CHAPTER TWO: THE WRITERS

The treatment of the migrant condition in literature is a most engrossing topic for intellectual discussion. The postmodernist world has seen the emergence of interdisciplinary and cultural studies as the major thrust areas of academic exploration. The postcolonial and migrant novels are seen as appropriate texts for such explorations because they offer multi-voiced resistance to the idea of boundaries and present texts open to “transgressive and non-authoritative reading” (Boehmer 243). In addition, most writers are themselves migrants and display their own angst through their fiction. In doing so these writers explore a fertile territory—a territory that is unstable and subject to interpretations and appropriation. Salman Rushdie writes:

Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles. (Imaginary 15)

These “new angles” produce a kind of undecidability between what is to be included and what to be excluded from the study of a literary text. This makes diasporic literature all the more interesting because it takes up the question of identity that can be explored in various spheres be it philosophy, psychology, metaphysics, sociology, politics, or any other such diverse field.

In a world where identity, origin, and truth are seen in postmodernist terminology as “structureless assemblages” (Lucy ix), the writer Anita Desai (b. 1937) appears as a very
good example in this regard. Desai’s mother was a German Christian and her father was a Bengali Indian. Her mother, Antoinette Nime, could trace her origin to France, and her father, Dhiren Mazumdar’s native place was Dhaka (now in Bangladesh) but had settled in New Delhi. Anita Mazumdar spent a major part of her childhood in Delhi and was able to visit Bengal only when she was about twenty years old. It was in New Delhi that she married Ashvin Desai. The mixed parentage of complex origin gives Anita Desai the advantage of having a double perspective when writing about India and Indians, as well as about migrants in India and Indian migrants to the West. She is both an outsider and a native: “I see India through the eyes of my mother, as an outsider, but my feelings for India are my father’s, of someone born here” (Quoted in Taneja 35). Desai has enjoyed her unique position while living in India for a considerable part of her life (about forty five years) after which she went to Girton College, Cambridge, in the UK, followed by her shift to Smith and Mount Holyoke colleges and subsequently to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA. Anita Desai started writing in India, and then went abroad harbouring memories of colonialism. But becoming a global citizen has chiseled her perspectives still further and made her explore the diasporic condition in her fiction in an incisive way. She has become one of the most prominent women writers of post-independence India writing in English.

Desai has dealt with a group of diasporic Indians in Britain of the late 1960s in her novel Bye-Bye Blackbird. She has dealt with the character of a migrant Austrian Jew in India in her novel Baumgartner’s Bombay. She has also shown an Egyptian acculturated in India and an Italian spiritual seeker in India in her novel Journey to Ithaca. Of late she has shown the predicament of a lonely Indian, Arun, in USA in her novel Fasting.
Feasting. In her last novel, *The Zigzag Way*, she has dealt with the theme of displacement in Mexican setting. What Desai has shown through diversity is the universal aspect of the sense of displacement and the need for the construction of identity. Desai’s earlier works (except for *Bye-Bye Blackbird*) deal with the sense of displacement but does not probe the problems of physical dislocation as is seen in her later works. Her works like *Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Where Shall We Go This Summer, Fire on the Mountain, In Custody, Clear Light of Day*, and others deal with the psychological sense of exile in her protagonists. *Games at Twilight* and *Diamond Dust* are two collections of short stories by her. Anita Desai’s fictions are generally existentialist studies of individuals, “illuminated by the author’s perceptiveness, delicacy of language and sharp wit” (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 71). Here background, politicality, historicity, social settings, class, and cross-cultural pluralities are only incidental. But being incidental does not mean that they are essentially extraneous. Their study is not only as important as the study of human condition in Desai’s fiction but in fact they are intrinsic to the latter study. For example, the solitude that Desai depicts in her diasporic characters is a result of both the inner psyches of the characters and equally their external circumstances. Thus the “private universes” (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 71) of the characters are manifestations of the world at large.

Bharati Mukherjee (b. 1940), in contrast, has generally depicted characters in her novels who want to come out of their private universes and assert themselves in the world. Mukherjee herself has been living and writing abroad for a long time. She was born and bred in Calcutta, and then went to the University of Iowa for higher studies. It was her conscious decision to go to the US instead of the UK for higher studies because
she wanted to get away from the colonial hangover. Later she married the Canadian author Clark Blaise and moved to Canada. She taught at McGill University at Montreal and in 1980 she moved to the US. In the US she taught at Columbia University, New York University, Queens College, and ultimately at Berkeley University. Her works generally deal with the Indian diasporic characters’ predicaments and she is often called the doyen of the Indian immigrant novel. Her novels like *Wife, Leave it to Me,* and *Desirable Daughters* all portray the condition of migrants, both legal and illegal, in search of identity. In her novel *Jasmine* she depicts the breaking of barriers to belong to a host society in transition. Her works also bring together topics like gender, family life, and human relationships within the ambit of her diasporic imagination. She also has two collections of short stories to her credit — *Darkness* and *The Middleman and Other Stories.* Her other works include *The Tiger’s Daughter, The Holder of the World,* and *The Tree Bride.*

Bharati Mukherjee has to constantly negotiate the question of belonging while living in the West. She has distinguished two ways to belong in America as she explicates in her essay “Two Ways to Belong in America.” One is by maintaining an identity and one is by transforming an identity — the former as an “expatriate aristocrat” and the latter as an “immigrant nobody” (A. Kumar 273). Mukherjee has adopted to live life as an immigrant American rather than as an expatriate Indian because she felt the “need to put roots down, to vote and make the difference that I can” (A. Kumar 274). In doing so she has to pay a price as acknowledged by her: “The price that the immigrant willing pays, and that the exile avoids, is the trauma of self-transformation” (A. Kumar 274). Both Mukherjee and Desai have self-fashioned themselves as residents of their adoptive countries. Living
outside India for more than twenty years, Desai finds her identification with India slackening. She has been quoted in The Telegraph (Kolkata, 11 September 2004): “I am often mistaken for a Mexican (in a sari?)” (19). Bharati Mukherjee has said in an interview published in the Massachusetts Review (1988), “I view myself as an American author in the tradition of other American authors whose ancestors arrived in Ellis Island” (650). Both Mukherjee and Desai have not shirked their ethnicity. They have self-fashioned themselves by asserting their altered identities.

