CHAPTER V

Conclusion
CHAPTER-4
Diasporic Sensibility in the Poetry of Chitra Banerjee
Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean Arsanayagam

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian American writer who emerged on the world literary scene during 1990 and established herself as a prolific and highly perceptive writer. She has written poetry, short stories and novels. Divakaruni was born on July 29, 1956 in Kolkata, India. She received her B.A. in English in 1976 from Calcutta University. Then she moved to the USA to continue her studies and got a Master’s degree from Wright State University in Drayton, Ohio and a Ph.D. from the University of California in Renaissance English literature in 1985. She has taught creative writing and English Literature at Diablo Valley College, Foothill College and University for Houston, USA. She has co-founded MAITRI an organization that works with South Asian women dealing with situation of domestic violence. She has also worked with Afghani Women refugees and women from dysfunctional families, as well as in shelters for battered women. She volunteers her time to MAITRI and to Chinmaya Mission, a spiritual and cultural organization.

For twenty years, Divakaruni lived in Bay Area and taught at Foothill College. In 1997, she moved to Texas with her husband and two children where she taught creative writing at the University of Houston.

Moved by the dual forces of pre-immigration and post-immigration conditions, touched and moved by the miseries of women in Patriarchal society and also by the desire to preserve nostalgic memory of homeland, Divakaruni started writing poetry and then turned to short stories and fiction. Her major publication includes three volumes of poetry; *The Reason for Mastanimms* (1990); *Black Candle*
(1991) and Leaving Yuba City (1997); two collections of short stories: Arranged Marriage (995) and The Unknown Errors of our lives (2001) and five novels. The Vine of Desire (2002), The Queen of Dreams (2004) and The Palace of Illusions (2008). She has edited two multicultural readers titled Multitude (1993) and We, Too, Sing America (1998). Critics have praised Divakaruni’s powers of storytelling, evocative language and highly poignant characterization. They have also lauded her very appealing retelling of the agonies of immigration and portrayal of diverse lives of the marginalized in American society.

Black Candle chronicles the scorched lives of women. It is presented as collection of poems about women from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The poet has dedicated the book to her mother and to the sisters of the South Asia Diaspora. The book is traversed by women in purdah, women whose marriages are arranged against their will, childless women enslaved by their husbands’ families, outcast widows, women whose foetuses are aborted, women burnt for dowries, Muslims women whose husbands marry second wives, Hindu women burnt alive as Satis on their husbands’ funeral pyres, living goddesses whose lives are sacrificed to the services of the temple and so on. Divakaruni attempts to chronicle and expose the sufferings, injustice and cruelty to women which patriarchal hegemony subject to them.

Black Candle is certainly like plunging backwards into the nightmare. There is a description of seemingly innocent and disparate landscape such as the monsoon fields of Bengal, Ocean beaches of Mausi, a mother’s kitchen in the US or haunting train journey that turns the known into the unknown. Through these very realistic descriptions, the readers enter the inner landscape of the South Asian women. The readers are drawn into the anguished heart of the poem via these frequently innocent-looking exterior landscapes, the way a seductively fragrant flower unfolds to reveal a captured insect victim in a poisonous core of the flower. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s voice is unique and
appealing. She brings into her poems a wide variety of experiences, a captivating multicultural perspective and a depth of feeling and perception. Her poetry touches the readers' hearts as it voices the genuine and heart-rending pain and oppression of women, exploited by traditions and evil customs.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s concerns are largely feministic. She is a crusader in the sense that she fights for the cause of women. She admits that while she was in India, she was totally immersed in Indian culture and traditions. She could not see the exploitative nature of Indian and South Asian tradition. She had not thought much about women’s problems and the need to remedy them. But once she was in the USA, she could view these problems and evils of patriarchal hegemony of the Indian culture objectively. This is not to say that the American society was free from these vices. She found that double standards prevailed regarding women both in East and the West. *Black Candle* is a book that bears a witness to the agonizing lives of women and also the condition of the Worlds in general. What marks her poetry is her genuine compassion that arouses the same feeling in the hearts of the readers.

*Leaving Yuba City* explores the images about India and the Indian experiences in America, from the adventures of going to a convent school in India run by the Irish nuns to the history of the earliest Indian immigrants in the USA. Groups of interlinked poems are divided into six sections: peopled by many of the same characters, they explore a variety of themes. Divakaruni is interested in divergent art forms like films, music, painting, photography and soon. These poems impaired by various art forms also deal with the experiences of women and their struggle to find identities for themselves. These poems possess universal appeal that captivates all sensitive readers into deep sympathy and heart-felt concerns for the sufferings and problems of women. *Leaving Yuba City* creates an intense chaotic world of
pleasures and pain. It contains magical poetry marked by strong, passionate, lyrical and sensuous poems. It weaves a varied, rich fabric of women’s lives both particular as well individual, communal as well as individual, operating on micro as well as macro level.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a successful short story writer also. Arranged Marriage is a collection of eleven short stories focusing on Indian women whose lives are linked both to the Indian tradition of arranged marriage and the power changes brought by immigration to the USA. These stories portray the struggles of women caught between tradition and change. India is shown as something that needs to be shed and rejected while America is shown as the source of new hope despite its complexities. The stance constructs the binaries of East versus West, showing West as superior and East as inferior.

The Unknown Errors of our Lives is a collection that features tales set in India and America illuminating the transformations of personal landscapes, real and imagined brought about by the choices of men and women at every stage of their lives. Mrs. Dutta writes a Letter is a story of a widow living in her son’s California home who discovers that her old, orthodox world ways cause embarrassment to her daughter-in-law.

The Mistress of Spices, Divakaruni’s first novel mingles magic and realism. Tilo is a magical figure who runs a grocery store and uses spices to keep customer overcome difficulties. But when she falls in love with Raven, a Native American, she is confronted with her own desire to be happy and to help others through the magic of spices; she has to decide which part of the heritage she will keep and which part she will choose to abandon. Tilo’s dilemma is an allegory of the immigrant who experiences the dual pull of the charm of the past and the call of the present.
In *Sister of My Heart*, two cousins are brought together by destiny to be born on the same night in the same house. Closer to each other, they share joys and pains of each other willingly. Sudha is starling beautiful while Anju is not. Bonded in mysterious way, they are sisters of the heart. They grown into womanhood but their fates remain merged. Sudha is gentle and quiet; Anju is rebellious and questions the old traditions that Anju respects. Yet when Sudha is put to the test, she makes the biggest sacrifice and treads the boldest path. When due to a change in family fortune, the girls are urged into arranged marriages. One travels to America while the other remains in India. When tragedy strikes both of them they discover that despite distance and marriage, they must try to each other once again. Here again, Divakaruni shows America as the land of hope and promise. While India is the land, they must forsake for good. The language of the novel is metaphoric and sensuous.

*The Vine of Desire* is a continuous of the story of Sudha and Anju from *Sister of My Heart*. Far from Calcutta, the city of their childhood and after years of living separate lives, Ajnu and Sudha rekindle their love and friendship. Now they face new challenges: a baby born and a baby lost, Anju’s husband’s treacherous attraction to Sudha’s beauty and Sudha’s difficulty in finding a new home for herself. Again, the language of the novel is rich with poetic imagery and lyricism.

*Queen of Dreams* is a story of Rakhi, a young artist and divorced mother in Berkley, California. She struggles to keep her footing with her family and with a world in alarming transition. Her mother possesses a special power of interpreting dreams and guides others through their fates. This gift of vision fascinates Rakhi but also isolates her from her mother. She longs for something that might bring them closer. After her mother’s death, she reads her dream journals that open the long closed door to the past.
The Palace of Illusions is highly relevant in War torn world of today. It takes us back to the times of the Mahabharata and the story is narrated by Panchaali, the wife of the five Pandavas. Divakaruni gives us a rare feminist interpretation of the great epic. Panchaali is presented as a fiery female voice in a rare world of warriors, gods and constantly manipulating fate. It is an ambitious work of art recasting the saga of the Mahabharata.

Divakaruni’s literary works have been critically well-received in the United States. She has won many awards including a California Arts Council Award (1998), a PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award (1996), a Pushcart Prize (1994), the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize (1994), the Editor’s Choice Award from Cream City Review (1991) and the South Clara Arts Council Poetry Award (1990). Most of her works have been appreciated for the fusion of lyricism, realism, myth and fantasy. However, critics have also criticized her works for her denigration of the Indian society and glorification of the taboo-free modernized society of the West, of the USA in particular. Divakaruni has defended her portrayals by saying that they are guided by truth, honesty and compassion for characters.

Divakaruni says that as a writer, she always wants to connect with women and women’s groups. She is deeply involved in women’s issues and conditions. She says that living in the US made her see and analyses the Indian life and culture objectively, and dispassionately. She noticed that many women are still caught in the value system that a man has precedence and power over than and mutely tolerate all injustices. She founded an organization called MAITRI in 1991, the first South Asian service of its kind on the West Coast. It is a help link which women in distress can use discussing their problems with trained volunteers. These volunteers speak many South Asian languages and have the understandings of the cultural context. The organization provides free of cost services including legal and medical help besides
family counseling. The most importantly, it provides a moral support to women creating in them a sense that a woman is not alone and she should not have to put up with the abuse of any kind. Divakaruni as a writer articulates the deepest fear and trauma faced by women in India and elsewhere. She exhibits women characters that emerge stronger and self-reliant. Some of her characters provide role models for women readers and women activists. She says that living in America has beneficial effect on many women writers. She says that her mother also wanted to be a writer but she could not do it because of family responsibilities. She says that it is not enough for women to have a room of their own to write but they must give it a priority. She emphasizes that woman writers should act as a writing community, reaching out to each other and drawing strength from each other.

The Room in Black Candle portrays the ‘mouth less face’ of the mother Divakaruni depicts a fine picture ‘a woman who rises towards’ her. She says,

“I am caught
by the lines of her bones, the fine
lighted hairs on her held out arm,
your eyes, mother, in her held out arm,
your eyes, mother, in her mouth less face.”

Nargis’ Toilette is inspired by a Muslim saying that says that ‘the uncovered face of a woman in a firebrand, inflaming men’s desires and reducing to ashes the honour of her family’. Nargis’ face is powdered and her eyes are under lined with kohl. Attar of rose is applied behind her earlobe women put henna on her hands and braid her hair. Divakaruni described the caged life of the women.

“In the women’s courtyard,
It is always quiet,
The carved iron gates locked.
The palm shivers by the marble fountain.
The bulbul sings to its crimson double
in the mirrored cage.”  

Nargis will be taken to visit the women of the Amin family. Nargis will sit with her eyes down. She will see for the first time Amin’s second son in the square wedding mirror placed in her lap. If the Allah wills, her marriage with Amin’s second son will be fixed. When she leaves, Nargis head is covered with black burkha that

“Spreads
Over the land, dark wave
Breading over the women, quenching
Their light
Now all is ready
Like a black candle
Nargis walks to the gate.”

_Bengal Night_ describes the life on a poor child who goes at night with a lantern to bring her grandfather home.

“The claws of night lizards
Skitter over rocks. Vapors rise
From the pocked phosphorus skin
of the mosquito swamp water insects
Cry into the hearts of elephant ears”

The child sets down the lantern and whirls around and around in the blue breathless air.

“Her skirt
Flares hibiscus red to touch
the whole. In the wheeling
Sky, star-studded bats hand
motionless on great leather wings.”

_(Black Candle, 5)_
Hibiscus-red and whirling skirt symbolizes the innocent poor girl’s desire for freedom and total abandon. However motionless bats with great leather wing symbolize the dull and monotonous life the girl had to live every day.

The Robbers’ Cave is also a poem depicting poverty and deprivation of a girl whose mother was always pregnant and whose hand were blue-veined, her home-bleached and whose face was blood less and anaemic. Her step father bent her and other siblings. She dreamt of her true father who had died at the time of her birth. The girl liked to play the game ‘Robbers’ Cave’ with her friends but she was never given her coveted role of the princess as she was only seven. Once she begged and begged until they let her be a princess for a day just once. She lay on the cold cement floor of the cave waiting for the prince who never came but the maid came and called her home for their mother was dying. Divakaruni poignantly depicts the picture of a deprived child whose dream world is marred by harsh realities of life. The bed of the girl’s mother was full of blood as she lay beside dying baby. The girl’s step father had flung the girl’s mother against a stair-wall. Her agonyed scream was muffled and no one had heard it. The girl hears her again and again in her dream as the scream echoes in the robber’s cave where she lies with hands tied being sucked by the metallic smell of her blood and ‘burning breath of her father on her’. The girl waits for the prince, the savior who never comes. Divakaruni takes up the issues of child-abuse, cruelty on women, poverty and inhuman treatment of women in South Asian Countries where traditional patriarchal system is still very dominantly and women suffer subtle forms of injustice and inequality often perpetrated not by men but by women on women.

Gauri Mashima portrays the character of the poet’s mother’s sister who failed to bear children after marriage and sterility in a woman is a curse in India. She had come from water country to dry land at the
age of fifteen. She who swam and dived underwater had no enough water for her bath. One day, she escaped from her husband’s house by hooking her arm into the looped anchor rope of a boat to the land of water again. Gouri Mashi symbolizes a free spirit like river that flows unharnessed.

*The Arranged Marriage* describes the Indian marriage in which bride’s father has to give dowry gold to groom’s father. From Western point of view, both arranged marriage and dowry are strange evil customs that treat women as inferior sex. Divakaruni takes her adopted Western stance while viewing many Indian customs. It cannot be denied that certain customs are really inhuman and anti-women but in India, marriage is a family affair rather than individual choice and arrangement. As a diasporic poet, Divakaruni has been convinced that the Western individualism provides freedom and scope for expression of women’s personality which are usually denied in Indian tradition-bound society and in other South Asian countries.

The custom of Living Goddess is very much like Devadasi- a girl dedicated in the service of the temple. In Nepal, the worship of the Living Goddess continues even today. The goddesses are discarded at puberty. While Devadasis are sexually exploited and often live as concubines or prostitutes, living goddesses are feared and avoided by men who live their lives as outcasts. In the poem *The Living Goddess Speaks* Divakaruni makes the Living Goddess speak about her life. At the age of five, the temple priest came to visit the girl’s grandfather. He examined the girl and found thirty two auspicious signs in her body. Thus, she was taken to the temple to become Kumari, the new Living Goddess. It was a great honour in the eyes of her family. Then she was forcibly taken to the temple where she spent nights on ivory beds and days on the temple throne. People worshipped her. One day, her sister came for her blessings in her bridal costumes. The Living Goddess is supposed not to weep or speak. As she started menstruating, another
living Goddess succeeds her. Then she is shut beyond the walls with iron gates. She yearns for someone's kiss but,-

“Who can kiss shut the eyes that cannot weep?
or lover his weight between the open legs
of a once Living Goddess?”  

*Mother and Child* describes the pangs of the birth of a dead child
coldless women live accursed life.

“Thoughts of empty days, pointed fingers
There goes the childless one
endless blind nights under her sweaty body.”  

*Song of the Fisher Wife* tells us of the woes of the fisher women
tale where it is believed that the virtue of the wife keeps her husband
safe at sea. Widows of the fishermen have to live the life of the
they are often forced into becoming prostitutes in order to survive. The
poem describes the death of a fisherman at sea and the fate of the
widow of the dead fisherman.

“They say all heard the crack and yell,
the boat exploding into splintered air,
sought for hours. They strip
my widowed arms, shove off my hair
Thrust me beyond the village walls.
Nights of no-moon will come to me,
Grunting, heaving, grinding
The damp sand into my naked back
men with cloths over their faces.”  

*My Mother Tells Me a Story* shows how the birth of a girl child is
looked at by the father of the girl-child who does not even come to see her. *Two Women outside a Circus, Pushkar* is inspired by a photograph by Rahgubir Singh. The poet here portrays the hard life of the women working in circus walking on tight rope or being hurled from a flaming
cannon. At home, they live the life of deprivatim caused by poverty and frequent pregnancies and childbirth.

