a cartographer. She combines representation of real places with the imaginary space of fiction. However quite often mental cartographies may not or do not correspond to the ‘abstract presences’ of borders and boundaries between places and peoples represented literally in maps, and yet they function as important markers of identity. This chapter, therefore also deals with the issues of borders and boundaries while interrogating the organizing principles of division that are at work not only in the extraneous national-global sense but also as being problematized within the nation paradigm.

The third chapter “Routes to Roots” deals with the significance of geographic space on the one hand and subjective space on the other leading to construction or representation of identity. Realignment in the sense of geography is perceptible, for example, through the emphasis on memory narratives over and above historically verifiable narratives. A comparative analysis of the works in terms of parameters such as language, form and narrative reveals the deconstructive nature of the issue of identity and its
refusal to confirm to any ontological reasoning. The position or ‘location’ of the author can be ascertained to some extent by studying the spatial divisions such as urban-rural, public-domestic and national-global divides within the texts. Displacement is an important signifier of spatial relations of a different kind. An adjusted sense of self emerges as a resultant of relocation. Yet, the relationship with the ancestral self is never completely severed and takes numerous ‘routes’ to connect with its ‘roots’ even if it is one of protracted leave-taking.

The fourth chapter “Worlds Within” deals with the issue of identity construction and the spatial dynamics of identity. A detailed study of various identities-hyphenated/multiple/normative/stereotypical-with respect to the three texts is undertaken with the view to establish its ‘choices’ that may be consciously subversive or inconspicuously complicit. While the ‘spatial turn’ heralds the significance of location and geographies, theories of identity are engaged with ‘unfixing’ the self from not only a rootage in history but also from that of space. It is not taken to be a given, rather it involves choice. There is moreover, flexibility and multiplicity in the choice of identity. Identity is always contextual, with the choice to prioritize. Thus, an individual inhabits many ‘worlds’ that may exist within the paradigm of one’s experiences.

The conclusion offers a closure in the analysis of the texts, while accounting for the limitations of the study and the scope for further research. The conclusion will attempt to prove that although these novels are ‘located’ in Indian socio-political and cultural issues, they tend to foreground a transnational lifestyle, ultimately unable to offer any viable options to the
current milieu and as Neelam Srivastava puts it, resulting in “a shift from Benedict Anderson's canonical formulation of the novel as a genre that constructs an imagined national community to one that constructs a transnational imagined community (40).”