The younger generation of writers like Sunetra Gupta and Jhumpa Lahiri, unlike the first generation migrant writers, has grown-up in the West. They fit seamlessly into the tradition of writers from Britain or USA. But their ready acceptance does not mitigate the crisis of identity faced by them. Their ethnic identity fashioned by inheritance clashes with their Western identity fashioned by their upbringing. Sunetra Gupta (b. 1965) was born in Calcutta and as a child lived in India, Ethiopia, and Zambia. She graduated in Biology from Princeton University and further studied at Imperial College, London. She did research on infectious disease at Merton College, Oxford. Evidently she was bred abroad mainly and also started writing abroad. She presents in her first novel Memories of Rain the breaking of the romantic illusion of dislocated existence. Her other novels are The Glassblower’s Breath, Moonlight into Marzipan, A Sin of Colour, and So Good in Black. Sunetra Gupta’s writing is intricate and full of allusions and her style is reminiscent of the stream of consciousness technique of Virginia Woolf. Her works have a visual richness and a poetic grace that gradually uncovers the human condition cutting across geographical boundaries. It is here that her diasporic consciousness comes to the fore.
Jhumpa Lahiri (b. 1967) is a relatively new diasporic Indian woman writer who was born (London) and bred (Rhode Island) in the West and like Sunetra Gupta started writing abroad. She studied in Barnard College and Boston University. She lives in New York but visits Calcutta often. She shows a globalized host society where construction of identity becomes an ever-changing process of self-definition in her novel *The Namesake*. She has two commendable collections of short stories – *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth*. Lahiri is a second generation non-resident Indian whose experiences are all post-colonial and hence there are subtle differences in her perspectives in comparison with first generation migrant Indian writers. In the depiction of either Eastern or Western characters her concerns are rather different from those of Anita Desai or Bharati Mukherjee or even Sunetra Gupta. Anita Desai has a hybrid origin whereas Jhumpa Lahiri is of hybrid upbringing. Lahiri's parents were Bengali expatriates who used to visit India often. Thus Lahiri grew up simultaneously in an American society and in an Indian family. This gives her multiple identities and, perhaps because she has encountered the question of identity in her life, she is comfortable in exploring it in her fiction.

Jhumpa Lahiri has mostly concentrated herself with the lives of diasporic Indians in the West in her fiction, but her works have a universal appeal. Her exploration of the diasporic Indian community brings out the quintessential condition of all postmodern lives. Jhumpa Lahiri has not had a physical displacement but she has inherited a sense of displacement from her parents – she has inherited a past that is not at her present place of existence. She is as much a migrant writer as Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, and
Sunetra Gupta. Rushdie's illustration of the migrant writers' condition applies as much to her as to any other writer.

It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being 'elsewhere'. (Rushdie, Imaginary 12)

All these four writers problematize the concerns of identity, loneliness, alienation, rootlessness, and so on with issues of history and culture to make them tangible in the context of displacement. These writers living abroad have first hand knowledge of displaced existence and often their works have manifestations of their own conditions. Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Sunetra Gupta, and Jhumpa Lahiri have highlighted through a spectrum the changes that have taken place in relation to the diasporic Indians and their acceptance in the West over the years.

Women writers since ages (from Austen to the Brontes to George Eliot to Virginia Woolf) have generally explored individual characters or the family or human relationships in their fiction and have very rarely explored social or political or historical themes. Although there are exceptions like George Eliot's Romola, Felix Holt and to some extent Middlemarch, the tendency of women writers, even many contemporary ones, has been to shy away from direct exploration of such issues. This does not mean that they are immune to such issues. Especially in the works of contemporary women writers there can be found undercurrents of these issues. Desai, Mukherjee, Gupta, and
Lahiri are women writers who have dealt with individual characters and human relationships in their fiction but if sought there can also be found in their works social, political, historical, and other aspects of exploring the themes of displacement and identity. Thus they provide the women's perspectives spanning over two generations on themes that have for long been dominated by male views. A great advantage of studying these writers in conjunction is the insight it gives of the difference in their approach towards a common goal. It not only widens the scope of exploration but also shows the immense potential of literature to depict reconciling views through differences. Further still the clubbing together of these four writers to explore the themes of displacement and the construction of identity brings into relief the fact that how these writers in their similarity reinforce each other and in dissimilarity complement each other.

The spectrum of literary representation of the Indian diaspora in the works of Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Sunetra Gupta, and Jhumpa Lahiri span from the 1960s to the early years of the new millennium. But since their latest works are contemporary with each other it enables critics to compare them directly with each other on certain common grounds. Thus Desai's description of Boston suburbs in comparison with Lahiri's description of the same leads to the comparison of the two writers' experiences and observations of that area. Even if some differences occur, it is to be noted that such differences in the depiction of the West by these writers are not essentially because of any perceptive bias. It is just that their concerns are different in their particular works and when their concerns are similar their depictions are also so. Here is Desai looking at the American suburb through the eyes of Arun in the novel *Fasting, Feasting*:
There are the more domestic signs of habitation that imply settlement by generations – the rubber paddling pools left outdoors by children who have gone in, moulded plastic tricycles and steel bicycles, go-carts and skateboards.

(Desai, Fasting 159-60)

And here is Lahiri’s picture of a typical American suburb through the eyes of Ashoke and Ashima in the novel The Namesake:

[They look on ordinary roads where plastic wading pools and baseball bats are left out on the lawns. All the houses belong to Americans. Shoes are worn inside [...] (Lahiri, Namesake 51)

Both the writers’ portrayals are similar because both of them are basically giving details of the same picture. But when Desai depicts the suburbs of London in Bye-Bye Blackbird then not only the place is different but equally the time is different and allied are the parameters that go to describe a place at particular points in time because both place and time are something more than mere spatial and chronological designations respectively.

Places have a way of affecting people. Fawzia Afzal-Khan writes about Bye-Bye Blackbird that “Dev’s experience of the calm, orderly countryside somehow breaks down his extreme antipathy to things British, so that he ends up working and living in London and quite enjoying his new life, much in the way his friend Adit has” (89). According to Lorna Sage “a sense of place has a special relevance for Desai. All her novels reflect a concern with spatial metaphors and her imagery is built upon cities and open spaces, islands and mountains which affect her characters who are uprooted or alienated figures, nomads or refugees, haunted by their own inner conflicts” (182). But the concerns of place are equally relevant for Bharati Mukherjee, Sunetra Gupta, and Jhumpa Lahiri.
Ashima is affected by the Boston suburbs, Jasmine by the Iowan expanse, and Moni by the drab London. As much as the migrants try to create an idea of home in an adopted place the said place in return counter-influences the migrants either positively, as is the case with Dev, or negatively, as exemplified by Moni.