*At the Sati Temple Bikaner* is also inspired by a photograph of Raghubir Singh. It depicts the most horrible of all evil practices in India. It is the practice of Sati, the burning of Widows on their husbands' funeral pyre. During the 19th century, it was outlawed but still isolated incidents of Sati occur in some parts of India, particularly in Rajasthan. Sati temples extolling the virtue of the burned wives still continue to flourish against law, disgracing the Great Indian Dream of Development and Modernization. These Satis—

“….have no names, no stories
Except what the priest tells each day
To women who have travelled the burning desert
on bare, parched feet.”

The widows are burned on funeral pyres of their husbands, held down with poles by force till their skin bubble away from pale pink under flesh.

“In this place
Of no wards, the women walk and walk
Somewhere in the blind sand,
A peacock’s cry, harsh, cut-off
for its mate or for rain.”

*I, Manju* has been penned after Mira Nair’s film ‘Salam Bombay’. It depicts slum life of Mumbai where poverty and prostitution go hand in hand. Manju, the speaker tells us about her mother who

“disappears into the room,
each time with a different
man many fingers
squeeze the rails
till rust scars the palms
The door shuts. The curtains shiver with silhouettes."  

_Sudha’s Story_ is a poignant tale of a young girl who wanted to pursue her love for classical dance. The Allaripa, Tillana and Nataraja are classical Indian dances. The Allaripa usually occurs at the beginning of the performance, the Nataraja at the end. Sudha was married to an officer at Delhi. Her parents sold the village home for a grand wedding. Everyone thought that Sudha was a lucky girl to find such a successful, well placed husband. However, he was jealous, mean-minded and possessive. He asked her to dance in the bedroom telling her that,

“From now on, you dance only for me.”

They went to Agra on honeymoon but the next day, he took her home saying that she looked at the guide and smiled at him. He did not want her to flirt with anyone. He locked her inside the house when he went to work. He brought gifts a new sari, perfume etc and made her wear the while making love. When she bore a child, he said it was not his child as no one fathered girl children in his family. He tried to kill her by giving her poison with tonic but she survived. At last, she decided to perform the Nataraja dance, “the dance for the world’s burning end.” She bolted her husband’s bedroom door from outside and poured kerosene and set the house on fire. She says,

“My right foot balances
On a wheel of Fire
I swing the left across
The trembling air
My palm holds up the sky,
which will fall
when I turn my wrist”  

11
The Garba is a poem about Gujarati Navaratri festival dance quite popular in the USA also among non-resident Indians. The Girls shed their jeans for long red skirts, pull back premed hair into plaits, strip off nail polish and mascara and press henna on to their hands and kohl under their eyes. The girls say:

“Our hips
move lie water to the drums
And,
The drums pound faster
in our belly, our feet glide
on smooth wood.
Our arms
are darts of light. Hair, silver braided,
lashes the air like lightening
The whirling is a red wind
around our thighs. Dance sweat
burns sweet in our lips.”

The description of dancing girls in Florida, USA is highly graphic and even sensuous. Divakaruni’s tone in the poem is feminist as well as nostalgic of Indian Navaratri festival and Indian landscape. The girls...

“........spin and spin
back to the villages of mothers’ mothers
we leave behind
the men, a white blur
like moonlight on empty bajra fields
seen from the speeding train.”

The Market of Chili Paste is inspired by Ketan Mehta’s film ‘Mirch Masala’. It depicts the bold, rebellious, independent temperament of chili paste makers. The speakers in the poem are women who work in a chili factory o the hill. All day, their big wood
pestles rise and fall like their heart beats. They voice their burning, flaming temperament in the following words:

“Our red hands
burn like lanterns
through our solitary nights
And,
All who taste our chilies
must dream of us,
women eyes like rubies
hair like meteor showers.”
(Black Candle, 51)

*Making Samosas* is a nostalgic poem about how the poet’s mother used to make delicious samosas and how in spite of the doctor’s advice, the poet’s father could not resist his desire to eat them. He had a stroke and he was advised not to take oily food. When he was reminded of the doctor’s advice, he flew into the rage and threw the chutney bowl across the room when the poet tried to call him from abroad, he hung up each time. She says that when she stirs tamarind into the chutney, she can visualize her father’s left leg dragging a little 1500 miles away.

*Burning Bride* is a poem dedicated to the victims of dowry deaths in India. Amidst the sacred chants of the Brahmins and the music of shehnai, the girl is married to a man with fire as the witness. After wedding, her in-laws weigh her jewellery and find it short of her father’s promise. The girl wrote to her father but his last cow was sold off and two daughters were still to marry off. She lived like a servant breaking coals for the kitchen in a windowless room. She wrote to her father that she would like to return to him but if she left her husband’s home, the family name would be tarnished and her sisters would remain unwed. Then one day, her in-laws poured kerosene over her body and burned her to death.
“Did they hold her down, struggling?
Oozing the dark oily stain?
Did they silence her cries?
Rough hand clamping across hips,
So the only sounds
Were the sharp rasps of a match?
And quick blue hiss of fire
Leaping in a night turned sudden red?” 14

Rest Room is a prose poem describing the journey of an immigrant woman to the US to be with her husband after eight years. After twelve hours journey by place, her bladder bursting and she pushes out of customs with num’s legs. Women in India do not speak of body-things and so she did not ask a heavy red-faced moon next to her to more so that she could go to toilet. She knew that her husband also lived as hard life in the US eating only one meal a day and washing his clothes at night. At the air-port, she is informed that her husband is in the hospital. Then she sees a sign WOMEN for women’s restroom. She goes inside to relieve herself. The description of the relief she experiences has been described vividly. Thus prose-poem shows the hardships and sufferings of the immigrants abroad.

Divakaruni works for battered South Asian women in the USA, The Women Addresses Her Sleeping Lover is written for Maya at the women’s Shelter at Oakland. Maya’s alcoholic lover beats her frequently and though she loves him, she wishes that he would never wake up again. The Rain Flies reminisces Indian monsoon when rain flies plunge into fire with brief gossamer blaze. On a rainy night while the rain pours heavily, children huddle in quilts listening to the rush of water outside. The poet left for a foreign country while Champa stayed back learning cooking, stitching and bathing fully clothed in women’s pond. Champa’s few letters never revealed her agony-filled life but one
day, she went to the bridge on rain-swelled night and killed herself on the railway track.

“The moving after the storm
the maid would sweep out
piles of pale wings, torn and shimmer less
the blind bodies crawling
ant like in desperate circles
searching for the flame”  

*My Mother Combs My Hair* presents the poet’s recollection of her mother combing her hair, sitting on the chair cross-legged and she on the floor kneeling. She regretted that her hair was not long and strong like hers. She said that when she was young, her hair reached her knees. At marriage, dowry was waived on account of her long beautiful hair. She commented:

“How you’ve ruined you hair
this plait like a lizard’s tail
or if you don’t take better care
of it, you’ll never get married.”

Now after her husband’s death, she has grey strands of hair, cracks at the edges of her eyes. The poet says:

“We hold the silence
tight between us
like a live wire
like a strip of gold
torn from a wedding brocade.”

*My Mother at Maui* Shows the poet’s attachment and love for her mother. The orthodox mother avoided the rows of bikini-clad beauties on the beach. She bathed in the ocean fully-clothed the sari billowed around her like a white petalling. The poet says that she had never
seen such an expression of happiness and contentment even before the death of her husband.

“I wrapped
The towel around your shoulders
We walked back silent, your hand
Light as a nesting bird
in the oval of my arm.”  

**The Garland** is a touching prose poem of a Muslim woman whose husband allows her to stay out of compassion instead of pronouncing the word ‘talaq’ for three times. She accepts her fate stoically without complaining or crying. She even decorates her husband’s marriage-bed when he brings Jalal Mohammed’s fair, beautiful daughter as his wife. The bride is overjoyed to walk into a forest of blossoms, marigolds, rose’s oleanders and jasmine. She touched light, shining petals only to find that they were torn butterfly wings. ‘Butterfly Wings’ symbolizes torn, broken life a woman.

**The House** depicts the memory of old house and childhood where opened cupboards spill tears like diamonds. The speaker says:

“At last, I see it in the corner,
tiny, glowing fire-fly bright:
My childhood, just as I lift it
I reach out but there’s a sharp
hiss. Between us, an enormous cobra,
hood upraised, black
as my father’s eyes.”

Cobra symbolizes ugly memories of childhood and the cruelty of the speaker’s father. These memories coils like a ribbon of silk in her hair. Time and again, Divakaruni presents the picture of a cure husband and father. Her crusading zeal seems to exaggerate the cruelties of men. Like Taslima Nasreen, she raises her voice against
the entire patriarchal hegemony and evil customs nurtured by it. *The Gift* paints the picture of a wedding of an Indian girl who walks behind a main around the sacred fire taking vows to follow him till death. Indian, good woman is one who brightens her mother’s name, one who serves obediently and unquestioningly, one who regards her husband as her god.

*Journey* describes the journey by train to homeland in India from abroad with the speaker’s husband and children. The husband tells the children the stories of his father who was a zamindar. He used to beat women with a whip. He used to beat his wife with a whip that made a permanent mark on her back. The zamindar’s house is filled with stuffed heads of tiger, buffalo, antelope and rhino. The poet says that there are only stories of fathers, never of mothers. It was like plunging backward into nightmare. The speaker feels like pulling the emergency chain and running away with the children to the sane world of her home but it was too late,

“Tomorrow we will enter
The places of your childhood
You will stride ahead with your son,
I, veiled and wifely, with your daughter
behind. Journey’s end.” 20

*The New City (I), (II) and (III)* are poems in sequence speaking about an immigrant’s encounter with a new city and new country. In a new city, in a new country comes across absence, lack of knowledge of the bird calls and forgets names of old trees like mango, banyan, jackfruit one learn the names of new trees, new birds and even new people. When one opens one’s hands, the names of friends fall from one’s hands. In the countries like the USA, on a new free way, there are no landmarks. One feels as if the tyres of the car slide on river ice. Tree are faceless due to unleafing and time rush by laughing while as shredded letters. In
a new city, one becomes anonymous. The poet says that in an alien country, one becomes a nameless person but this also gives one an unknown sense of freedom.

“On streets where no one knows you (She recalled)
You dance the anonymous dance, not touching ground.” 21

Leaving Yuba City contains poems on a variety of themes, suffering of women and their struggle to seek their identities. Nishi is a prose poem that is hauntingly pathetic. The speaker’s mother lived a life of suffering. Like a caught bird. After her husband’s death, she commits suicide ending the tragic tale of her life. The speaker hears her mother’s voices calling her with its unbearable sweetness and unbreakable threads of spun sugar.

The section Growing up in Darjeeling contains five poems recalling the poet's Scholl days in Darjeeling at a convent school run by the Irish missionaries. The poets depict a gloomy picture of the stern school discipline coupled with moral science lessons. Children waited for winter vacation in December but as they waved good bye, they wept wishing that they could comeback. The section: Rajasthani contains four poems after the photographs of Raghubir Singh. Two of them Two Women Outside a Circus, Pushkar and At the Sati Temple, Bikaner have been discussed earlier in Black Candle.

The Babies: I and II are poems about new born babies left by their mothers in garbage or on hospital steps. Sometimes, they carry notes pinned to their clothes: Her mother died. Her name is Lalita. Please bring her up as Hindu. The poet says that they are considered children of sin, whom no one will marry and they too would leave their babies on the steps of the hospital. The speaker is unable to forget them who continue to suck all through her sleep. Train is a prose poem about a man who lives near the railways station and goes it between 6 and 7 in the evening. He enjoys watching the hustle and bustle on the
platform when the train comes. Every night, he sleeps with his wife in his airless bedroom smelling of diapers and her hair oil. He is happy and contented as long as his wife turns and puts a damp arm over his. This is a very realistic picture of the Indian poor who often live contented life never thinking of what they do not have.

The section: Yuba City Poems contains five pomes narrating the emotional trauma of the first immigrant from Punjab to Yuba City in 1910. Now it is a thriving Indian community in Northern California. Until the 1940’s, the Alien Land Laws precluded non-white immigrants from owning land and immigration restrictions prevented their families from joining them. A number of the original settlers could never reunite with their families. The Founding of Yuba City describes the first immigrant from Punjab who came to Northern California after a month long journey, toiled hard as labourers, unaware of the Alien Land Laws hoping that

“Tomorrow they would find jobs,
Save, buy the land soon.” 22

They remembered their wives in red skirts who carried rotis, alu and jars of buttermilk for them to their fields. They longed to be reunited with them.

“Not knowing
how the wheels of history
grind over the human heart, they
smiled in their sleep.” 23

Yuba City Wedding is a long prose poem that describes a Sikh who is going to marry a Mexican woman. During 1920s to 1930s, several men married local women from Mexico as they could not go back to Punjab to marry Punjabi women. The poem describes a Sikh sharing a rickety room with five other labourers in Yuba. He decides to marry Manuela, a Mexican woman out of necessity. Manuela is a
Christian who eats pig’s flesh, cow’s flesh, she is not clean and ant
even white skinned. She is not fit to raise her children s good as Sikh
but he had no choice. He remembers Punjab, his home, his own people
and culture. He knows that it was like groping into the dark, uncertain
future which was the destiny of all immigrants in those days.

*The Brides come to Yuba City* depicts women who first came to
Yuba City after the immigration laws were relaxed and they were
allowed entry in the USA. They travelled for a month to reunite with
their husbands whose faces they have forgotten. These Sikh women
express their trauma-ridden life.

“Thirty years
since we saw them. or never,
like Halvinder, married last year at Hoshiarpur
to her husband’s photo
which she clutches tight to her
to stop the shaking
he is fifty-two,
she sixteen. Tonight-like us all-
she will open her legs to him.” 24

*Yuba City School* describes a Sikh boy Jagjit’s humiliation at
school where the teachers and other students make fun of him and
inflict insults all the time. He dreams of going back to Punjab, and his
grandfather’s mango orchard:

“The earth, he knows, is round,
and if he can tunnel all the way through,
he will end up in Punjab,
in his grandfather’s mango orchard, his grandfather’s songs
lighting on his head, the old words glowing
like summer fireflies.” 25
Divakaruni portrays the strong, independent young woman of the modern generation who decides to leave her home in Yuba City for Las Vegas or Los Angeles. Leaving Yuba City the title poem of the collection is a prose poem about a Punjabi Sikh girl Sushma who packs her bags and baggage and at night when all are asleep, leaves her home, her parents and old asthmatic grandfather. She wants to leave them because their orthodox ways are suffocating her spirit. She wants to live on her own, independent, matured life with freedom and dignity. She knows that she is bound by ties of language to her joint family. She says:

“May be the words will come to her then, halting but clear, in the language of her parents, the language that she carries with her for it is hers too, no matter where she goes. May be she’ll be able to say what they’ve never said to each other all their lives because you don’t say those things even when they’re true. May be she’ll say, I Love You.”

In Woman with Kite, Divakaruni portrays a woman who cuts through her stereotypical role of wife or mother achieving new found joy and freedom. She takes up the spool of thread from her son and like a young girl lets the kite go up into the sky. She sprints backwards, sure-footed and connected to the air as if she were flying herself. She laughs like a woman should never laugh.

“She laughs like wild water, shaking Her braids loose, she laughs Like a fire, the spool of a blur Between her hands, The string unraveling all the way To release it into space, her life, into its bright, weightless orbit.”
Indian Movie, New Jersey gives a picture of the Indians watching Indian movie in New Jersey, admiring plump Indian actresses, dance and songs, mispronounced English of the Indian actors and actresses. Their young children are no more interested in Indian culture and Indian cinema. Their sons do not want to run the family stores anymore. Their daughters date secretly. The first generation viewers admire and applaud friendship and sacrifice of the Indian hero. After the film is over, they talk of about their trip to India and share good news. They do not speak of motel raids, cancelled permits, stones thrown through the windows in their stores or houses or their daughters and sons raped by anti-Indian gangs. The immigrants abroad always feeling insecure and dream of retiring to India with a yellow two storied house with wrought-iron gates and their own Ambassador cars. The movie Truths like sacrifice, success, love and luck seem to be more real to the Indian immigrants abroad. The poem deals with the lives of the immigrants in the USA and diaspora in general, who suffer from the sense of insecurity and seek refuge in their native culture, art, religion, festivals and gatherings.