Place is of special concern for the displaced and is well shown by all the four writers. Moreover, they have shown how the diasporic Indian communities have attempted to recreate the idea of India in their milieu – be it the ghetto of Flushing where Dave Vadhera lives in *Jasmine*, or the “little India in London” (204) in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, or the circle of Bengali acquaintances that Ashima caters to in *The Namesake*, or the Bengali New Jersey society of Padma in *Desirable Daughters*. What Michael Parker and Roger Starkey say about Desai is relevant for the other three writers as well: “Desai’s focus on the outsider, the expatriate, the marginalised, suggests a mixed cultural assimilation of discrete centres where the metonym of “India” as a homogeneous unit fades as characters attempt unsuccessfully to re-establish “home” (15). This can be understood in view of the fact that India itself is not only a geographical location but additionally stands for a diversity of cultures, histories, and even peoples. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak goes so far as to say that “‘India,’ for people like me is not really a place with which they can form a national identity because it has always been an artificial construct. ‘India’ is a bit like saying ‘Europe’ . . . And ‘Indian-ness’ is not a thing that exists” (Sullivan 74). But even though “India” is a word without a specific referent, that India maps a political territory is crucial for immigrants to look back at and often even to come back to, as is the case with Adit, Moni, Ashima, and Tara.
One of the important ways of recreating home, the “little India”, in the West is through the food eaten by the migrants. Desai uses food as metaphor when she shows Adit’s preoccupation with frying “pakoras” at his in-laws’ place in the English countryside and his memory of the Bengali meal cooked by his mother in India. Similarly Lahiri depicts Ashima every now and then in preparation of Indian food for her diasporic Indian guests at the parties thrown by her at her Pemberton Road house in Massachusetts. Bharati Mukherjee’s Jasmine says, “Food is a way of granting or withholding love” (216). But food is not only a cultural emblem; it is equally a symbol of the plentiful, lavish, and extravagant West. In Fasting, Feasting, Arun, “becomes culturally displaced when studying in the US, faced with intensive food-oriented materialism in the form of ‘shop till you drop’ supermarket expeditions” (Wisker 96). Despite the abundance and Mrs. Patton’s efforts Aran fails to satiate his hunger. Although popular, Indian food is still exotic in the West and this exoticism has had an enduring appeal since the days of spice trade. Moreover businesses advocate this exotic appeal as their unique selling proposition.

The selling of the exotic East is not confined to food. Often writers are accused of deliberately presenting the fascinating aspects of the East as a contrivance. Nagendra Kumar writes, “Mukherjee has made up a formula which apparently works – Indian characters in search of American citizenship retain sufficient Indianness to be exotic but float gleefully into American materialism” (23). Zohreh T. Sullivan writes: “The concept of fluid identity in Jasmine distressed some Indian and American reviewers, for whom she either abandoned too easily an essential ‘Indian’ identity, or failed to settle into an acceptable version of American identity” (82). These criticisms are no drawbacks of the
writer because it is a matter of self-fashioning of the individual character as depicted by the writer. Mukherjee depicts Jasmine’s fluid identity because the impulse is the protagonist’s want to accommodate a part of her ethnicity in her identity as a matter of choice. Jasmine acknowledges as much: “We murder who we are so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 29). Jasmine still dreams of India and so she retains some iota of Indian-ness in her self. Jasmine makes choices at moments of epiphany and “her actions also carry their dark underside by always reminding us of the inevitable cruelty of newness, revolution, and mutability” (Sullivan 83). Lahiri’s Gogol goes through a similar regeneration by juggling his ethnic and Western identities. Ultimately it is again a matter of choice for Gogol in retaining or dispensing traces of various identities that he is saddled with. Just as Jasmine has different names – Jasmine, Jase, Jane, Jazzy – for her different identities, Gogol too has the same – Gogol, Nikhil, Nick. But the difference that is pronounced is that Gogol is seen to choose his name at various situations, whereas Jasmine just accepts the names given to her. This is so because Jasmine is a female illegal migrant from an Indian village unlike Gogol who is a male second-generation disaporic Indian born in America.

Jasmine’s path of migration from Florida to California duplicates “the western movement of the earlier immigrants, she mimics their personal and historical moments of appropriation, devastation and construction” (Sullivan 81). Gogol finds in his uncommon name commonness with the obsolete names of the first migrants to America, the land of immigrants. Tara in *Desirable Daughters* finds her namesake in her ancestor Tara Lata Gangooly, the one who is still remembered in Dhaka, now in Bangladesh, because of her struggle against the British rule in India. The use of nomenclature as identifier and its
manipulation to bring out the intricacies of identity as seen in Mukherjee, and Lahiri are remarkable. Even though Sunetra Gupta does not use the technique of name-manipulation, it is quite apparent from the actions of her characters such as Debendranath and Niharika that when they disappear it is not exactly into anonymity but into different identities and possibly harbouring different names. By being presumed drowned Debendranath and Niharika fake death and become non-existent for the world that constricts them with social and familial relationships and demands. Their condition is comparable with that of Arun in Fasting, Feasting who often feels the “total freedom of anonymity” (172) as a student in USA. For Arun it is a predicament but for Debendranath and Niharika it is their willful acts. It is not a crime, but rather a sin -- a sin of colour that cannot be categorized in the binaries of black and white or right and wrong. The sin of wanting freedom from all bindings is in fact akin to the spiritual revocation of social and familial life that forms the last of the four stages of Vedic life -- the “Chaturashrama”.

It is the faking of death by Debendranath that is the turning point in A Sin of Colour. In fact death forms the pivot in other writers’ works too because it is perhaps the only inevitability of real life. Ashoke Ganguli’s death in The Namesake changes Gogol, Darrel’s suicide makes Jasmine decide on her future, and Christopher Dey’s murder forces Tara to reassess her commitments. Sometimes it is the violence of death -- like the killing of Half-Face by Jasmine, sometimes it is the agency of death -- like the terrorists Sukhi and Abbas Sattar Hai, and sometimes it is the contemplation of death -- like Moni thinking of committing suicide in England, that is pivotal for the narrative. Moreover the narrative is not always linear. All these four writers ably use the technique of going back and forth in time as an efficient narrative device. Anita Desai’s Bye-Bye Blackbird is
structurally linear but it has evocations of a time past in “portraying the lives of ‘Macaulay’s bastards’ in post-imperial Britain, and by reversing the themes of colonization and ‘postcolonial revenge’” (Mohanram 103). Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* is also linear in narration but not without flashbacks like about the train accident of Ashoke in India or about the Ganguli family’s visit to the seaside in the US. Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* shuttles between past and present alternately and in *Desirable Daughters* the narrative unfolds the past as the unraveling of a mystery. Sunetra Gupta’s *A Sin of Colour* starts on a conversational story-telling mode and often makes time-jumps in an intricate narrative structure, whereas in *Memories of Rain* the forward action takes place in a mere weekend but the writer’s “highly visual and poetic style transforms language into memory” (Sage 297) to flesh out the narrative background.

Anita Desai and Sunetra Gupta have greatly used the technique of stream-of-consciousness in their narratives. Like Sunetra Gupta, Desai’s prose style is seen as “poetic and richly lyrical” (Afzal-Khan 59). Radhika Mohanram and Gita Rajan write about Anita Desai: “Her novels are regarded as lyrical, existentialist, Woolfian studies of individual selves that only incidentally belong in middle-class, post-independence India” (103). Desai has herself acknowledged “a change of style in her later fiction, indicative of a broader interest in social and political reality” (Afzal-Khan 60). *Bye-Bye Blackbird* “marks a shift from this existentialist questioning and, moving the locale to London, focuses on problems of cultural nostalgia and alienation” (Sage 183). But even *Bye-Bye Blackbird* has passages of interior monologue that is the hallmark of Desai’s fiction. Sunetra Gupta’s fictions has even more “virtuoso prose and intricate plot-lines” (Sage 297). Amit Chaudhuri writes about the “problematic, and increasingly complex nature”
of Gupta’s writing: “To engage with Gupta’s writing, however, means that one has to be prepared to engage with the difficulties her writing presents, even challenges the reader with” (Chaudhuri 582). In comparison, Jhumpa Lahiri’s works show little rhetorical flourishes and yet are detailed, with understatement being their subtlety. And Bharati Mukherjee’s works are seen as “allegories (Mukherjee calls them ‘fables’) of the contradictions and problems of a travelling identity” (Sullivan 73). That is why Mukherjee’s and Lahiri’s novels have simple chapter-wise breaks, whereas Desai’s Bye-Bye Blackbird (“Arrival”, “Discovery and Recognition”, “Departure”) and Gupta’s A Sin of Colour (“Amethyst”, “Indigo”, “Azure”, “Jade”, “Saffron”, “Ochre”, “Crimson”) are divided into parts. Desai’s Fasting, Feasting breaks into two sections with two different protagonists (Uma and Arun) at two different locations (India and USA) and justifying through the narrative bifurcation the meaning of the book’s title.

Allied with the comparative similarities and dissimilarities is the crucial fact that all these four writers through their characterization have depicted human relationships’ importance, and shown great empathy with their characters. That is why even if they sometimes use fate / chance / coincidence as a problem solving device it does not seem out of context and extraneous to the flow of the narrative. Their characters are round and show evolution over time — Dev, Adit, Arun, Gogol, Ashima, Moushumi, Jasmine, Tara, Moni, Debendranath, and Niharika all change. It is to be noted that since change is central to self-fashioning, the evolving of characters gains an added dimension in the said context. The spectrum of the Indian diaspora thus depicted epitomizes the transformation of the alien into the native.
Both Western and Indian traditions of literature have richly and variedly influenced these four writers. Anita Desai has often been straitjacketed as a writer in the European tradition because “Desai is much like the nineteenth-century women novelists, such as the Bronte sisters and Sarah Orne Jewett” (Afzal-Khan 62). Her extensive use of Woolfian characters in her earlier works shows a heady mix of “realistic detail with the symbolic and the historically documented with stream of consciousness” (Wisker 95). But subcontinental writers also have affected her works. Gina Wisker writes about her novels thus:

They use a richly mixed mode, making something new of the several cultures from and about which she writes, mixing oral story-telling, circularity and repetition, motifs, revelation of origins and versions of events with postmodernist intertextuality, which in its turn utilises Victorian and twentieth-century European and US-originated work (Tennyson, T. S. Eliot) as frequently as the many voices and writing of India and Pakistan (Iqbal, Tagore).

(Wisker 95)

Moreover it is not only Europe and India that have been Desai’s inspiration. America, the continent of immigrants, finds a place subtly even at the early stage of her writing. The title of her novel Bye-Bye Blackbird is taken from the title of the song published in 1926 by the American composer Roy Henderson and lyricist Mort Dixon.

Here no one can love or understand me,
Oh what hard luck stories they all hand me.
Make my bed and light the light,
I’ll arrive late tonight.

Blackbird, bye-bye.  

(Desai, Blackbird 131)
Anita Desai uses the 1926 American lyrics in her novel to delineate the predicament of her Indian immigrants in England. Thereby she brings about a sort of globalization in a literary text as early as 1971 when the novel was first published.

Sunetra Gupta's works, despite being as Woolfian in its display of stream-of-consciousness technique as Anita Desai's works, show an inter-mixing of Western and Indian influences. "Her first novel, Memories of Rain is a post-colonial reinterpretation of the Greek Medea. It is the story of a marriage between the Indian Moni and her English husband who is having a long-running affair with another woman" (Sage 296). Moni intends Anthony to suffer from the pain of estrangement by taking away their daughter back to India with her. But the exposition of the Greek tragedy is brought about with the help of the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore:

She will choke him [Anthony] with her sorrow, [. . .] he will suffocate upon the embers of her charred song, the anguish of the poet gives shape to her own misery,

the night wind has quenched my light

and you come without haste to bid farewell

passing upon this path in darkness

the scent of night flower will drown you   (Gupta, Memories 71)

Amit Chaudhuri writes about the novel that it owes "its romanticism and poetry of exile to, via Tagore, Kalidas's own tribute to the rains in Meghdoot (The Cloud Messenger)" (Chaudhuri 582). Thus linking it with the ancient tradition of Indian literature.

in the dense of this deep dark rain

you tread secret, silent, like the night, past all eyes.
the heavy eyelids of dawn are lowered to the futile wail of the winds
clotted clouds shroud the impenitent sky
birdless fields
barred doors upon your desolate path.  