Like Black Candle, Leaving Yuba City also contains many woman-centred or even mother-centred narratives focusing on mothers of the first generation. These women suffered the pangs of imprisoning patriarchy but survived them through either submission or cunning strategies paving ways for more freedom and creative life for their daughters. Divakaruni employs poetical metaphors of birthing, pregnancy, nursing and motherhood in her poetry, emphasizing on and exploring the secret alleys of women’s bodies. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni stands out as a bold, feminist diasporic poet whose cries of protest and rebellion ring out bold and clear.

Moniza Alvi was born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1954 and she was taken to England when she was a few months old. She grew up in Hertfordshire and studied at the Universities of York and London. She

Moniza Alvi’s father is from Pakistan originally and her mother is English. They had met when Moniza’s father was in English for apprenticeship. They went back to Pakistan, but eventually divided to return to England. Moniza says that she never actually learned her father’s language and she regrets it to some extent. While growing up in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, she felt that her origins were invisible as there were very few of mixed race to identify with. However, as a child, she was brought up in the Church of England. Her father’s religion was Muslim he was not a practicing Muslim. He had a fairly typically English upbringing of 1950’s/1960’s. Moniza did not visit Pakistan until 1993. Moniza says that she does not consider herself anywhere as entirely home. Even when she visited Pakistan 1993, he did not feel that was home. She had never felt at home in England. She even does not consider herself as a part of the Asian community. As she has written poems about her Asian background, people identify her as a black writer the title that she refuses to accept. She feels that England is culturally mixed now.

In a telephonic interview recorded by B.B.C., London, June 1998, she defines identity as something deeper, something that has to do one’s spirit.
I suppose I would define identity. Very broadly in terms of what you do, what you respect and may be something deeper, your spirit. But it’s important to know where you come from, which is perhaps what I was lacing as a child. I think it’s important to know what has gone into your making, even quite for back, I think it gives you a sense perhaps of richness. 28

As a poet, Moniza Alvi is attracted by the visual and it is reflected in her poetry-some of her poems are fairly autobiographical. *The Country at My Shoulder* contains poems of childhood memories in England. These poems describe childhood play, fights and adventures. In the very first poem, she says:

“I was raised in a glove compartment.  
The gloves held out limp fingers-

In the dark I touched them  
I bumped against the First Aid tin,

and rolled on notepads and maps.  
I never saw my mother’s face-

Sometimes  
Her gloved hand would reach for me

I existed in the quiet. I listened  
for the sound of the engine.” 29

*Pilgrimage, Neighbourhood* and *The Garden* are the poems about childhood fights and adventures of the poet’s childhood days in Hatfield, Hertfordshire. *The After World* depicts the child’s world when her parents are gone.

“Across them spreads your long hair-  
it is still golden.
But you will not own anything-
except the sudden sunlight
shining through you parents’ hallway
up into your bedroom.” 30

I would Like to be a Dot in a Painting by Miro has a
contemplative, introspective tone. ‘A dot’ symbolizes the lack of ego,
the acceptance of what is, self-contentment, desirelessness and self-effacement. A dot has a potential of turning into alien, a picture, an
animation, a dream and a dance.

“But it’s fine where I am.
I’ll never make out what’s going on
around me, and that’s the joy of it.

The fact that I’m not a perfect –circle
makes me more interesting in this world
people will state forever

Even the most unemotional get excited
so here I am, on the edge of animation,
a dream, a dance, a fantastic construction.”

On Dunton Bridge gives a vivid visual of a bridge that has
witnessed the fight of a couple, the father clutching a sobbing little boy
and the mother yelling at a girl in school uniform.

“They all stood turned to stone
like Dunton Bridge. And I froze too.” 31

In In News Paper, the poet recollects her mother’s act of
wrapping her cut-off plait in news paper.

“Free from snipping, splitting, perming, it waits
long years to be touched in awe
and splashed with lamplight.
It is an ear of black corn, ripened in newspaper
in my mother’s room.”

Throwing Out My Father’s Dictionary shows words growing shoots in the bins and changes taking place in spellings, punctuations and so on. The poet’s father’s dictionary contained his signature in the centre page. The poet has a bigger, weightier dictionary containing the latest entries but she dare not inscribe her name on it. The poet here wants to suggest that the language is always in flux and one cannot own or possess it by inscribing one’s name. It eludes and escapes one’s grasp.

Present from Pakistan contains poems on themes related to Pakistan. The first poem in this section The Indian Cooking describes the India style of cooking of keemo and khir with a variety of spices, colourful and aromatic. Melted ghee looks like lakes or golden rivers. The poet while tasting these recipes tastes the landscape of India.

Presents from My Aunts in Pakistan is one of the first poems she wrote. When she wrote the poem, she had not visited Pakistan, he father’s original country. The speaker in the poem is about 13 years old. Her aunts had sent a peacock blue salwar kameez, an orange one, glass bangles and the jewellery from Pakistan. The salwar bottoms were broad and stiff and candy-striped glass bangles drew blood. Though she is fascinated by these colourful clothes and jewellery, she feels awkward wearing them. She longs for denim and corduroy. She contrasts the beautiful clothes and jewellery of India and Pakistan with monotonous English cardigans from Marks and Spenser. Then she recollects her journey with the family to England when she had prickly heat all over her body. She feels that her identity was uncertain and fragmented.

“I pictured my birth place
from fifties’ photographs,
When I was older
there was conflict, a fractured land
throbbing through newsprint.”

The poem is written in free verse with stanzas of varying lengths and phrases arranged loosely across the page. The poem depicts a sequence of personal memories. There are associating as well as contrasting images. The tone of the poem is that of confusion caused by the dual pull of colourful Indian and Pakistani gifts and modern English denim and corduroy. She is unable to decide her identity as the past was invisible and indistinct while the present she could not completely identify with and therefore she experienced a sense split identity. At the end of the poem, she tries to imagine how it might have been if she’d lived in Lahore instead, and wonder whether she would have been more at home there or in England.

“sometimes I saw Lahore-
    my aunts in shaded rooms,
screened from male visitors,
sorting presents
    wrapping them in tissue
Or there were beggars, sweeper girls
and I was there-
    of no fixed nationality,
  Staring through fretwork
    at the Shalimar Gardens.”

Luckbir is a pen-portrait of the poet’s aunt who read Jane Austen but never lived beyond the confines of a home. She did not take a job or an evening class. She died young and the poet’s uncle could never forget his beautiful companion with red lips, draped in colourful, gorgeous saris.
The Country at My Shoulder is a title poem that tells of the burden of one’s inheritance and culture. It refers to Pakistan without naming, the country of her birth where under the military rule, public execution took place in the square. Women cry at the sight. Shedding tears on their wet dupatta, women toil hard breaking stones. The poet says:

“
I try to shake the dust from the country,
Smooth it with my hands.”

Alvi says that the country has become her body that she cannot break hits off. The mixed identity of the poet does not let her rest. She says:

“
I water the country with English rain,
Cover it with English Words
Soon it will burst, or fall like a meteor.”

Identity labels and canons of culture are often so strong that they do not allow easy flow of cultural assimilations. This conflict caused by mixed nationality and upbringing can be seen clearly in Alvi’s poetry. However, in Moniza Alvi’s poetry, there is a conscious attempt to break free from fixed representation of gender, race and culture. She is in fact, alien to the culture of her birth country, Pakistan and that her connection with it is surreal and fantastical. It becomes the symbol of other losses for her.

The poem Sari is symbolic depiction of the poet’s culture. The Sari is not just a cloth but that which “Stretched from Lahore to Hyderabd, Wavered cross the Arabian Sea, Shot through with stars” Alvi has written several poems where she refers to India, the undivided Bharat before partition. She says in Map of India:

“India is manageable-smaller than
My hand- the Mahanadi river
Thinner than my life line.”

(The Country at My Shoulder, 37)
When Jaswinder Lets Loose Her Hair expresses the poet’s memory of Jaswinder’s long stream like hair “that could run around mosque” for which she craves. The Draught describes the Indian weather in the mountains in winter. Alvi’s tone of diasporic discontent is always mild and mellow. In When We Ask to Leave Our City, the poet says:

“They say
Why don’t you instead
cut off your hair
tamper with the roots?

So we ask to leave the Earth forever.

They say What! Leave the Earth forever?
And they offer a kind of umbilical cord
To connect us up to the coldest stars.

We’ll stay in our city
opt for decent bread
lean our unruly heads
against the wall.” 39

The Bed, the last poem of the collection The Country at My Shoulder symbolizes home, the country and one’s shelter that can hold the tempests of one’s dreams.

“We’ll have river
in the middle of the bed-
Where in the ancient song
the King’s horses could all drink together.” 40

The poet longs for the country where people of different races, cultures and religions can live happily and amicable. Thus, Alvi’s
collection *The Country at My Shoulder* describes issues of identity, home and exile. Her later volumes of poetry *Soul* (2002) and *How the Stone Found its Voice* (2005) show how her cultural transformation transcends beyond ‘English’ or ‘Asian’ to effect an original self-reinvention of her individualism and identity. Alvi also exhibits glaringly distinct Indian influence. Pakistan evokes a sense of strangeness to her but Indian influence on her poetic sensibility is firmed imprinted which her poetry exhibits time and again.

*Souls* is a collection of 79 short poems dealing with the image of soul. It is interesting to note that Moniza Alvi plays with the idea of the soul in a quite different manner. For her, soul is not a spiritual concept but the spirit that gives meaning to life and existence. Souls give presents of nothingness which is the most sensible gift of all. It clashes with nothing. The idea of NOTHINGNESS is central to the Zen Buddhism, Taoism and many spiritual paths. Alvi does not philosophize the concept of the soul but deals with it in a playful manner- Souls advice people

“Collect nothing
which isn’t infinitely collectible.”

In a poem *Travellers*, Alvi says that those who are well-equipped with life’s experiences are good travelers. In a poem ‘Lost Souls’, she writes:

“Lost souls are not always lost
They inhabit us as if our faces
were portraits in galleries-”

In Indian philosophy, souls are considered immortal. *The Gita* says that soul never dies: only body perishes. She echoes the idea of immortality in the poem *Immortals* in the following words:

“We only know about life
To the Souls,
we’re the real immortals.” 43

In a poem The Worst Thing, the poet says:
“The worst thing for the Souls
is forgetting how to fly.” 44

Escape describes souls’ elusive nature, their habit of playing,
truant and hiding in lifts and murky stairwells.”
“However hard we press down
on the lid, out they come
out of the box.” 45

Shirt on the Line is a marvellous poem depicting altogether a
new way of looking at the idea of the soul. The poet says that the souls
are not always serious, they are fun-loving. The soul like a wind fills,
out the white shirt on the line and the sleeves riotously sway and flap.
“The empty shirt is a joy
for an hour the souls forget
what they carry with them,

have no idea whether
it is a happy childhood
or a great weariness.” 46

Great and Small shows that there is nothing small or great. In
fact, the small is a great thing. There is something special in the
second.
“The second is the great thing,
not the years, the days,
the protected minutes
The souls know so well,
the particles of time,
their scent,
their explosive nature.” 47

In *Stranger*, Moniza Alvi says that each soul is stranger to the other. Each soul passes down the thoroughfare in its separate disguise. When they collide, they are confused because they cannot easily tell whether it is themselves or the other. The poem *Hotel* expresses the popular India idea of the soul dwelling in a house temporarily and then moving into some other place. Moniza Alvi compares the body with a hotel, a temporary home, spongy and leaky place with heart like Big Ben presiding over it.

“Perhaps the soul is drawn
to the body’s holes and windows’
knowing that one day
it will surely leave
without a backward glance
was the body really such a good hotel?” 48

*Two Dates* says that in fact in our frenetic years of life, the souls have no need for diaries or calendars. For them only, two dates are important, the date of birth and the date or the final adieu.

“Two dates which bind together
our existence.” 49

Moniza Alvi always emphasises the fact we are all strangers and our home is nowhere. It is the trick of the light that we are tempted into believing that it is our home. *This Town* depicts the guiding aesthetic of Alvi’s poetry that we are all immigrants and we are all strangers to ourselves.

“This town we think is home,
Is somewhere else. Abroad.
Every might we ravel
miles and miles to get here…

…………………………
Even our breath is scarcely
our own—the Souls maintain
they give it as a gift.
Quite casually.”

Nothing is another short poem showing that “Nothing is more precious than life”. Souls shed everything and desperately cling to ‘nothing’, holding it closely as if it were a child. Emptiness, nothingness, vacuum contain potential for holding, possibility for being filled with something. Therefore the very idea of nothingness is very important in spirituality. As a diasporic poet, Moniza Alvi reiterates the idea that immigrancy is the essence of life. We are all immigrants, moving to some alien land, not knowing where we are heading and where our home is. The very concept of ‘NOHOME’ or homelessness paves way for home everywhere, anywhere.

In Go Back to England, Moniza Alvi describes how she felt a sense of being a stranger in Lahore where she was born and lived there briefly. After her birth, when she was a few months old, she was taken to England. Her English mother felt it necessary that the baby needed to be brought up in England. In Pakistan, she wailed endlessly detesting the heat and the cold of the region.

“Go back to England
said the stones and boulders.

Go back to England
urged the dusty grass

July gasped in the heat
the day we loft Model Town

My mother hoped to be
a different mother.
The ocean knew
I would be translated

into an English Girl.” 51

In this poem, Alvi ironically expresses the loss of a birth nation’s inheritance and cultural translation forged by the multiplicity of cultures. The Boy from Bombay describes lost children who are taken to Switzerland and adopted by Swiss parents. Years later, when the boy looks into the mirror and pictures himself for a moment somewhere else in Mumbai, under the yellow basalt of the Gateway of India.

“He strains to see
as if he cold uncover
the full story.
As if he cold untie
a boat on the lake
row it from one world
to another-
backwards and forwards
through the sunlight
and the shadows” 52

Moniza Alvi’s How the Stone Found its Volume (2005) shows how her cultural transformation goes beyond just being “English” or “Asian”. It offers oblique perspectives on the global conflict of divided cultures. The collection contains poem about her childhood, subtle adaptations of the French poet Jules Supervielle, moving pieces elderly parents and her own experiences of motherhood. Then there are also poems that adopt the voice of a husbands peaking about his wife, the subject which she had earlier explored in the collection Carrying My Wife (2000). The pomes in this collection conjure darker, even apocalyptic perspectives. The titles themselves are suggestive of their
apocalyptic nature: How the City Lost Its Colour, How the Countries Stopped Away. The poem How A Long Way Off Rolled Itself Up begins like children’s story “Once there was a place called Long Way off” where trees grew upside down and houses appeared to have been turned inside out. The idea of a distant place recurs in many of Alvi’s poems. In a poem For My Daughter, she hints that her daughter too was there with a whisper of another continent in her bones. Alvi conjures up larger themes and landscapes with gentleness and ease. What links the poems in the collection is the overriding sense of not belonging of fragility, even our relationship with ourselves. This feeling of fragility echoes in her adaptations of Supervielle poems. For example, the final poem of the collection starts as a poem addressed to a child but soon it turns into the speaker’s own elusive bold on pat. The speaker says:

“I’m convinced you’re my childhood
haunting a favourite place.
Your hide from me, embarrasses.”

Moniza Alvi often, refers to the sense of being strangers to ourselves. In one poem, old age is described as the experience of living inside of a jar filled with marmalade in which it is difficult to move or enjoy the simple pleasures of life. The final section adopts the voice of a husband as he speaks about the subtleties and complexities of life. These delicate and surreal poems explore the fragility of marriage, of belonging and nor longing to someone else. In a poem ‘After Escher’, the husband bemoans the seemingly impossible attempt to write about his wife accurately ad factually.

“She slides away from herself,
in anger, or mischief. I sigh,
tempted to fling down my pen
My wife is rarely my wife.”
This human predicament is both a matter of despair and of reconciliation that nothing or no one is unchanging or the same. We should be prepared and willing to accept the ever-changing current of existence.

_Europa_ is a collection of poems by Moniza Alvi that explores post-dramatic stress disorder and the meaning of rape while mining the international politics of east and west through the myth of Europa. Europa was a Lebanese princess and her father ruled a city the Greek called Tyre. Its name, Sur in Phoenician, Tzor in Hebrew meant ‘Rock’. Tyre’s princess symbolizes the first human example of rape in Western history.