Moni’s migration to England after her marriage to Anthony makes her culturally
displaced but her condition is accentuated by her husband’s infidelity “and the
consequent psychological disarray, renders her a nervous wreck, [. . . ] it is memories of
home and ‘Rabindra Sangeeth’ that sustain her through this phase” (Vijayasree 127).
Sunetra Gupta depicts this by actual usage of Tagorean lyrics in English translation
incorporated within the narrative. This at once gives poetic depth to the story as well as
shows the working of the mind of Moni, whose mental anguish is often intermixed with
the very Indian sentiment of “biraha” (a sort of longing and estrangement), which fails to
find suitable equivalence in the English language. Moni leaves Anthony and comes back
to India but still she pines to be remembered by him, as she would remember him:

Even so, remember me
If I should move far away, even so
If the old love should be lost in the mazes of a new passion
Even so, remember me
And if although I am near
My presence, like shadow, is shrouded with doubt
Your eyes might cloud with tears
And if one lovely night this game should end
Even so, remember me
If, on an autumn morn, the final blow should fall, even so
And if, remembering me, tears do not come
Tears do not glisten in the corners of your eyes
Even so, remember me.  

(Gupta, *Memories* 197-198)

And it is not only Tagore, as Amit Chaudhuri writes, “she is capable of passages and images of marvelous exactitude and poetic suggestiveness, passages that link her not only to Modernism but to Bengali writers like Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee and Jibanananda Das” (Chaudhuri 582). A hallmark of these Bengali writers is that their consciousness and modus operandi are fundamentally Western, even if (indeed precisely because) their locales are typically and fiercely Bengali. But just as Sunetra Gupta’s writing seemed to seep in Bengali culture she invokes lines from John Keats’s “Ode on Melancholy” (*Memories of Rain*) or the lyrics of Bertolt Brecht’s “The Ballad of Mack the Knife” (*A Sin of Colour*) from The Threepenny Opera (1928) to go with Tagore’s songs that problematizes her texts and brings her hybrid world to the fore.

Bharati Mukherjee’s globalized world comes to the fore in the galaxy of writers who have influenced her writing, as Nagendra Kumar writes:

The movement from expatriation to immigration is also reflected in the choice of the writers who shaped Mukherjee’s creative sensibility. After outgrowing and discarding the posture of an expatriate she rejected Naipaul as a model and chose Bernard Malamud whose central concern was the life of minorities and its agonies. Though partially influenced by Isaac Babel, Conrad and Chekhov, she followed Malamud as his writings instilled unusual confidence in her. (20)
But Mukherjee’s world is also hybrid like Sunetra Gupta’s. Although, “Mukherjee has shrugged off her own Indianness and claimed that her immigrants move away from their origins in India yet one can easily find the echoes of Indian English, Indian sensibility in her novels” (N. Kumar 23). Sudeshna Kar Barua insightfully writes that “some of Bharati Mukherjee, [ . . . ] and Jhumpa Lahiri’s immigrants do feel almost as out of water now as Anand and Narayan’s Indians did in the past within India. It is a nagging feeling of being inadequate and perhaps small” (Barua 56). Sudeshna Kar Barua further writes that “a sentiment voiced or a feeling experienced by one writer in the early twentieth century, for instance, may reappear and be re-used in some form, perhaps unconsciously, in a tale of the late twentieth or the twenty-first century, not even remotely similar” (Barua 53-54).

Indira Chowdhury in the “Introduction” to her translation of Ashapurna Debi’s novel The First Promise (Pratham Pratisruti, 1964) writes that “The past, as they say, is a different country” (Debi xxxv). This equivalence of time and space is of course not Einsteinian in nature but it shows that estrangement over time and estrangement over distance are relatively linked at some level. Here is Ashapurna Debi from Chapter One of The First Promise:

Having travelled such a vast expanse of her life, Bakul has learnt that one must repay the debts to one’s grandmother and great-grandmother before one begins to talk about oneself. (Debi 1)

And here is Tara, the protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee’s novel Desirable Daughters at the end of Part – II of the book:

I’d been writing at night on a rented typewriter, and the story that had begun to emerge was of the Tree-Bride and of the class of Calcutta girls born a century
later, both of them witness to dying traditions [. . .] If I didn’t write their stories I’d explode; there’d be no one to mark their passing. (Mukherjee, Daughters 280)

Ashapurna Debi (1909-1995) is a renowned Bengali writer who wrote in the vernacular. Bharati Mukherjee, on the other hand, is a Bengali who writes in English and is based in the West. Ashapurna Debi’s character Bakul wants to tell the stories of her “grandmother and great-grandmother” as a historical need. Her impetus is a “debt” to be repaid by bringing into focus the unacknowledged contributions of the women-folks of the time past in shaping the history inherited by her. Bharati Mukherjee’s novel’s narrator, Tara, is more or less doing the same thing in documenting the oral stories of her ancestors, especially the women. Tara’s need is also historical as she will be the one to “mark their passing” through generations over time. But Tara’s impetus is not merely distancing over time but additionally a geographical distancing that she has experienced. Having spent a considerable part of her life in San Francisco, Tara’s debt to be paid to her ancestors is perhaps to bring across time as well as space the stories she wants to tell. The description about Bakul – “having travelled such a vast expanse of her life” – and the narration of Tara – “witness to dying traditions”, “mark their passing” – are apt in their own context and if exchanged with each others’ context will hardly seem anomalous. In fact the tropes of the words will acquire added meanings. The words “travelled”, “vast”, and “expanse” basically convey spatial sense but they are used to indicate the passage of time. Similarly, the words “dying” and “passing” indicate the march of time and yet are used adjunctively in the context of dislocation. Therefore, the sentiments, emotions, angst, and other feelings arising over time and over space are relative to each other. This shows that the
pangs of antiquity and the pangs of displacement throb in the same vein. This also brings into context that diasporic writing is not absolutely lacking in tradition.