Alvi’s poems explore and restage the vulnerability of both women and a rock through the rape of Europa, when the world’s divine ruler himself, disguised as a bull raped her. The bull offered a lift to Europa who clung on its back and carried her over the sea to Crete and raped her there. Europa’s son was Minos, the father of Crete’s royal family whose lives were hall marked by bulls ever after. As Europa was tricked by a bull, Minos’s wife Pasiphae tricked a bull into sex and bore the Minotaur, half man, half bull. Theseus killed Minotaur with the help of Ariadne, Mino’s daughter, but finally married her sister Phaedra who caused the death of Theseus’s son Hippolytus by falsely accusing him of rape. Hippolytus died facing another bull from the sea.

The bull, mark of Crete, stands for violence, abandonment and rape. The role that Moniza Alvi reinvents for Europa is that of Anderson’s little mermaid, who sacrifices her scaly tail for the love of a prince. Like Theseus, the prince marries someone else while the girl’s human legs hurt her like knives. Moniza Alvi associated this mythological politics. Europa is a muslim girl whose head scarf in post 9/11 Europa is a divistive badge of an alien culture. Europa is also a girl in an honour killing, who becomes prey of the reaction to 9/11.
holocaust. What Alvi wants to suggest is the vulnerability of the innocent in violence of all kinds. The terrorist attack killed innocent people while the reaction it generated all targeted innocent people. The real culprits always escape whether in mythologies or in real life.

Europa is the girl whose name gave western culture its identity: a girl invaded, a girl who represents all violent traffic between East and West. In Alvi’s treatment of Europa myth, the echoes of Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine problem ring clearly. Alvi’s voice is never outrageously rebellious; it is gentle, modest, patient and disciplined. Peace eludes the world always hiding in the dark limbs of intolerance, violence and mindless acts of terror. Europa’s father is unable to recognize her and the emperor of the world apologizes to Europa with his head bowed down shamefully. These poems can be seen as looking at both psychological and cultural split again. They are fine examples of surreal poems presented through intensely lyrical language. However, Moniza Alvi says that what a poet can do is to bear witness to the damage marvelling how the ink clings to the nib, the tray miracle. Poetry is a tiny miracle that survives all disasters proving that wounds of violence heal and poetry glitters like a tiny star on a dark night.

Jean Arsanayagam is a Sri Lankan poet whose poetry presents genuine diasporic anguish and ethnic conflict which minority has to face. Born to a Burgher family as Jean Solomons in Kandy, Sri Lanka, Jean Arsanayagam received her schooling in Kandy and graduated from the University of Ceylon. She married a Tamil Youngman named Thiyagrajah Arsanayagam and she has personally known the insecurity and fear experienced by the Tamil community during attack on Tamils in the post independence period.

Jean began to publish her works in the early 1970’s and they have been widely published in English and have been translated in Danish, Swedish, French, German and Japanese languages. Jean
Arsanayagam won the national award for non-fiction literature in 1984. Her major poetical works include:

- *Kindura* (1973)
- *Poems of Season Beginning and a Season Over* (1977)
- *Colonial Inheritance and Other Poems* (1985)
- *Out of Our Prisons We Emerge* (1987)
- *Trial by Terror* (1987)
- *Shooting the Floricans* (1993)

Besides being a renowned poet, Jean Arsanayagam is an excellent prose writer too. Her prose works have earned her recognition and fame. These works include:

- *The Outsider* (1989)
- *Fragments of a Journey* (1992)
- *All is burning* (1995)
- *Peacocks and Dreams* (1996)
- *In the Garden Secretly and other Stories* (2000)

*The Cry of a Kite* is a collection of intense poetic description of the bare, desert like landscape in the neighbourhood of Jaffna in Northern Sri Lanka, the traditional homeland of the Tamils. It portrays the decay of small villages, their marginalization on account of rapid modernization Peacock and Dreams is a series of political vignettes from Tamil village life. Fragments of a journey and ‘All is burning’ exhibit Jean’s strength as a painter and explorer. She is a minute observer with an eye for details. She seldom tells a straight forward story in a conventional manner. Some her stories explore the bitter truth of ageing and loneliness. Her prose work displays her insightful deeply psychological characters, circular composition and poetical
melodious pose. In her short stories, she expresses something more than transience and decay. It is an attempt to express the enigma of existence and presence of God. She emphasizes the fact that the old religions need to be protected against a new age of brutality and ethnic intolerance. There are contradictions in religions, no enmity among gods and prophets. All religions lead to love, equality and brotherhood.

Jean Arsanayagam has spent her childhood in a small provincial town of Kudugannava and her experience of this place is reflected in her works. After her graduation, she got her M.Litt from Strathclyde University, Glasgow, Scotland. She taught English language at St. Anthony’s college and also lectured at the University of Peradeniya. Since independence from colonial rule, Sri Lanka has passed through severe ethno-political conflict. The inter racial conflict between the majority Sinhalese and Tamil minority has caused a large scale communal violence in Sri Lanka again and again. With the rise of Tamil militancy led by Prabhakaran since the eighties, the country has been ravaged by bloody war till death recently causing death, destruction and displacement of lakhs of people from their homeland.

Like many other ethnic Tamils, Jean’s family had been victimized and was forced to flee the war zone as refugee in 1983. This experience created an identity crisis within her which impelled her to express the anguish and sufferings caused by ethnic conflict in her works. On a personal level, she too underwent profound sufferings and pain as a war refugee. The nurses’ attitude was also divisive and discriminatory in those refugee camps. Jean Arsanayagam’s home had been attacked by a frenzied mob as she and her husband belonged to a minority. She and her sister escaped death quite narrowly. Jean had taught in both schools and universities. As a teacher, she had never experienced social alienation in the beginning but ethnic violence made her realizes that ethnic intolerance spares no one. She felt that her past life as a teacher was of no value. Police officers acted like stooges and
desperate refugees crowded in school rooms and school compounds. It was even difficult to find a space for standing. In Sri Lanka, teachers faced grinding poverty. Ethnic violence disrupted education system in Sri Lanka completely. For the first time, she experienced the fear of being thought alien, the other.

Jean Arsanayagam comes from Neil Burgher community which reminds her of her colonial past. Her father was a white man. Power and authority embodied in him. She wanted to belong to that part of her identity which would ensure her recognition and respectable place in society. It also meant that she must reject another part of her identity – her mother’s way of life. In fact, her father had not married her mother but he always wanted his childhood to be raised the way that had legitimized his own existence in his world. All through her life, Jean questioned the source of her birth. She felt that she was a new hybrid flower, her colourings, markings were distinctive. She felt that her mother was like a natural plant, the ungrafted bud, pure and undefiled but they (Jean and her siblings) could not cling to that vine and naturally, the severance was quite painful.

Separated from her mother by patriarchal will Jean, with her present knowledge of colonial debate looks at her identity crisis from a very personal angle.

“To whom did I owe my true allegiance? To my father’s people or my mother’s? Her people were subjugated, caught up as they were in that historical process of colonialism. The subjugation was further extended by possession of her body, but when I looked upon my father in my childhood. I did not consider him in that light.” 55

Jean has visited number of countries on her academic tours. She had faced harassment by immigration and airport authorities on account of being a Sri Lankan. Her experience as an academician
during her visit to different countries provides her ample scope to compare the effects of colonialism on different cultures. Jean has visited India several times where she feels “at home outside her home”

The personal suffering of her life has given her wider perspectives on human sufferings. She merges her little, personal self with the greater, higher self or humanity. In her poetry as well as in her prose works, there is a marked autobiographical element that mirrors her innocent, peace-loving soul. In the middle of bloodshed, chaos, horror and humiliation, she experiences a contradictory sense of freedom.

“Someone smashed in the door
And gave me my freedom
To walk out into the World
free, free from the prison of myself.” 56

Jean Arsanayagam like other Dutch Burghers was the offspring of a union of a Dutch colonizer and a woman of indigenous community. The split inheritance makes her proclaim thus:

“I have suckled on a breast shaped
by the genetics of history.” 57

In the beginning, Jean Arsanayagam felt that she was an outsider but when she and her family become refugees during ethnic violence. She realized that she was no longer an outsider or onlooker but she was in it. Now that it happened on her, she felt, “A last history has meaning.” Her uncertainty about her identity gives her both the feeling of being a “Trishanku” and also of freedom from the burden of any fixed inheritance and history.

Before one reads Jean Arsanayagam’s poetry, one needs to understand ethnic-political situation in Sri Lanka. The modular form of European nationhood undertook radical changes in their dialectical
enter counter with the colonies. Representative politics shifted from representation to representativeness in the Asian arena; which is supported to guarantee the principle of equal citizenship based on the idea of anonymous and homogeneous civil society. Colonial practice of census-taking has generated a powerful numerical imagination among the colonized people aiding in expanding their race and community consciousness. This naturally translates into a politics of numbers where the majority justifies domination. In case of Sri Lanka, the Sinhala – Buddhist community being the largest majority claimed that it had a natural right to dominate and rule over the other minorities. In Sri Lanka, it was frequently argued that the Tamils were a pampered minority under colonial rule and needed to be ‘Kept in place.’ So, their move to restrict their number in education, administration professions etc. was only the just way of restoring balance. In post-colonial Sri Lanka, comradeship became limited to an exclusive ethnic group while others were pushed to the periphery.

Jean Arsanayagam’s poetry should be read in this context as her poetry captures a unique and complex response to exclusionary nationalist rhetoric of post-colonial Sri Lanka. As a writer of Dutch Burgher origin, married to a Tamil that as the largest and politically most assertive minority in Sri Lanka, and living in the largely Sinhala dominated southern region of the country. Jean Arsanayagam’s works echo her long-term engagement with the multiple heritages that inform her identity. And what emerges in her writing is uncomfortable hybridity causing serious problem of self definition. Under the sign of post-colonial nation and its hegemonic discourses, Jean Arsanayagam’s works seek its specific space. In politics of domination, no domination is ever total as the dominated create a zone of autonomy. In Jean Arsanayagam’s works, one can explore this zone of autonomy and contradictions.
One of the earliest works of Jean Arsanayagam, *Kindura*, and the title poem represents the ambiguous perspectives of hybridity. The poem uses half-human, half bird form depicted in the Buddhist legend *Sanda Kinduru Jatakayato* suggest a potential for autonomy that might or might not be realized fully:

“Feathers slice off your waist,
Tail plumes splay the air,
Claws grasp earth,
Fingers touch flute.
Music twitters from those human lips
Your imperturbable profile
Does not suggest
Discrepancy of his embodiment
Yet your folded wings
Unruffled feathers
Suggest an immobility
of flight arrested,
And I see in my own
submerged personality
A strange restless
Ghost of Kindura”

Kindura being, both avian and human contains hybridity, its people ‘imperturbable’. However this flamboyant spirit becomes motionless and arrested in flight. The doubleness of Kindura – its capacity for dynamic action and artistic performance hybridized with the potential unrealized renders its problematic as the sign of the poet’s own self-identity as a woman and poet. The last lines bring her mixed feelings on “submerged personality” as the ghost of Kindura. It is really interesting to note that Jean Arsanayagam in her early work draws inspiration from the Buddhist legend. In the Sinhala imagination, the Sinhalese people are supposed to be the chosen custodians of the Buddhism and Sri Lanka, the sanctuary of Buddhism. Jean
Arsanayagam’s adoption of the symbol of Kindura is an attempt to replace a hybrid consciousness in a majoritarian discourse that justifies itself in a singular and immemorial tradition promoted as authentically local. Most of her works is characterized by this ambivalence where a marginalized identity struggles to assert its autonomy from and yet seeks articulation with dominant identity formations.

In her poems written after a decade, in the aftermath of the 1983 anti Tamil racial violence, of which she was an unwitting victim, there is a different manifestation of this ambivalence. She who considered herself ‘outsider’ suddenly found herself ‘in’. She writes:

“It’s all happened before and will happen again
And we the onlookers
But now Jim in it
It’s happened to me
At last history has a meaning.” 59

These lines that occur in a poem titled 1958.. 71…77…81…83 deal with the history of repetitive violence. Having perceived the incidents of violence as an “onlooker”, she now encounters it as a victim realizing that history has a ‘meaning’ for who are affected by it. Regi Siriwardena notes that in *Apocalypse ’83* the poems are spontaneous and profound accounts a fatality of violence, but in her later poetry “she begins to dwell more identity and belonging that arise from the trauma of what happened to her and her family in 1983.” 60

It is clearly marked that 1983 was a significant event in her literary career that brought forth note of urgency and political awareness in her works. She starts investigating her self-identity and position within a society she has inhabited from birth but now finds it inimical. This investigation generates a space for individual autonomy. The sense of mythic calm and poise of Kindura is no more here. The hybrid consciousness has hardened and solidified in to a minority
consciousness aware of impending threat from majority. What emerges from the personal encounter with the violence of exclusionary politics and ethno-nationalism is a strong and resolute desire to seek a place, to belong.

Post-83 writing of Jean Arsanayagam exhibits of the Buddhist mythological references that she has visited in *Kindura*. One can suggest that she is probably disillusioned by the fact that the religion that preaches peace and compassion (Karuna) resolved to such a mindless violence. Whatever the reasons, there is for greater awareness and investigation of the two minimized communities and their traditions that shape her cultural identity- Dutch Burgher and Tamil. It is here that her works explore the complex issue of nationalism and its exclusionary discourses. Her writing redefines the Sri Lankan post-colonial space and marks it out as a space of multicultural heritages in place of unitary logic of nationalism. She is aware of the fact that in spite of her desire to belong, she is persistently marked as alien. Thus, there co-exists her desire to belong and the process of re-writing her aliens. Her reinvention of alienation becomes both critical irony and poetic urgency.

In post-85 writings of Jean Arsanayagam, we see that the Burgher dimension finds expression in her poetical works repeatedly. The Dutch Burghers were a miniscule numerical minority that enjoyed a position of wealth and high status in society in colonial Sri Lanka. In colonial times, the Burgher community enjoyed prominent place in medical and legal sectors. They also considered themselves self-styled modernizers. However, since independence in 1948, their numbers dwindles and their social and economic position was threatened. In the sphere of cultural life, they suffered the worst alienation. The Sinhalese used the word ‘lansi’ to denote their marginalized identity and aliens against the native Sinhalese who considered themselves the children of the soil, the *bhumiputrayo*. 
In the collection *A Colonial Inheritance and Other Poems* published in 1985, the speaker’s voice self-consciously seeks out the history of violence and exploitation that marks the advent of the Dutch in Sri Lanka. The poem titles *Epics* offers an example:

“In the garden of the museum
Cannon rests, within glass case
Artefacts of time. Minted coins a braded
Silver larine, golden guilders, starrers,
Ancient swords stained with rust
And blood. Firearms antique,
And in my face- a semblance.” 61

‘Cannon’ and ‘blood stained coins’ symbolize colonial violence and economic exploitation by the colonizers. The poet looks at these artefacts through a glass case, and on the glass surface her reflection is super imposed palimsestically upon the coins which reminds her of her own connection to the colonial history. In post colonial context like Sri Lanka, the museum serves both as a reminder of a glorious pre-colonial past and also destruction and violent bloodshed caused by colonialism. The marginalization of the Burghers is also the outcome of the colonial legacy as in the distorted bearers of colonial legacy. Jean Arsanayagam does not keep silent over the exploitative colonial history of the Dutch Burghers. In *Genealogies*, Jean Arsanayagam says:

“Have I no shame, no guilt
That my inheritance came
with sword and gun?

I am of their love,
Not of their hate,
Perhaps of their lust,
The consummation
Of some brief bliss
That filled the cradle,
Brimmed the grave,
I am their ultimate dream.  

‘The consummation of some brief bliss’ suggests the transient nature of brief physical union which leads to birth and also love, hope and capacity for dreams. The images of ‘miracle’ and ‘cradle’ remind the readers of another birth, resurrection and promise of peace and love, the birth of Christ.

Jean Arsanayagam work seeks a broader identification with the sufferings of women who had been victim of colonialism and patriarchy. In her collection *Shooting the Floricans*, there is a poem titled *Maarden-Huis-The House of Virgins Amsterdam/Kalpitiya*, the poet chronicles the sufferings of Dutch-orphan virgins who were brought to Sri Lanka to be sexual partners of second class Dutch colonizers. The tombstone of Johanna Vander Beck was engraved with an epitaph “died in the childbed at fifteen/Buried with her infant Pieter Jacobus”. It sands forlorn at Kalpitiya in Dutch fort. Her tombstone inspires the narrator to identity with the young Johanna in her alien tropical Kalpitiya’. She had endured the rough passage on a ship full of “The sweat and Blood of men rotting with scurvy”.

She was destined to be sexually exploited and, “To bed with some humble Foot soldier, halbedeer or pikeman.”

The narrative of the poem is mimetic of resurrection and rebirth through pain and suffering. In Arsanayagam’s long poem *Exile Childhood*, the poetic person asks with self irony, “Who brought us anachronisms of that age?
We were part of an Empire’s glory.”
However, the identity of the Dutch Burghers was like that of the stilt workers who walk on a pair of upright poles supporting the feet. It was unnatural and artificially elevated by traditions. Finally, they are shown to disappear in the dark. The poetic persona’s predicament is very much a kin to that of the self alienated colonized individual whom Fanon calls a self that has in some ways ‘selved’ the other and ‘othered’ the self.  

Jean Arsanayagam feels alienated from her own past as she recognizes it as the source of her present alienation from others. It is no longer the image of mythical ‘Kindura’ that symbolises the persona’s desire to find a place in Sri Lanka’s contemporary cultural ecology. The image now articulates the persona’s desire but to be recognized as a migrant and foreign who is also assimilated in a unique manner. Jean Arsanayagam’s connection with Tamil culture through marriage and her experiences of violence post-83 periods creates a complicated relationship of belonging and not belonging with Tamil culture. The Tamils are a more dominant presence in Sri Lanka compared to the Burghers; only next to the Sinhalese and as a Dutch Burgher; she was not so welcomed among the Tamil Hindus even by her mother-in-law and other members of her husband’s family. Cultural collision is depicted in some of her poems very affectively. However, in her later poems as Siramohan observes, the mythologizing the relationship gives meaning to the daughter-in-law’s life who “coming down in the line of women serving women” lives out the myth of the goddess.

According to Siramohan, the relationship of the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law breaks away from their socialized identities as Tamil Hindu and Dutch Burgher Christian and finds a common ground where women serve women mythologizing the images of goddess and devotee. In her poem titled Poet she thinks of herself as a common women, opposed to the institution of society where in she says that within her lies a power of creation known only to herself.
“I watch her
She takes the helm of her garment and
Wipes the sweat off her brow
The thin cotton is damp and stained.

She tells herself,
‘I am common
Anonymous like all others
Here
No one knows that I have magic
in my brain.” 67

The poets like women are anonymous but they have magic in their brains that work miracles. This is the magic of imagination that allows her to express the sufferings of her fellow beings. Her poetry also seeks a space for all those who are marginalized due to exclusionary nationalist politics. As a Diaspora poet in Sri Lanka, Jean Arsanayagam seeks to live and write within Sri Lanka as she writes from within the nation and as one who wishes to belong to it. Unlike some other diasporic poets, she does not claim to be a global citizen moving across the borderless world but she desires for a place locate herself in Sri Lanka, the country where she was born and brought and married. She remains very much a part of the post-colonial Sri Lanka where multiculturalism is not the part of exclusive nationalist rhetoric.

The poem Ruined Gopuram depicts the description of a Hindu temple during the riots. Jean Arsanayagam is more concerned about the intolerant attitude of the people towards other than the act of the destruction of the temple. The riots destroyed not only the temples or religious places but the lives of many people. After the attacks on the temples,

“There are no bells
left for the mourning.”
The poem reveals the inhuman nature of the mob destroying symbols of faith and the lives of the innocent people.

_In the Month of July_ arouses the emotions of pity and terror that depicts the cruelty of the mob. “All evenings the pyres burn” suggests the ceaseless acts of killings of the innocent people. She laments the destruction of the landscape that has changed beyond recognition. War has bulldozed houses along with the lives of the people. The ultimate message that Jean Arsanayagam gives us is that of love, the love for the land she has made her own, the love for her husband whose home is Sri Lanka, and the love for alien Tamil culture towards which she feels attracted. Jean Arsanayagam recaptures childhood very vividly in _Mythologies of Childhood_. Childhood for her is a magical medley of gods, their consorts, myths and legends. In _The Inventory_, she says that her spirit roams like a silver-linked astral body to look on generations of family portraits; “a mother, draped in Varanasi Silk of family heirlooms still paraded. It tells me many stories, this inventory... I had ventured in to that/grove where they had their beginnings. When the wars began everything was destroyed. No one left/nothing is left/only shadowy memories” and as she closes the inventory she feels that possessions were not part of her baggage, no impediments were on her way no territories to guard, and no inherited arrogance. In _The Sutradhar– Narrator of Fragments From Family Sagas_ where she recollects family sagas and her father-in-law.

_A Nice Burgher Girl_ is a story of a personal quest in the land of ‘the others’. The book is a slim volume detailing Jean Arsanayagam’s story of life in pre independence times. Its pages are filled with highly lyrical prose and poetry. It describes sounds, sights, smells, people and places and also her journeys and exploration. It cannot be called a story but an exploitation of the self and community.
Memories, self-exploration and discovery, in heritance these are the corner stone’s of Jean Arsanayagam’s creative output. Her ancestors had come as the servants of the Dutch East India Company. They were also called ‘Free Burghers’ who came to the colonized land for trade and commerce. Some women also follow their men folk. After the British took over the land, many Dutch Burghers left but others opted to remain, adapting the English language and Sri Lanka as their home. As the British rule consolidated, the people of Dutch origin and those from other European countries who had migrated to the colony during the Dutch colonial rule began to a distinct community. Their European ancestry and the use of English language gave them certain advantages in trade, commerce, education, medical and legal professions.

Jean Arsanayagam belongs to this community who never thought that the land which she has come to love as her own would reject her as being an alien. Her connections with the Tamil culture through marriage placed her life in double jeopardy.

In *A Nice Burgher Girl*, Jean Arsanayagam recollects her childhood experience both good and bad. She has opened her life to the readers very candidly making them participate in her personal odyssey. Her keen observation makes all her works a feast of sensuous experiences.

*Women, All women* (2000) is a selection of poems of Jean Arsanayagam from her old collections as well as new ones. The poems focus on the themes related to women searching for her daughter’s beloved among the dead bodies of two hundred men. Here she alludes to the violent conflicts in Sri Lanka. She depicts cruelty, violence, poverty, ageing very poignantly. At times, she recollects her own childhood putting herself at the centre of the poems. There are, then poems that deal with the life of the poet’s marriage away by her
new Tamil family and how she was treated by her domineering tradition bound mother-in-law. She was treated as an outsider by her in-laws but she portrays them with sympathy and tolerance. She even tries to win the love and sympathy of her mother-in-law and succeeds to some extent. She comes to adore the matriarchal culture that treats women with reverence and devotion. There are also poems that describe cultural walls that created alienness and sense of dislocation but these cultural walls; she seems to emphasis, provided security and sense of ‘home’ to these women. In one of her poems, she gives us a portrait of her mother-in-law tragic old age.

There are poems that deal with her encounters with women from different places and communities. She feels that all women share almost the same kind of problems in their routine, non-glamorous life. As a narrator in a poem says:

“I too lead an ordinary life
Wash my own clothes
Heat kettle’s of water
See that rice does not get burnet.”

These poems depict the sense of loss of worlds as well as values which is very often a common lot of all women including the poet herself. Jean Arsanayagam’s work is intensely personal while her fiction is deeply political as it is concerned with her identity in post-colonial country torn by violence and strife. Growing fundamentalism and cultural intolerance pose a question before all so-called civilized societies of the world: Are we really civilized? Jean Arsanayagam is a diasporic poet with a difference. She writes in the red ink of her own blood and that is what makes her poetry deeply disturbing but cathartic as well.
References:
2. Ibid. p.2.
3. Ibid. p.3.
4. Ibid. p. 4.
5. Ibid. p.18.
6. Ibid. p. 20.
7. Ibid. p. 22.
8. Ibid. p. 29.
9. Ibid. p.29.
10. Ibid. p.39.
11. Ibid. p.49.
12. Ibid. p. 43-44.
13.Ibid. p.44.
15.Ibid. p.71.
16.Ibid. p.76.
17. Ibid. p.76.
18.Ibid. p.80.
19.Ibid. p.84.
20. Ibid. p.94.
21. Ibid. p.100.
23.Ibid. p.96.
24. Ibid. p.103.
25. Ibid. p. 105.
26. Ibid. p.110.
27. Ibid. p.112.
32. Ibid. p.24.
33. Ibid. p.31.
34. Ibid. p.31.
35. Ibid. p.34.
36. Ibid. p.35.
37. Ibid. p.36.
38. Ibid. p.37.
39. Ibid. p.46.
40. Ibid. p.56.
42. Ibid. p.17.
43. Ibid.p.20.
44. Ibid.p.22.
45. Ibid.p.27.
46. Ibid.p.29.
47. Ibid.p.33.
48. Ibid.p.37.
49. Ibid.p.39.
50. Ibid.p.42.
51. Ibid.p.63.
52. Ibid.p.69.
54. Ibid.p.31.
57. Ibid. p.7.


62. Ibid. p.7.


64. Ibid. p.10.


Chapter – 5

Conclusion

The study of Diaspora literature is highly relevant in our times as during the last century, there has been mass migration from south Asian countries to the European countries like England, Sweden etc. and particularly to the USA and Canada. In past, under colonial race, there has been migration from India and other South Asian countries to European colonies like Fiji, Guyana, Surinam and Trinidad as indentured labor. Abolition of slavery in European colonies of the Western hemisphere between 1834 and 1873 created the need for a new source of labor. In areas where land was scarce, such as the Caribbean islands, newly freed slaves were forced back to work on plantations. In areas where land was plentiful, such as Guyana, Surinam and Trinidad, former slaves took up independent subsistence farming.

The plantations workers were supplied by the system called indentured labor (girmitia). Natives of India agreed to work for a fixed number of years in one of the colonies for a meager wage, plus room and board. Most of the labor force came from north central and north eastern India and also from south regions. Most of them were Hindus and a few Muslims. In the 1840’s, labors started coming to Trinidad in the Caribbean, Guyana in South Africa, and Mauritius off the coast of Africa. In the 1860’s the laborers began to come to the British colony of Natal in South Africa for whose rights Mahatma Gandhi fought later and invented a new weapon called ‘Satyagraha’. During 1870’s the indentured laborers came to a Dutch colony in Surinam and in 1880’s to Fiji. In 1920, the indenture system was abolished but immigration to colonial areas still continued.

Sri Lanka, which was a British colony, some Tamils migrated there to work on the tea plantations. South Asians went to Malaya, then a British colony to work on rubber plantation. In the last quarter of 19th century, Indian laborers/workers migrated to Myanmar (Burma) to work on the plantations or for other menial jobs. Some South Asians who migrated to South East Africa were not indentured or contract laborers. They had come
to build railways and stayed as low ranking civil servants, shop keepers and professional. Many of such migrants were from Gujarat, Punjab and Goa.

The 20\textsuperscript{th} century saw a new dimension of immigration from South Asian countries to the older destinations and also to new ones – U.S., Canada, the U.K. and European countries and later to Australia and the Middle East too. Immigrations to the US took place in two waves, the first between 1907 to 1924 and the second starting from 1965 to the present day. The first wave consisted mainly of Sikhs from Punjab, and Muslims. By 1900, nearly one million South Asians had migrated to the USA, among them a large percentage of the South Asians in the second wave were educated professionals. South Asian immigration to Canada started at beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The majority of these immigrants were from the Punjab. During 1963 and 1967, the restriction of immigration laws were relaxed and a large number of immigrants came from South Asian countries that included Sikhs from the Punjab, Hindu from Gujarat, Mumbai and Delhi, Muslims from Pakistan and Bangladesh, Christian from Kerala, Parsis from Bombay and Buddhists from Sri Lanka. Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis began to come to the UK in 1950's and 1960's. By mid-80's South Asians composed more than half of non-white populations in the U.K. Some South Asians also settled in Australia and New Zealand. South Asian professionals were also drawn to Austria and Germany. Germany granted political asylum to Tamil refugees who fled Sri Lanka during Ethnic conflicts.

Among the South Asian diaspora, the Indian diaspora constitutes an important part, a unique force in world culture. The origins of the modern Indian diaspora lie mainly in the subjugation of India by the British and its incorporation in the British Empire. Over the million Indians had fought on behalf of the empire in several wars including the Boer war and two World Wars. The dispersal of Indian labor and professionals had been a worldwide phenomenon. Their contribution in trade, commerce, art, culture and scientific advancement had been quite noteworthy. Indian communities across the world maintain some sort of tenuous link with their mother land, what binds them together in their food, culture, festivals, religion and certain
traditions like arranged marriage and so on. These Indian communities have their places of worship; they celebrate their festivals with gaiety and gusto and maintain ties with traditions in spite of economic development and modern, western life-style.

Diaspora literature involves an idea of a homeland, a place from where the displacement occurs and narratives of harsh journeys undertaken for economic, political or other reasons and agonizing sense of alienation in an alien land often resulting in intense nostalgia of home land, family, community, religion and one’s mother tongue. Basically, Diaspora is a community living in exile. The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘Diaspora’ as ‘the voluntary or forcible movement of people from their homelands into new regions’. Under colonialisms, it refers to multifarious movements, involving, the temporary or permanent of people all over the world.

Originally, the term ‘Diaspora’ referred to denote the Jewish communities living outside the Holy land. It was used to designate the dispersal of the Jews and their forced exile to Babylonia. However, at present, the term ‘Diaspora’ applies to all those who live outside their countries for economic, political, and professional or other reasons. It can be summed up as “the voluntary or forcible movement of the people from their homelands into new regions”. Homi Bhabha calls diasporas “gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of foreign cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centers; gathering in the half life, half light of foreign tongues or in the uncanny fluency of author’s language, gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of under development of other world lived restoratively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival, gathering the present”. ¹

The three major characteristics of Diaspora are (i) Dispersion (ii) Homeland orientation and (iii) Boundary maintenance. Cohen lists the following criteria for the Diaspora: (i) Dispersal or scattering (ii) collective trauma (iii) cultural flowering (iv) troubled relationship with the majority (v)
sense of community transcending national frontiers and (vi) promoting a return movement. Cohen also classifies Diasporas’ into five types viz: victim Diaspora, labor Diaspora, trade Diaspora, imperial Diaspora and cultural Diaspora. The diasporic sensibility entails the sense of displacement, dislocation, exile, crisis of identity, nostalgia for homeland, hybridity, acculturation, acceptance and assimilation. This is reflected again and again in their writings. Due to modern technological advancement, travelling abroad has become easier and migration is usually voluntary rather than forced. In this context, the terms Diaspora have lost its original connotation. However, still the sense of yearning for homeland, attachment to traditions, religion and language give birth to Diasporic literature which is primarily concerned with the individual’s or community’s attachment to homeland. A migrant is a peripheral person, a creature on the edge. V.S. Naipaul very poignantly portrays the search of the Diaspora for roots in his novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

“To have lived without even attempting to
Lay claims to one’s portion of the earth;
To have lived and died as one has been born,
Unnecessary and unaccommodated”

Diasporic writings are often finding new angles to enter reality. Hybridity challenges cultural authorization and majoritarianism. One of the most important aspects of diasporic writing is that it interrogates and challenges the authority of history. In post modern era, the dispossessed and the marginal have broken their silence; they have become vocal and their voices have attracted the attention of the people all over the world. Through the diasporic writings, readers also learn the most enduring lessons for living and thinking.

The concept of home is very vital in the writings of the diaspora. There are polarities of attraction and repulsion experienced by the characters towards and from their homeland in their writings. For example, for sugar diapora, home means an end to wandering and putting down the roots while
for the masala diaspora, there is constant mantling and dismantling of the self in makeshift landscapes. Diaspora is often described as Trishanku, the state of dangling self, uncertain identity, having nothing to stick to, and being neither here nor there. Migrants’ writers are often endowed with plural/double insider/outsider syndrome.