Standing in the post-postcolonial age, defined by neo-colonialism and the diasporic movement of people across the world and resultant cultural shifts, it is more than natural for the reader to look upon diasporic writing as a comparatively new phenomenon, quite different owing to perspectives and approaches hitherto untried. This is not quite the case. Let us not look at diasporic writing as rootless.

(Barua 53)

Even Jhumpa Lahiri's stories are seen to be in the tradition of Indian literature. Just as reviewers have compared Lahiri with Hemingway and Isherwood, her stories also bear comparison with M. A. Anand, R. K. Narayan, and even Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, as Sanjukta Das and Sudeshna Kar Barua have variously shown:

“Mrs. Sen’s” and “Interpreter of Maladies” show married women unburdening their hearts to passive yet sympathetic listeners – a motif common in early twentieth century Bengali fiction, eg., Sarat Chandra Shattopadhyay’s *Sreekanto* or Tagore’s *Nashta Nir.*

(Das 75-76)

The Pirzada story is a brilliant reworking of Tagore’s “Kabuliwallah.” A little girl is befriended by a man exiled from his own daughter, bearing sweets and the sense of a distant land and culture. The antics of Tagore’s Mini become Lilia’s Halloween masquerade.

(Das 75)

The lost child’s fear [Mulk Raj Anand’s “The Lost Child”], Phatik’s homesickness [Rabindranath Tagore’s “Homecoming”] are all just as palpable as the craving of the physically displaced like Mr. Pirzada, in present-day writings.
According to Sanjukta Das, Lahiri's stories, though written in the medium of English, are within the Bengali literary tradition. Thus there is a reversal of the achievement of the major Bengali poets such as Jibanananda Das and Sudhindranath Datta, an achievement explicated upon by Dr. Santanu Majumdar in his paper entitled “Bengali Poetry: Splendid Isolation” at a seminar on vernacular English literature held at Jawaharlal Nehru University in March 2005. Sanjukta Das writes –

Lahiri’s characters are etched in terms of their private relationships. Ashapurna Debi, on whom Lahiri wrote a dissertation at her American University, had written about ordinary human beings in their day-to-day living. It is a style and vision that exists in other vernacular women’s narratives. (Das 75)

The depiction of ordinary human beings in their day-to-day living is never laboured because it is through human relationships that the diasporic dimensions of their lives are explored. Be it the long winding relationship between Satyabati and her father Ramkali in Ashapurna Debi’s The First Promise or be it the fleeting contact between Mrs. Das and the Indian tourist guide Mr. Kapasi in Lahiri’s short story “Interpreter of Maladies” – both these relationships when seen in the context of displacement reveal a commonness. Satyabati leaves her in-laws’ house and goes to Kashi to her father Ramkali to seek answers for her questions. Mrs. Das, born and bred in the West, makes a stark confession about her life in New Jersey to an Indian, Mr. Kapasi, while visiting India as a tourist. Satyabati does not seek her answers at her in-laws’; Mrs. Das does not find a confidante in the West. It is because they know they have a refuge away from their place of dwelling.
That place away from one’s place of dwelling – one’s parents’ place, one’s ancestral place, home / homeland – pulls one constantly. News from “that place” fuels the longing. Ashima, living with her husband in Massachusetts, receives the “first piece of bad news from home” that her grandmother has had a stroke and she is “inconsolable for days” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 37). Likewise, Satyabati “was very disturbed on hearing of her grandmother’s death” (Debi, 233). Ashima “can’t help but wonder who will console her the day her own mother dies” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 44). And when Satyabati’s mother dies and she receives the news at her in-laws’ place –

Satya seemed oblivious to the fact that her mother was dead, that she would never see her again. It seemed to her that her ever-compassionate mother was playing some kind of cruel game. She had raced away to some faraway place from where she was mocking Satya with a laugh. (Debi 254)

In their hours of grief both Ashima’s and Satyabati’s predicament appear similar. Death and displacement act in conjugation and intensify the estrangement from the “faraway place.” This sense of being drawn away subsists for a long time. News from home / homeland sustain Satyabati and Ashima in their displaced existence.

The effectively diasporic dimension in the lives of Bengali women depicted by Ashapurna Debi makes her the writer to look up to by Jhumpa Lahiri and her likes. Ashapurna Debi’s *The First Promise* is a prime example of the exploration of the so-called mute, neglected domestic space. A rather extensive study of Ashapurna Debi’s novel brings into focus many interesting facets of her writing in comparison with the works of diasporic Indian women writers. In fact the novel’s protagonist, Satyabati, falls in the tradition of women characters having a questioning mind, a restless spirit, and
standing up for the emancipation of women from the subterranean world. The modern Indo-Anglian diasporic women fiction writers like Jhumpa Lahiri have also explored the domestic space in their works. It reveals that domesticity is essentially the same whether in cosmopolitan or local context. Lahiri’s characters be it Mrs. Sen from her short story “Mrs. Sen’s” or Ashima Ganguly from her novel *The Namesake* are found to be preoccupied in either dicing vegetables or cooking fish or preparing elaborate Indian (Bengali) meals for their Indian acquaintances in the West. Ashapurna Debi’s characters like Bhubaneswari and Sharada are also found to be spending a major part of their time in kitchen duties.

What this apparently superficial comparison between Ashapurna Debi’s traditional characters and Lahiri’s first generation migrant characters subtly indicates is that women, when they go to their in-laws’ house, experience a prototype of the diasporic condition, moreover it is a kind of permanent exile for them, since return to their father’s home means disgrace. “A woman need not leave home to be exiled or expatriated, as she is always an outsider; in fact, the effects of elsewhereness are felt most painfully in her own native setting” (Vijayasree 124). Lahiri’s characters, after marriage, have literally come to a foreign country to live in, whereas for Ashapurna Debi’s character the in-laws’ house is like a foreign country, especially because of the time of history in which they are located. Both Ashapurna Debi’s and Lahiri’s characters keep themselves busy in household chores as an antidote to the pain of separation from the place they have left behind.

Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Sunetra Gupta and Jhumpa Lahiri have all depicted the migration of Indians to the West either for economic opportunities or for educational
opportunities. Adit Sen from Desai’s novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Bishwapriya Chatterjee from Mukherjee’s novel *Desirable Daughters*, and Ashoke Ganguly from Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* have migrated to the West for better economic livelihood. Whereas, Arun from Desai’s novel *Fasting, Feasting* and Niharika from Gupta’s novel *A Sin of Colour* are in the West to better their academic prospects. In Ashapurna Debi’s *The First Promise* the same reasons are given for the migration of Bhabatosh, Nabakumar, Nitai, and Satyabati from the village to the city. The opportunities afforded by the city and the prospect of being able to grab those opportunities steel Satyabati’s determination of going to Calcutta.

Satyabati, after coming to Calcutta, is faced with the challenge of managing an independent household. She has to make office-meal for her husband, she has to send her sons to school and she has to take her own household decisions. It is a situation totally divorced from village life where family, relations and neighbours all provide the comfort through contributions or interactions in day-to-day living. Effectively, in a way, the city itself is a foreign soil for the village girl. Indian brides who literally go to live with their husbands on foreign soil face the same challenge of managing independent household. It is daunting proposition for Ashima when her son Gogol is born.

Until now Ashima has accepted that there is no one to sweep the floor, or do the dishes, or wash clothes, or shop for groceries, or prepare a meal on the days she is tired or homesick or cross. She has accepted that the very lack of such amenities is the American way. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 32)

Satyabati becomes a twice migrant after coming to Calcutta. Her ambivalence between her duties towards her husband and children in the city and her duties towards her in-
laws’ in the village can also be equated with the ambivalence of diasporic Indians regarding their duties towards their adopted country and their duties towards their native land. Adit and Tara are wracked by such indecisiveness. Even a small girl like Lilia, who belongs to the second generation of the Indian diaspora, is found to be wavering when she takes a book to read about the Indian subcontinent, though it is not covered in her history syllabus at school. Living in the West does have its influence on diasporic Indians, especially those of the second generation. In *The Namesake* Gogol and Moushumi often find themselves more comfortable as Americans than with any other identity. Similarly, *The First Promise* shows the influence of living in the city. Bhabatosh Biswas and Suhashini find solace from Hindu orthodoxy in the Brahmo Samaj. But these do not mean switching of identities because in time it is seen that being Brahmo or being American do not obliterate Hindu or Indian identities respectively.

An important characteristic of women writers is that their narratives more often than not deal with the home and the family. They give a perspective that is not often fully explored. Characters like Ashima, Moni, Jasmine, Tara and even Adit and Gogol are found to negotiate the alien terrain principally from within the domestic space. This domestic space both confines as well as fashions the individual.

[. . .] spaces and locations also construct and constrict people, particularly women, whose social, cultural, religious, educational, economic and psychological conditioning might well prevent them from seeing beyond and certainly from being able to escape the confines of the home, family, kitchen and backroom.

(Wisker 96)
This perspective is quite a forte for diasporic women writers and they use it to highlight the concerns of women in particular. C. Vijayasree writes that "the tensions of a transplanted existence, the struggle for survival in a world of strangers, the schizophrenic experience of woman cracked by multiple identities – these constitutes the subject matter of a number of novels" (125) where there is significant "enactment of female resistance to discrimination and oppression through the framework of exile" (126). She explicates the matter further through the interpretation of Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine*:

> Jasmine, a Punjabi girl with no formal education or patron, arrives in America with neither money nor passport. Her illegal immigration is an act of defiance whereby she breaks all norms – familial, cultural, national and legal. Her journey through an alien landscape and her gradual transformation into a stable, confident resident constitute a *Bildungsroman* of female migration. Jasmine, in fact, belongs to the tradition of the early Asian immigrant women who boarded ships bound for the West to escape oppressive homes, suffered the trials of immigrant life, and made their destiny in America. (Vijayasree 127-128)

Jasmine experiences and responds to America through her physicality. Her inner transformation is reflected in her body, clothes, gestures and posture. Here is an instance of the female protagonist's body itself being read as text, with the narrative fusing the physical and the semantic aspects of experience. In all these cases, we find that women are trying to 'write their bodies,' reconstructing and re-visioning the body as a site of difference. (Vijayasree 130)

Self-fashioning by migrants in general has the subset of self-fashioning by migrant women in particular. But the area of women's studies also has the subset of the study of
migrant women. Thus self-fashioning in a diaspora “acquires an additional edge of urgency and poignancy in the case of female migrants, because, for them, the issue of self-definition can hardly be isolated from larger questions of gender” (Vijayasree 124).

C. Vijayasree stresses that the feminism of the migrant women “deviates substantially from the mainstream feminist movement” because it “raises more fundamental questions about the relationship of a discourse of gender relations to race and class” (129). Disaporic Indian writers like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Sunetra Gupta, and Jhumpa Lahiri, being women, find a way to break away from being straitjacketed into confining categorization when they through their writings “forge a sort of female bonding across time, culture, race and class” (Vijayasree 129).

The historical continuity of female experience becomes central to their work, and they turn to their past – their mothers and grandmothers – to trace their links through a matriarchal lineage. More importantly, they establish links horizontally, too, connecting women of different classes and races to break the barriers separating woman from woman. (Vijayasree 129)

When Bharati Mukherjee’s Tara turns to her past of “mothers and grandmothers” she delves into the story of the tree bride of Mishtigunj. When Sunetra Gupta’s Niharika looks back there is the story of Neerupama and Reba of Mandalay in Kolkata. This looking back does not narrow the scope of exploration, for when Anita Desai looks back she produces books like *Voices in the City* as well as *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, thus covering an area from Calcutta to Germany. Jhumpa Lahiri is also seen to be looking back when she models the narrator of the story “The Third and Final Continent” on her father (Barua 55) or when she depicts the Ganguly family’s visits to India. This looking
back quite coincidentally produces for these four writers a looking back at a particular place in India namely Kolkata / Bengal since all these writers are of Bengali lineage. But this coincidence was highly probable since Kolkata is the cultural capital of India and historically Bengal has always been on the forefront of colonially-induced reformation movements in India. The bulk of the middle-class intellectual diaspora was from urban Bengal. And then there is the “more important” horizontal connectivity. Jasmine breaks barriers horizontally by connecting with Lillian Gordon and Mother Ripplemeyer. Niharika breaks barrier horizontally by connecting with Jennifer. Moreover the writers, Desai, Gupta, Mukherjee, and Lahiri, themselves break barriers by interacting with Western writers, especially Western women writers. According to Gina Wisker:

Diasporan writers aim on the one hand to represent and recognise their differences, [. . . ] they also try bridging these differences, recognising similarities and the coalescence of these in themselves as writers. This is a necessary step to understand one’s identity as a migrated subject or as any subject. (Wisker 97)

C. Vijayasree has summarized “three central concerns in the writings of expatriate women – exile, journey and sexuality – through which they articulate a perspective of women’s experience of exile in particular and women’s alienation in general” (125). These three concerns are not extrinsic to the lives of migrant women writers because often “‘writing’ becomes an act of redemption, in the sense that these writers get over their traumas by relating them in their work” (Vijayasree 131). This is very much true of the earlier novels of Bharati Mukherjee: “That Mukherjee is an autobiographical writer is the commonplace of critical literature on her” (N. Kumar 25). Works like The Tiger’s Daughter, Wife, Jasmine, Leave It To Me, and even Desirable Daughters and The Tree
Mukherjee’s contribution to the literature of migration is to add new dimensions of indeterminacy and complexity to the conflicted discourse of migrancy and travelling identities. Her fables allegorize the migrant’s split between the longing to embrace, to destroy and to be destroyed by the ‘promise’ of America. While engaging a range of strategies for surviving and managing displacement, her migrants struggle indeterminedly with the questions crucial to all diaspora and exile: whether to preserve or to reject identity with a place or location, to create a new self, to destroy the old self [...] (Sullivan 83)

But this may be equally said of Mukherjee’s life in general. There is “indeterminacy and complexity”, “migrant’s split”, “strategies for surviving and managing displacement”, question of “whether to preserve or to reject identity with a place or location”, and creation of a new self not only in Mukherjee’s writing but also in her living as a migrant in Canada and later in the US. Mukherjee writes about assertion of identity but the very process of writing is an assertion of identity. This dilutes the distinction between the self and the subject.

The peculiar condition is not isolated to Bharati Mukherjee. All migrant writers, including Anita Desai, Sunetra Gupta, and Jhumpa Lahiri, have similar predicament. "Immigrated people translate and transform rigid, oppositional, racial and natural categories through their writing, metamorphosing perceptions and developing hybrid identities. In this interaction, the diasporan experience can be seen as active, progressive,
producing its own literary response” (Wisker 99). Here when the self becomes the subject then it is not exactly identity but rather subjectivity that comes under interrogation. Donald E. Hall writes about identity and subjectivity thus:

One’s identity can be thought of as that particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that, in short- or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being, while subjectivity implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity, at the same time allowing a myriad of limitations and often unknowable, unavoidable constraints on our ability to fully comprehend identity. (D. Hall 3)

Hall goes further to say that “subjectivity is the intersection of two lines of philosophical thought: epistemology (the study of how we know what we know) and ontology (the study of the nature of being or existence)” (D. Hall 4) thus showing the larger context of subjectivity. But to come back to the literary response that the diasporan experience elicits it is seen that its manifestation is in two forms – the fictional / symbolic / poetic narrative and the testimony or personal narrative. The former narrative form is seen as having an objective view whereas the latter form is mainly subjective. And often these two forms of literary responses become intermixed and indistinguishable. Sara Suleri has argued that when a “native” is allowed to speak and his or her subjectivity is used “as a basis for information” there arises the “problem of how subjectivity can provide truth” (Wisker 100). In a similar vein there might arise objections regarding validation and authenticity when the writer’s own testimony is mixed within a fictional narrative. But when writers, especially diasporic writers, explore their subjectivity then it becomes an exploration of “the ‘self’ as a text, as a topic for critical analysis, both in and beyond its
relationship to the traditional texts of literature and culture” (D. Hall 5). Thereby an objective approach to the self and the subject is achieved.

Moreover, “Stuart Hall suggests [that] the crucial concern of diasporic writing is not subjectivity but subject position” (Ashcroft, Empire 218). Then there is a prospect provided by the diasporic writer “of fluidity of identity, a constantly changing subject position, both geographically and ontologically” (Ashcroft, Empire 218). When Sunetra Gupta says: “Writing is for me a kind of structured dreaming [. . .] the act of writing embodies for me a very tender junction between the chaos of my dreams and the stern order of the universe.” (Quoted in Vijayasree 131), she is not only speaking about her writing but more importantly she is speaking about her existence as well. An extent of external criticism is immanent within the internal criticism of the writings of such a writer. Amit Chaudhuri writes about Sunetra Gupta thus:

Gupta’s world is a hybrid one; her writing is preternaturally sensitive to the trajectory of individual lives, of migrations across continents, of lower- and middle-class post-Partition Bengali culture; but it is also open to excess, to stereotypes and archetypes, to the vague, intense longings of the feminized, adolescent imagination. These psychological dichotomies mirror the two cultures – Bengali and English – that have shaped, vivified, and also fractured Gupta’s sensibility, a sensibility, thus, in which nothing is ever finally resolved.

(Chaudhuri 582-583)

In doing so Amit Chaudhuri is speaking about Sunetra Gupta’s subjectivity as well as her subject position. For Gupta being a diasporic writer, her subjectivity is complicated by her multiple subject positions. And such is the case with other diasporic writers equally.
It is quite a characteristic of migrant literature that certain things become both objects of exploration and tools of exploration. Even the English language is used both as a tool to explore the diasporic situation and being the prime language in the diaspora is an object of exploration. C Vijayasree writes: “Perhaps it is because of the doubleness implicit in exilic positioning that narratives of exile naturally assume allegorical garb” (Vijayasree 132). Ashoke Ganguly mentions to his son Gogol the comment of Dostoevsky on Nikolai Gogol – “We all came out of Gogol’s overcoat” (Lahiri, Namesake 78). Dostoevsky’s comment can be construed in two ways – one with regard to the writer Gogol and one in reference to Gogol’s story “The Overcoat”. Dostoevsky meant the tradition of writers led by Nikolai Gogol as well as the tradition of writing begun by Nikolai Gogol – thus encompassing in a single sentence the self and the subject. This is precisely the characteristic of diasporic writers and writing, where a single text becomes symbolically both fiction and testimony.