The alienated consciousness of the writers using the English language is an important factor for those who unite in English, particularly South Asian writers. Diasporic Indian writers are often criticized for their western stance and criticism of everything native. Another characteristic of Indian diasporic writing in English is the writers’ obsession with history and magic realism. Many Indian English writers like Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh are obsessed with history and its impact on human destiny. Quote often, there is comparison between the native culture and the culture of the country where the writer has settled. Modern South Asian migrants are educated professionals and scholars. In spite of the fact, they are fragmented and dispersed; they form an interlinked community through writing, workshops, seminars, gatherings and internet. They have succeeded harnessing international readership for contemporary diasporic writings. The zone of marriage and family has also undergone radical change. Inter-racial marriages, international social, sexual relations have paved way for thematization of bisexuality, homosexuality and lesbianism in their writings. South Asian diasporic writers constitute a wide spectrum of religious, ethnic, cultural groups. Though most of them are secular in content, this diversity and distinct religious, cultural identity make their writings quite appealing.

In modern times, the concept of Indianness and East-West encounter has also changed considerably. Indian immigrants in different parts of the world differ from each other in their attitudes towards India, Indian religion and culture. Many of them are highly critical of India and Indian traditions. The Research work is confined to five South Asian diasporic women poets, three from India, one from Pakistan and one from Sri Lanka. They all represent diverse and yet somewhat similar diasporic sensibilities. The fact is that the diasporic literature is a broad term. It is quite varied and today, it
is an important part of multicultural literature. It is generally acknowledged that some of the most noteworthy literature produced in the UK and the USA is multicultural. In the countries like the USA, there are writers from Arab American, Asian Americans, Africans, Hispanic and Native American ethnic groups; one of the earliest Arabs immigrant poets to the USA were from Lebanon and Syria that included khalil Gibran, Mikhail Naimy and Amin Rihani. Gibran’s ‘The Prophet’ is profoundly philosophical and spiritually uplifting.

African diaspora literature expresses the pangs of dislocation, displacement, exile and longing for roots. Awanoor, Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo are some of the remarkable writers. There are also remarkable black American writers like Tony Morrison, Alice Walker, August Wilson, Rita Dave, James Baldwin, Longston Hughes, Maya Angelo and Paul Marshall etc.

South Asian diaspora, writers comprise of the writers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka etc. The South Asian diasporic writings have received unprecedented attention of the readers from all over the world mainly through fiction. Poetry has remained comparatively a less traversed area. In the dissertation, five diasporic women poets have been chosen whose poetries express diasporic sensibilities in distinct, individual manner. The South Asian diasporic literature contains certain common characteristics that can briefly be summed up as below:

- The works of these writers call attention to the idea of Empire and interrogate colonial history.
- The struggle for independence the tragic saga of partition of India and Pakistan and traumatic experiences of mass exodus and violence find expression in literatures of Indian and Pakistani diasporic writers frequently.
- In Sri Lankan literature, the ethnic violence between the Sinhalese and the Tamils and sufferings of the victims has found heart rending expression.
• Much of these writings focus on the issue of identity often juxtaposing the individual and the collective, the local and the foreign, private and public.

• Religion and politics form an important focal point of discussion in many diasporic works. It is quite often rewriting of history from altogether a new angle.

• Most of the diasporic writers are secular and tale broad minded humanist view of religion and culture and yet they look back on their past and traditions in a nostalgic way.

• Many diasporic women writers have given emotive expressions to feminist issues in socio-political construction of the nation.

• The act of writing for the diasporic writers is an act of reclaiming their home land, forgotten traditions and quite often the lost language.

• The narratives of these diasporic writers are varied and realistic like their themes and settings. Geographical boundaries stretch across India, Pakistan, England, and USA and so on. The geographical territories are blurred on account of movement of the character’s psyche back and forth.

• Most of the Indian diasporic writers laid from different states, different background, different religion, and have settled in the countries like the USA, England, Canada, Germany and other European countries in different milieu but they meet on the common ground of migrant mind and diasporic destiny.

The major Indian diasporic writers, to name a few prominent are V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Vikram Sheth, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherjee, Uma Parmeshwaran, Meena Alexander, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Apachana and so on. Women writers among the diaspora are quite remarkable who have carved niche for themselves. The major women writers of South Asian diaspora are Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Shashi Deshpande, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Yasmine
Diasporic writers have explored various literary genres of literature, fiction, poetry, memories, fictional narratives, non-fiction narratives etc. Fictions being the most dominant form of literature, practiced by them, the diasporic writers have earned reputation as fiction writers. There are excellent short story-writers among the Indian diaspora writers. In comparison to fiction and prose, diasporic poetry lacks the richness and variety. However, there are some powerful diasporic women poets like Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and others whose poetry exhibits sincerity of feelings and expressions and also poetic maturity.

In the dissertation, the first chapter deals with the term diaspora in general and then briefly explained its types, characteristics and its relationship with other disciplines like sociology, history, political science and so on. The focus of the research is on Diaspora as a literary term. In the end of the first chapter and the entire second chapter, major diasporic writers, including some regional literary writers mainly Gujarati, are discussed as Gujarati is my mother tongue. The dissertation focuses on the study of five women poets Meena Alexander, Sujat Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean Arsanayagam.

Poetry, as everyone has to acknowledge, is the highest, the subtlest form of human utterance. Its language is metaphorical and much of its meaning lies between the lines. It contains layers of meanings that need to be explored with utmost care and understanding. It often abounds in images, symbols, mythological allusions and subtle figures of speech. A careful study with deep sensitivity unfolds its meaning with its layers. Poetry was a special kind of language that transcends the limitations of the language per se. The process of merging, overlapping, intermingling and entwining is the characteristic of poetry. To be a poet or living as a poet itself is to live a sort of alienated life. Therefore a native or non-native poet is an outsider. A
Great Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva said, “All poets are Yids (Jews)” The poets are eternal misfits, even outcasts in the mainstream of cultural establishment.

An immigrant poet is not a poet of exile but rather a poet of alienation or not belonging. Alienation implies nostalgia for past or future and the poetry is always related to “felt time” (past or future). Man is not the master of the language but it is the language that dominates man and man surrenders to its strange contrivances. This ‘strangeness’ is not incidental; it reflects the destiny of a poet who is always ‘a stranger at home”. Poetry is the act of defiance against the incommunicability of being. Joseph Brodsky once wrote that literature in the first place as the translation of a metaphysical truth into any given vernacular, on a subconscious level or on the universal grammar. Poetry is the form of art that remains the most unrevealed.

What Meena Alexander says about a lyric poem is highly relevant:

“It seems to me that lyric poem is a form of extreme silence, which is protected from the world. To make a lyric poem, I have to enter into a dream state. But at the same time, almost by virtue of that disconnect, it becomes a very intensive location to reflect the world.” ³

In our age when science and technology rule the world, many people think that it is irrelevant as Science and spirituality are not antagonistic; poetry and science are not against each other. Poetry is a higher Science. In ancient times, Science was considered a part of philosophy and poetry is a profound philosophy. Sigmund Freud admitted that the unconscious had long been discovered by the poets before he did. William Wordsworth had declared that poetry is the impassioned expression of all sciences. It is the loftiest form of literature and the supreme utterance of mankind. Mathew Arnold predicted the brightest future for poetry. He called it the future religion. True poetry rises above the clamor of the chaos, violence and trivialities of life. The poets are liberators they are free and make others
free. The basic concern of poets is man because man is the Supreme Being among all creatures.

The study of poetry is chosen because it is observed generally that poetry needs to be given its rightful place in our research and studies. As poetry is open to multiple meanings, it is an interesting job to study and analyze poetry and my research work has enlightening task. In the dissertation, I undertook the study of five diaspora women poets: Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean Arsanayagam. All these women poets belong to South Asian region: Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are Indians who have settled abroad. Meena Alexander and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have lived in the USA while Sujata Bhatt lives in Germany. All of them have travelled widely across Europe and USA. Meena Alexander belongs to Kerala, Sujata Bhatt is from Gujarat and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni hails from Bengal. Moniza Alvi is born in Pakistan but she has lived in England since she was only a few months old. Jean Arsanayagam is a unique case of a diaspora. She is a Dutch Burgher women poet married to a Tamil. She has undergone the most agonizing experience of being alienated and exiled.

These women poets are called ‘Cassandra in Exile’ in the title of the dissertation, because like Cassandra, they are condemned to speak out but often not listened to or believed. The myth of Cassandra is quite well-known in Greek literature. It is one of the saddest tales of ancient classical literature. Cassandra was the princess of Troy; the daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba. She was so charming that gods and mortals both were charmed by her beauty. Apollo, the Sun God lusted after her and to win her, promised to bestow upon her the gift of prophecy. She received the gift but refused to give herself to Apollo. Furious at her refusal, Apollo decided to punish her. He could not take back the gift from her but altered it. He leveled a curse upon her that she would be able to see the future but no one would believe her when she predicted. On the contrary, they would call her a liar. The cruelty lay in the fact that she could foresee the future but no one believed her when she warned them of impending disasters. Even her father
pronounced her insane and she was locked inside her chamber. Cassandra predicted the fall of Troy at the hands of Greeks and also warned her people about the Trojan horse in which the Greeks hid themselves to enter the city of Troy.

After the fall of Troy, Cassandra accompanied Agamemnon as his concubine. Upon their return, Agamemnon’s wife Clytemnestra killed both her husband and Cassandra. Cassandra foresaw her own death at the hands of Clytemnestra but could not stop it. To my mind, Cassandra represents the fate of women in patriarchal society. She also symbolizes the impassioned outbursts by the woman who is unable to bear the burden and agony of her gift of prophetic speech. Poetic speech and prophetic speech are synonymous. Cassandra’s knowledge is apocalyptic and poetry afflicts her settings her off from other people. This suggests that poetry from its unknown hidden source creates speech which profoundly ‘other’ or ‘opposed’ to the accepted values and notions of the society. Cassandra thus symbolizes the denigration of the hierarchy of traditional authority and her role is to create the poem as prophecy. The society tries to paralyze its female poets who through the intensity of their language create songs like screams. Cassandra’s screams are the screams of a woman and poet who can see impending tragedy and try to warn humanity but the tragic irony is that no one needs them. In fact, all poets are destined to be Cassandras whether they are men or women. Ved Vyas, the author of the Mahabharata bemoaned the fate of poet when he said that he had been crying out loudly raising his hands but people did not listen to him.

The five women poets discussed the dissertation are prophetic in the sense that they cry out against the evils of terrorism, racialism, war, ethnic violence, egotism and patriarchal hegemony. Like Cassandra, they say ‘no’ to easy complacence of our age. They speak out fearlessly and unabashedly. These diasporic women poets have been displaced from their Troy, their homeland and undergo the agonies of exile and the loss of their mother tongue. Like Cassandra, they denigrate the hierarchy of traditional authority, the stereotype values, political and cultural subordination. These
diasporic women oppose false cultural pretensions of their own countries as well as the countries of their domicile. Like Cassandra, they represent women and poets who voice the universal and eternal sufferings of the suppressed, the alienated, the displaced and the marginalized. I would reiterate that in reality, all poets are Cassandra’s but these five diasporic women poets represents Cassandra more as they are women; they are exiled from their home lands and they are poets who like all poets born to speak out against the evils of their contemporary society.

Meena Alexander (1951-) is a genuine diasporic voice that expresses her own lived diasporic experiences in her poetry, uprooting and exile, migrant memories, displacement and search for identity in an alien land. Meena Alexander was christened Mary Elizabeth but she officially changed her name to Meena when she was fifteen. By changing name, she felt that she stripped free of the colonial burden. This very act of changing the name indicates her independent, rebellious spirit. Meena went to Sudan with her parents where her father worked with the Sudanese Government. She spent her childhood years and the days of adolescence between five to eighteen there. From Khartoum University, she moved to England where she got her doctorate from Nottingham University. She returned to India, worked in CIEFL Hyderabad where she met David Lelyveld whom she married and moved to New York. She has lived in New York with her husband and her children- a son and a daughter. Her husband is a Jewish scholar of the history of India and South Asia.

Most of her writings explore the theme of migrancy, displacement, exile, multiple identities and allegiances. These themes appear in her early works *The Birds Bright Wings* (1976), *Without Place* (1978) and *Stone Roots* (1980). These themes continue to reappear in her subsequent works also. As the titles of many of her books suggest, her major preoccupation is the search for roots through evocation of local landscapes, events, family members and family events.

In her later collections, she deals with the issues of defining a strong female self especially through matrilineal memories. Her grandfather Ilya, her grandmother and their house in Tiruvilla dominate her memories. Ilya was an intellectual, social worker quite close to E.M.S. Nambudripad, the well known political leader of Kerala. Her grandmother Kunju was a very powerful woman who adored Gandhian values. She worked for women’s liberations through education. Meena Alexander reminisces about her.

“I imaged her: a sensitive, cultural woman; A woman who had a tradition, and a history- precisely what I lacked; a woman who had lived to witness the birth pangs of a nation”.  

Meena Alexander expresses her sorrow and sense of emptiness at being a woman without a tradition and history on account of her immigrant life.

Meena Alexander’s poems abound in personal memories of her childhood, her grandparents, their house in Tiruvella and the landscapes of Kerala. Her memoir throws an ample light on her mental makeup and shaping of her sensibilities. It helps the readers in understanding her poetry better, which are marked by the sense of loss, the pangs of exile, and dislocation. *A House of a Thousand Doors* (1988) is a collection of poetry mixed with imaginary letters to her grandmother and mother and short lyrical prose pieces.

Meena Alexander’s poetry is intensely personal as well as political. In her poem *Art of Pariahs* from *River and Bridge* (1996) she deals with issue of racial tension in the USA.
“Back in the kitchen stove
Draupadi sings:
In my head Beirut still burns

The queen of Nubia, of God’s upper kingdom
The Rani of Jhansi, transfigured, raising her sword
are players too. They have entered with me
Into North America and share these walls.”5

Here she refers to injustice to women and racial discrimination in the USA. She deals with the themes of ethnic intolerance, terrorism, fanaticism and interracial tensions.

(5) Meera Alexander’s poetry is intensely lyrical, poignant and sensual. With a few strokes of a pen, she evokes layers of meaning. As a poet, she is very conscious and confident about the role of poetry. She says:

“In a time of violence, the task of poetry is in some way to reconcile as to our world
And allow us a measure of tenderness and grace with which to exist.” 6

Alexander believes that poetry is a powerful force to tackle global violence. She believes that poetry, particularly a lyric poem is a form of extreme silence protected from the world. She recollects the famous Gujarati poet Umashankar Joshi’s faith in poetry. In a poem Paper Filled with Light, she says that poetry is an illumination. In spite of violence and terror that prevails in the world, one must never lose faith in human goodness and virtues.

(6) Meena Alexander has undergone multiple identities in multiple places as she has been travelling and living in different centuries: India, Sudan, USA and different cities and towns: Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozencheri, Pune, Khartoum, London, New York, Hyderabad, New Delhi, Trivendrum etc. In Fault Lines, she asks herself: Who am I? Where am I? When am I? These are the questions that all diasporic writers need to ask amidst violent
densities of place. In modern times, the worlds overlap and therefore one has to co-exist in fluid diasporic world she says:

“What does it mean to carry one’s house
On one’s back?”

In the USA, Meena Alexander experiences racial discrimination where she has to explain her origin, her occupation all the time. As a poet, she has to be put into a category of Asian-American poet or American poet or South Asian immigrant poet but all these labels are hyphenated and incomplete. She calls herself a woman poet of color, a South Indian woman poet who makes up her lines in English, a post colonial language. She says that Frantz Fanon speaks of the barbed wire that exists in a colonized state. She believes very strongly that zone of occult instability must be expressed in the poetry of diasporic poets. The Asian Americans have to grapple with subtle violence and injustice and the expression of these experiences will help in the process of decolonization.

(7) Meena Alexander says that people call poets “the creatures of that small despised art”. As a poet, she returns to her past memories again and again. She feels that ethnicity demands the recollection of past, homeland and one’s traditions: In India, there are varied patterns of hierarchy, authority and traditions. However, unlike Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, she finds nothing much damaging in them. In fact, to her mind, the post-colonial heritage has subverted many good things that India could boast of. She says that the freedom that America claims to provide to her people is worse than a lie. It damages imagination beyond repair. In America, she came face to face with the subtlest forms of racism and violence. She feels that her ethnicity as an Indian American or Asian American requires her to hold on to past resisting fracturing. This is where poetry helps her to transcend individualism and restore human dignity.

(8) Diasporic women poets face double burden of diasporic destiny. They face hostile racialism and displacements in alien countries and at the same time also suffer at the hands of patriarchal society. In addition to these, women poets also face the borders that their bodies create racial as well as
sexual borders. She was taught by her mother and the environment around her about the limitations imposed on women by their bodies. Arranged marriage was a narrow gate that all Indian women had to enter and learn certain skills to run a household. Meena had heard that girls were molested in public places and quite often they committed suicide to do away with their shameful bodies. Meena Alexander is haunted by these terrible memories. In her poem *Passion* she describes the life of woman who gives birth to another life but for her, there are no bronze, no summoning”. Not even the words of sympathy and love. Meena Alexander does not blame the traditions for the sufferings of women like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, but blames the body of the women. A woman is “smeared with ash from black god’s altar”, and she is “tongue less in rhapsody”.  

(9) Meena Alexander portrays the pain of crossing borders and the ruin of our language and sense of having “no home”. She writes in the poem titled *Muse*.

> “Our language is in ruins  
> Vowels impossibly sharp  
> Broken consonants of bone  
> She has no home.”  

In another poem titled *Muse (2)*, she says that diasporic poets are creatures of Here and There who keep scurrying from one place to another with no fixed home. Words, sentences, maps burn her skin. Meena Alexander has also written poem about the burden of English and illiteracy in one’s own tongue. She realized that colonialism was quite intrinsic to the burden of English in India. She feels robbed of something intimate and intrinsic. In her poem, *Night scene the Garden* she talks of ‘ferocious alphabets of flesh”, and her back against barbed wire”. At the end of the poem, she summons “ferocious alphabets of flesh”.

> “Come, ferocious alphabets of flesh  
> Splinter and raze my page
That out of the dumb
And bleeding part of me,
I claim my heritage." 10

Meena Alexander’s poetry expresses the narrator’s search for identity amidst a world that labels and identifies people by race, color, religion or ethnic group. In a poem *Brown Skin, white Mark?* she describes a free make-over in America to turn herself into “a hyphenated thing” with Paul’s shoes, makeover at Macy’s eye shine and lip shine. In the U.S.A. Asian woman prefer to be of ‘no color’, larks with no sound. Meena Alexander deals with the theme of intolerance, violence and fundamentalism anywhere in the world. *The young of Tiananmen* eulogizes the sacrifices of the young men and women in China to end bloody communion regime. She has written two poems about Safdar Hashmi who was beaten to death on January 1, 1989 while performing a play titled *Hallabol* in support of striking workers. Two days after his death his wife Moloyshree returned to the spot and performed the play. Meera Alexander pays a rich tribute to Safdar, a dedicated Marxist playwright and to his brave wife.

(10) Meena Alexander gives voice to her protest against the tyranny of patriarchy and colonialism. Compulsory acquisition of colonial language splits the subject’s body and her sense of self. In her collection *Illiterate Heart* (2002), she deals with the theme how identities are shaped by languages and how they merge with and inscribe female bodies. However, by using languages and writing poetry on them, she is able to bind body and self into a unified whole. In a poem *An Honest Sentence*, she turns to the Greek myth of Agamemnon and Iphigenia. Iphigenia, the poet and woman emerge as an injured voiceless sacrificial lamb of human history – the female. In Meena Alexander’s poetry, woman is brought back to life again and again.

(11) The events of 9/11 and the aftermath made indelible impact on the minds of the Immigrants in the USA. Indians, Pakistani’s and South Asians were targeted and taken as terrorists. It was a hellish experience for many Asian diaspora. Even Meena was cautioned by a friend that she could be
taken for an Arab. In her collection *Raw Silk* (2004), the three poems titled *Aftermath*, *Invisible City* and *Pit fire* deal with the trauma after 9/11. There are also poems that deal ethnic violence in Gujarat in September 2002. The collection is an attempt to negotiate a dual trauma both for the poet herself and her subjects. These experiences of violence, war and terrorism were a palimpsest, as she had heard of the violence of partition from her grandparents and parents. Then she had witnessed the genocides civil war in Sudan where she had spent her adolescence period. Later, she had witnessed emergency, the assassination Mrs. Indira Gandhi and massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984, terrorist attacks on Twin towers and Hindu-Muslim riot in Gujarat. In *The Pit fire*, she proclaims:

“In altered light I hear a bird cry
by the pit, for of metal, strut of death.”11

(12) Meena Alexander is a great admirer of Gandhiji and Gandhian values. The title poem *Raw Silk* refers to bonfire ordained by Mahatma Gandhi and in a poem *Rumors for an Immigrant*. She describes Gandhi in Central Park with “Smoke in his palms, raising his charkha, fluttering out of his dhoti”. The rumor is soon afloat that

“There is no homeland anymore
All nations are abolished, a young man cries.” 12

*Petro Glyph* is based on Kant’s notion of geography where all borders are erased. It is a long poem in eight parts that diffuses the diasporic tension by saying:

‘Home is where I go, they let me in’13

She says that art of fire and rain, a new word with unity and brotherhood would emerge. Poets are always the torch bearers of love and peace and Meena Alexander also gives out the final message of love, brotherhood, humanity and peace.
(13) Meena Alexander’s poetry exhibits intense diasporic sensibility as she calls other places ‘Fragile places’ and she returns to her homeland through nostalgia and memory again and again. Her poetry also exhibits a strong link with matrilineage. There is also a feminist thrust in some of her poems. The narrator in the poem Blood Line speaks about continuity and change, the old generation and the new generation and how the narrator acts as a bridge. She had dedicated the poem to her daughter Swati Mariam and traces three generation of women.

“She is my mother’s
Mother who cries in me
My line of blood
Our perpetuity”

(14) Gender, religion and racial discrimination are the forces that have created wars and violence. It is usually men who have perpetrated wars and violence. Women have acted as the guardians of lineage transcending race, gender, caste and religion. Despite soul-crushing patriarchy and subjugation, women have never given up hope for love, faith, harmony and happiness. In despair, the poet must think that “the point is to live” and the very act of writing is intrinsic to the act of living. Meena Alexander calls poetry “the music of survival”. She says that a woman has to cross several borders, body being the first and when the crust of self hardens, poetry comes into existence. Migrant as memories have given birth to her poetry which permits a dwelling at the edge of the world.

Meena Alexander is a woman poet with intensely confessional, self analytical tone. She is utterly sensitive to violence, exploitation and dehumanization and cries out against them with Cassandra-like scream. There is a sad undercurrent in her poetry but also an optimistic note for future without war and violence. She is genuine diasporic poet as she experiences the crisis of identity and alienation in alien lands and returns to her husband, her roots through nostalgia and memories.
Sujata Bhatt, like Meera Alexander, is a remarkable diasporic poet who lived in India, the USA and Europe. She was born in Ahmedabad in 1956 and graduated from the writer’s workshop, University of IOWA. At present, she lives with her husband and a daughter in Germany. She has worked in the USA and Canada. She was a visiting writer at the University of Victoria, British Columbia.

The remarkable characteristics of her poetry as follows:

(1) Her poetry exhibits her contemporarity through her writing about time, culture and history and their impact on her identity. Like all diasporic poets, she too feels the pain of displacement but she does not exhibit it openly. A sense of continuity in terms of her relationship with home pervades through her poetry. Though she is away from home, she feels that she carries it with her all the time. Though her concerns are global, she shuttles back to local, native experiences. To her Home is not a mere geographical entity’ it is the part and parcel of her inner being. She says:

“But I never left home
I carried it away
with me here in my darkness
in myself.”

Home remains central to her consciousness. When she writes about the Hindu-Sikh riots in Delhi, she remembers how she used to play with a Sikh boy in her childhood. She recalls the people, family members, places and fun and festivals of India and Gujarat in particular. She often refers to legends, anecdotes and family rituals that have been stored in her memory.

(2) For Sujata Bhatt, history is a broken narrative that entails displacement, dislocation and alienation. In her poem *History is a Broken Narrative*, she says:

“History is broken narrative
Pick a story and see where
It will lead you
You take your language where you get it
Or do you
Get your language where you take it?"

At the end of her poem, she frames an equation between history’s broken narrative and the narrative of the diasporic self. She says that a diasporic self makes a language when he/she changes it.

(3) Sujata Bhatt evokes images of home and the country through birds, animals an insect like peacock, lizard, monkeys, crocodile etc. She is fascinated by the monkey in particular who represents not just an animal but Lord Hanuman, the monkey god. When a monkey child and human child stare at each other, innocence stares at innocence, and there is purity, clarity and transparency in this stare. Neither the human child nor the monkey child knows fear. For a human child, the word is the thing itself but for a monkey child, a thing is a thing without a name. The poem *Stare* achieves a philosophical dimension children treat monkeys in a friend manner for whom trees are barren without them. The memories of childhood days in Ahmedabad (Maninagar) give her a sense of being at home whenever she goes.

Sujata Bhatt also revokes the past and the sense of home recalling personalities like Swami Anand, Nanabhai Bhatt, Deviben Pathak and her grandmother. She also refers to ancient Indian mythological figures like lord Hanuman, Goddess Kalika, Nachiketa and so on. The diasporic writers’ sense of identity is ascertained and strengthened through the images of past and history of his/her country.

(4) A Sujat Bhatt poem *A Memory from Marathi, Honey moon* and *My Mother’s Way of Wearing a Sari* expresses her preoccupation with her childhood. The identity of a diaspora is constantly in flux, changing colors always slipping out one’s grasp and yet refusing to go away. Sujata’s multicultural perspectives on language, literature, art and culture arise from her own multicultural experiences. Born in Gujarat, her mother tongue is Gujarati, studied in England and USA, worked in Canada and USA and now lives in Germany; it is natural that she has a multicultural upbringing and exposure. She is acquainted with various form of arts-painting, sculpture,
music and literature etc. Her poetry is often deeply meditative and philosophical. Her poetry is often deals with Indian landscape and moves towards Europe and America but India remains in her memory as fresh as ever, providing to her the sense of home in alien lands.

(5) In many of her poems, language or languages pose a major concern. She spoke Gujarati, and then she studied at Pune where she learnt Marathi and Hindi but soon English came to her replacing the languages of her country and her people. She refers to the colonial nature of language when she says:

“Which language has not been the oppressor’s
Tongue?
Which language
truly meant to murder someone?

However the very language of the oppressor becomes the language of the oppressed. In history, there have been examples where the language of the colonizer becomes the language of liberation from the tyranny of the colonizer for the colonized. The example of English in India can be cited to illustrate the point.

Her poem *Search for My Tongue* is a fine example of a diasporic sensibility that undergoes pain and conflict when one has to lay aside one’s mother tongue and use a foreign language. She asks:

“I ask you what you would do
If you had two tongues in your mouth,
And lost the first one, the mother tongue
And could not really know the other,
the foreign tongue.”  

The poem expresses the fear that she was losing her identity as a Gujarati speaking Indian. She feels that she was being Americanized and her mother tongue would not and die in her mouth. Then she dreams that her mother tongue reasserts itself as her first language. The language of
her hopes and dreams remains Gujarati. The poet is proud of the fact that her cultural identity has not been lost as she feared. She feels reconciled when she realizes that one’s mother tongue would blossom out of one’s mouth anytime pushing other language aside. The initial fear of losing the language is finally replaced by the confident reassertion of the mother tongue strengthening the identity of the poet. This poem is an assertion that the diaspora need not fear the loss of their mother tongue.

(6) In Sujata Bhatt’s poetry, we find intense longing, nostalgia and lust for life. *The Dream* is a poem about childhood memory. Her father tells her

“Don’t resist
You must accept it
There is no point
In fighting with the snake” 16

Snake symbolizes eros, desire, longing, fear or uncertainty. As a diasporic poem, it tells the readers that in a multicultural world, it is unnecessary to fight with the colorful otherness. It has to be accepted as a fact. The title poem *Augatora* suggests an eye-gate, a hole for eye to measure the sun and light. As a diasporic poem, it cautions that one must not lose one’s identity. Child and house symbolize one’s identity. She says:

“Keep an eye on the house
Keep an eye on the child
Don’t let the child fall out of the window
Don’t throw your house out of the window.” 17

(7) Sujata Bhatt refers to international political leaders and events in her poems. She refers to Partition, pope, Tito, the WHO, the earthquake, Jerusalem, Red army and so on. *Partition* describes the horrible experience of partition of India in 1947 by the poet’s mother who was nineteen years old then; she could hear the cries of people stranded at Ahmedabad railway station. Her father’s sister went to the railway station with food and water for those stranded people. The poet recalls that she stood in the garden listening to those cries of pain and fear. The poet’s mother tells her that she
wished that she had gone with her aunt. The poet in this poem when Indian independence turned fifty year old recalls her mother's remorse and guilt at the lack of courage. The poet's mother also remarks that it was cruel that a man who knew nothing about the history of the country divided India. Sujata Bhatt refers to historical events not in larger context but in the context of her personal memory.

(8) Sujata Bhatt is not a fiery, staunch feminist like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. However, in some of the poems, she deals with the sufferings of women in patriarchal set up of society. *Voice of the Unwanted Girl* is moving poem about a girl who had been done away with before her birth. The dead girl addresses her mother and asks her to look for her in the place where she had sent her, the place unspeakable and indescribable. *Kalika* is a poem that deals with the theme of loss because of the death of the protagonist's mother and the continuity of matrilineage through mother's nurturance.

(9) Sujata Bhatt as diasporic poet stands for assimilation and acceptance. She thinks that human history is a broken narrative with phases of fragmentation, assimilation and renewal. Her diasporic entity is marked by tolerance, acceptance of multicultarism, assimilation and reconciliation. 'Multicultural Poem' is a manifesto of multiculturism and multicultural poetry. Multicultural poem cannot be tamed; it cannot be anyone's pet. It has to be read at the border. It escapes understanding. Inclusiveness and assimilation is the intrinsic elements of multiculturism.

(10) Sujata Bhatt is the granddaughter of Shri Nanabhai Bhatt, an eminent Gandhian educationist who set up Lok Bharati, Sanosara near Bhavnagar. Nanabhai was a freedom fighter, social worker and educationist who advocated Gandhian model of education viz rural-based education focusing on cultivation of head, heart and hands (three H's). Sujata remembers Nanabhai's commitment to eradication of untouchability and how her grandmother, an orthodox woman changed her mind about untouchability when Nanabhai decided to sleep in the garden. She gave up her deeply ingrained views regarding pollution through touch for the sake of her husband. The poet says that she has inherited her grandmother's crescent eyebrows and impatience to understand.
Sujata also recalls Nanabhai in Prison in 1942-43 reading Tennyson, his favorite poet. She wonders which lines of Tennyson comforted him in that dark cell. Some of the poems of Sujata Bhatt express her admiration and adulation for her grandmother, grandfather and mother.

(11) In many of her poems, Sujata Bhatt refers to Indian mythology, like that of Ganesha or Hanuman. In her poem *What happened to the Elephant* refers to the famous mythological tale of Ganesha whose human head Shiva chopped off and replaced it with an elephant head. *A Different Way to Dance* describes a drive south of Boston on a hot June night when her mother saw an elephant in a truck. The follow the truck as if they were following Lord Ganesha himself. The poet imagines Parvati, Ganesha’s mother dreaming of her son’s greenish brown eyes, small nose, and curly hair and so on. Sujata says that the elephant head of Ganesha still cherish the memories of the forest life. She evokes a fine sensuous picture with the images that appear to senses of touch, hearing, smell, sight and so on. Her use of Indian myth strengthens her diasporic stance. Sujata looks at these myths raising highly sensitive and intellectual inquiries. For Sujata, tails of monkeys suggest glorious question. She mixes history, mythology and politics in a very poignant manner.

(12) As a diasporic poet, Sujata always insists on embracing universalism and inclusiveness. Her poem *Distances* expresses her diasporic and multicultural sentiment suggesting that the whole world is one, the word beyond borders and walls. While swimming in the Atlantic Ocean at Conil, she feels that all places are closer to her. She can touch Africa, America and other countries through the ways simultaneously and all places slide through her fingers “with the frothy, breaking ways with salty water”. Out of the ocean, in land; all is separate and distant where man-made borders come into existence. It is not the land but the ocean that represents true multicultural world.

(13) Sujata Bhatt’s poetry exhibits her wider perspectives and empathy across cultures. She has deep understanding of painting, sculpture and literature of other countries. *A Color for Solitude* (2002) shows her profound
understanding of the painter’s inner and outer world. Sujata recaptures the beauty of German landscapes, weather and the music of other languages. The poems in *A Color for Solitude* explores into Paul Modersohn Becker’s (1876-1907) beautiful and deeply sensitive paintings. She died at a very young age after giving birth to a daughter. She left behind her remarkable body of paintings that made her earn the place as one of the greatest modern painters of her time. She was a friend of Rilke, the famous German poet and his wife Clara, a reputed sculptor.

Sujata differs from other diasporic poets under this study in that she is sensitive are critic with an eye of a scientist. Her poetry has instinctive sophistication that confronts the contradiction in the world of Science and mythology. She appreciates modern German poetry, paintings and sculpture, besides other European arts. She is sensitive, romantic and sometimes erotic poet with scientific attitude, wry, wise and searching questioning stance. Her poetry is motivated by the sense of questioning, analysis and shifting attitude towards the process of immigrant life and history. Despite her longing and love for India, she is well aware of its poverty, squalor and superstitions. However, she is not critical and sardonic as analytical and objective in her attitude and treatment of evils that India is infested with. She is also an admirer of strength and endeavor of Indian people, women in particular.

(14) Mother and motherhood emerge as the key thematic issues for diaspora in search of their identity. An identification with Indian matrilineal practices-nurturing, devotion and sacrifice sure psychological function for diasporic women writers for the purpose of rooting in their country. An Indian woman always believes that it is motherhood that confers upon her a purpose and identity. In *Brunizem* Sujata Bhatt speak of women sources of narrativisation, knowledge and creators of myths. The women personas in Sujata Bhatt’s poetry is strong willed independent and intelligent who question male-centered world. Location is often synonymous with mother centeredness. In a poem *Garlic of Truth*, the kitchen is shown as the world of women where ingredients like mustard and garlic are used as motherly
medicines. Her mother who put garlic all into her ears gave her ‘dreamy truth’ and truthful dreams’.

Though Sujata Bhatt never claims to be a crusader for women’s rights, she believes that a new woman is an agent of new social reality.

“The tall woman walks alone
Deeper into the woods
Among a crowd of trees
She finds her place
And looks at the moon
As if it were her little sister
Finally come home.”

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, has been acclaimed as a fiction writer but she had started her literary career as a poet earlier and won several prizes for poetry. She was born in Calcutta and moved to the USA where she got her Ph.D in English. She has been deeply involved in issues involving women. She heads an NGO called MAITRI that provides counseling and shelter to battered women. Her major works are: Black Candle, Leaving Yuba City, The Reason for Masturtiums (collection of poems) and works of fiction that include: Arranged Marriage (short stories) The Mistress of Spices, Sister of my Heart, The Vine of Desire, Queen of Dreams, The Palace of Illusions. She is a bold feminist who fights against victimization of women. Black Candle as a collection of poem chronicling the searched lives of women particularly an India.

The characteristics of her works as a diasporic poet are as follows:
(1) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni that as a diasporic poet, she enjoys certain amount of freedom which she would not have been able to enjoy, had she lived in India. She feels that her coming to the USA gave her the distance she needed to look back on her culture objectively to pick out what she valued and what she did not agree with. One of these was the double standards in effect in many areas for women. She also saw that many
Indian women around her were still caught in the old value system that a man has a power and precedence over them. She came across several women in the USA belonging to South Asia during 1989-90 who were victims of abuse.

They were doubly victimized by the fact that they were unfamiliar with the workings of American Society and had no one to turn to. They were uncomfortable with the idea of taking family problems to strangers—whites especially. This made them more vulnerable. Chitra started a group called MAITRI that started helping women in distress. Her poetry exhibits her staunch feminist stance in most of her works.

(2) *Black Candle* is a collection of poems about women in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The book is traversed by women in Pardah, women married against their wishes in arranged marriage, childless women suffering at the hands of her husband and in-laws, outcast widows, women whose fetuses are aborted, women burnt for dowries, women beaten by husbands, Muslim women whose husbands marry second wives, Hindu women burnt at their husbands’ funeral pyres, living goddesses forced to live secluded, virgin lives. Divakaruni exposes the oppression to which patriarchal hegemony subjects them.

(3) In Divakaruni’s poetry, frequently innocent looking exterior landscapes turns ominous and dreadful. Seemingly innocent and disparate landscapes like the monsoon in fields of Bengal, the ocean beaches of Maui, a mother’s kitchen in the US, heady fragrance of Indian cooking or a haunting train journey transforms the known into the unknown and the reader is drawn into the inner landscape of South Asian women.

(4) Chitra’s voice is unique different and quite out spoken among all these diasporic women poets. She brings into her poems a wider variety of experiences, bicultural perspectives and a depth of feelings and perception which make the world of South Asian women accessible to readers in a highly poignant manner.

(5) Chitra’s poetry reflects the depth and complexities of the contradictory world of the immigrant women. She portrays joys, the customs, the rituals of
women’s lives in South Asia, the stuff of which women’s lives are made up of, and above the sufferings visited upon them by patriarchal dominance. Chitra’s voice is so genuine and poignant that her poetry is immediately recognizable by all women. Divakaruni is highly sensuous, pictorial and poignant. It is unabashedly human, feminist and women-centered.

(6) Divakaruni’s poetry bears a witness to the conditions of women and also to the conditions of the world. The world that she depicts is rich in sounds, colors, scents with fabrics, spices, flowers and water. It is the world that afflicts rather than it exhilarates.

(7) Divakaruni is particularly interested in how different form of art influence and inspire each other. There are a series of poems based on paintings of Francesco Clemente, photographs of Raghubir Singh and Indian films. Like her other poems, these also focus on experiences of women and their struggle to find identities for themselves. Her poems have the magic and universal appeal. As a diasporic poet, her concern is primarily with women in South Asian women. From her experiences of the USA and American way of life, she feels that women in the USA and the west have certain advantages over the South Asian women in general.

(8) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in *Leaving Yuba City* narrates the emotional trauma of the first immigrant formers who came from Punjab to Yuba City in 1910. Immigrant restrictions prevented their wives and families from joining their men. They had to live unnatural lives with unquenched longing for their husbands and their husbands yearning to be united with them. *Brides of Yuba City* empathies with the cultural shock faced by the innocent women. They had to undertake a long arduous journey to the USA in a ship travelling for the whole blurred month with the acrid smell of vomit. Many of them had never seen their husbands as they were married to their photographs. Chitra writes the tragic fate of sixteen year old Harvinder married to a man of 52. The narrator says:

“He is fifty-two
She sixteen, tonight like us all-
She will open her legs to him.”

18
Chitra Banerjee’s focus in this collection is on narrating the neglected lives of women from the perspectives of women. *At the Sati temple, Bikaner* depicts ugly practice of Sati in Rajasthan. Though the practice has been outlawed in the 19th century, it still continues, as in the case of Roop Kanwar in 1987. The Sati temples extol the virtues of the burned wives. In the poem *Leaving Yuba City*, the girl Sushma leaves her home for the USA, snaps ties with her family, state and country for freedom and modern ways of life. She has shed patriarchal prescriptions and imposed taboos but she knows that when she would call them from Las Vegas or Los Angeles, words would come to her, halting but clear in the language of her parents.

(9) Chitra’s poetry is mother-centered and portrays the strength of women of the third generation. The first generation women suffered the bondage imposed by patriarchy but they, through their strategic moves, paved way for their daughters’ freer and happier lives. Banerjee’s poetry also highlights the matrilineal past in which the daughter’s identity takes birth. Mother aids and abets her daughter’s liberation through literacy, creative work like cooking, house-keeping, embroidery, gardening and her endurance and self-confidence.

(10) Chitra Banerjee Divakarunis’ differs from other women poets in this study in her attitude towards homeland. She too, like other diasporic women poets, recalls India, Indian traditions and landscapes but she does see very little good in India and her traditions. She stands for liberation of women from crushing patriarchy that Indian society does not allow while the western society, particularly, the American way of life does. This does not mean that she does not feel nostalgic for homeland but her feminist crusade overshadows the diasporic sense of uprooting and dislocation caused by migration and racial bias. For her, dislocation of woman is routed in the patriarchal system which does not allow woman to shape and mould her individual identity.

Moniza Alvi was born in Lahore in Pakistan in 1954. Her father is from Pakistan and her mother in English. They went back to Pakistan but eventually returned to England when she was a few months old to Hatfield in
Hertfordshire. She never learnt her father’s language and growing up; she felt her origins were invisible.

She was never truly attached to her father’s country, her father’s language or his religion. She even did not feel at home in England. She was not the part of Asian community at all. She felt it odd when she was sometimes labeled as a black writer. She thought that England is a country of mixed races and mixed cultures. However, she always felt that it is important to know from where one comes and what has gone into one’s making.


(1) Many of Moniza Alvi’s poems are autobiographical. The poem *Presents from my Aunts* was one of her earliest poems. The girl in the poem is around thirteen. She has received gifts of clothes and jewellery from her aunts in Pakistan. The clothes seem to stick to her in an uncomfortable way, like a false skin. She is fascinated by the colors and beauty of these clothes and jewellery but at the same time, she feels more comfortable in denim and corduroy. She then contrasts the beautiful clothes and jewellery of India with boring, dull English cardigans from Marks and Spencer. She also tries to remember what it was like for her family to travel to England. Her knowledge of her birth place comes to her only through old photographs and newspaper reports. She could not connect with her birthplace and childhood. Her poems present over riding sense of lack of belongingness and even fragility of one’s relationship with one’s self.

(2) Moniza Alvi’s poetry is also marked by nostalgia and memories of India. In a poem *An Unknown Girl*, she describes her visit to India and the time when she had her hand hennaed by a girl in the market place. She could never forget the wonderful experience and likens it the tattooing to icing on cakes. The henna tattoo is linked with India and its colorful multi-
patterned culture. She says that she waters the country with English rain and covers it with English words. However, she knows that soon it will burst or fall like a meteor. This kind of experience indicates her ‘rootlessness’ as a diasporic poet.

(3) Diaspora from India, Pakistan and other South Asian countries in Britain has their ‘Country at their Shoulders’. They have left their homeland, their birth place behind. Many of them have never visited their homeland but still they feel that it is the part and parcel of their imaginary or real lives.

(4) Moniza Alvi’s poetry has a wider diverse range both in subject, approach and moods that are uneasy or celebratory. Very often, there is a light touch but rich imagery makes her poetry very effective. The poet’s voice is delicate, distinct and memorable. Sometime, there is a philosophical tone as in *I would like to be a Dot in a Painting by Miro*. She says:

“But I’m fine where I am
I’ll never make out what’s going on
Around me, and that's the joy of it." 

She says that she is not a perfect circle and this fact makes her more interesting in the world. Philosophically speaking, the poem can be interpreted as the acceptance of incompleteness and also of detachment. As a diasporic poet, she accepts her root-lessness and absence of anchorage. Not only that, she probably celebrates her non-belonging-ness like a dot in the painting of Miro.

(5) Moniza Alvi in one of her poems refers to growing number of English words, changes in uses of punctuations and so on. Her father had inscribed her name in the middle of his dictionary but the poet says that she dare not do so as she has no courage to say that she owns the language. Moniza Alvi here refers to heterogeneous quality of English and also of her diasporic identity. In modern times because of the English language, the walls of dividing countries are crumbling and borders are expanding day by day.

(6) Recalling one’s country, traditions and rituals strengthen the diasporic sensibility of the diasporic poets. The poems *Indian Cooking, Luckbir',
Presents from my Aunts, in Pakistan, The Country at My Shoulder, The Sari, Map of India, When Jaswinder, Lets Loose her Hair are nostalgic of India and Pakistan. The Indian style of cooking makes her taste the Indian landscape and customs of her father’s country. Luckbir was the poet’s aunt who lived a closed secluded life of a housewife and died young. The Sari symbolizes wider perspectives of Alvi belongs to Pakistan; for her undivided India symbolizes her motherland as she refers to India again and again. India is a vast country from geographical point of view but she says:

“India is manageable-smaller than
My hand, the Mahanadi River
Thinner than my life-line.” 20

As a diaspora, Moniza Alvi answers to those who ask the immigrants to tamper with the roots by saying that they are ready to leave the Earth forever. Then, the offer a kind of umbilical cord to connect the immigrants up to the coldest stars. The immigrants assure them that:

“We’ll stay in our city
opt for decent bread
lean unruly heads
against the walls.”

There is no rebellion or protest but assurance of assimilation, merger and acceptance of new home in her poetry on behalf of the diaspora struggling to survive in alien land. The Bed is a fine poem by Alvi that symbolizes and conceptualizes her philosophy of multiculturalism and all inclusiveness. The poet says that we have traveled many miles to find the bed that can accommodate the entire family and hold the tempests of our dreams. Finally, when we are accustomed to it, river will flow in the middle of the bed where all the horses of the King could drink together.

Souls is a collection of poems by Moniza Alvi that shows her spiritual attitude towards life and the world. In Indian philosophy, the concept of nothingness signifies that it has potential to be filled with or to receive a little more. Alvi says: collect nothing which is not infinitely collectible.
Moniza Alvi describes souls in a variety of ways in highly poetical manner. She says that the worst thing for the souls is forgetting to fly. Souls escape from all kinds of enclosures; they come out of the box however hard we press them. Alvi says that souls play mischief by inhabiting shirts on the line. For souls, not years or days but the second is a great thing as they know the explosive nature of time.

Indian philosophy proclaims that body is a place of inhabitation for the soul. Moniza Alvi calls body a hotel for the soul to stay. The soul is drawn to the body’s holes and windows knowing that one day, it would certainly leave. Souls wonder what we would be like without them. Souls always prefer to swim in the depth of simplicity. Alvi’s poem *This Town* emphasizes the philosophical idea that we often think of a place as our home but in fact, we do not even own our breath. It is a gift given to us by soul.

*Go back to England* compares Pakistan with England where Moniza’s mom took her when Moniza was only a few months old. Moniza’s English mother tried to make Pakistan her home but, after the birth of the child, she left for England. The England, she was translated in to an English girl. (9) The idea of distant place is central to Alvi. Her work as filled with glimpses and echoes of large areas of out of reach experiences. In a poem *For my Daughter* she says that there was another continent in her bones though she could not think of it like that. Her poems have surreal agility, seemingly direct and light but often ominous In *How the stone finds its Voice*, there is a poem that adopts the voice of a husband who speaks about the subtleties and complexities of his wife. The husband in her poem *Aster Escher* bemoans his failure to understand and write about his wife accurately. He says:

“She is not the woman I met
She never was.”

Moniza Alvi’s voice is amazing original in dealing with post 9/11 trauma and what it meant to be a Muslim in the USA and Europe. In her collection
of poems *Europa*, she explores post-traumatic stress disorder and meaning of rape while mining the international politics of east and west through the myth of Europa. The poems in the collection restage Europa’s rape, when the world’s divine ruler, disguised as a bull. Europa symbolizes a Muslim girl whose headscarf in post 9/11 Europa is a divisive badge of an alien culture. Within the myth of Europa, Alvi sets the Middle Eastern echoes of Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine ringing, where peace is hiding in darkness, not wishing to be found. As a poet, she feels that a poet can bear witness to the damage and give voice to it. May be, the poet cannot remove all evils of the world but she can certainly strike at their roots. Moniza Alvi avoided political references in her earlier poetry has come out vigorously in her later collections of poems hitting at the intolerance and superficial humanism of the western countries after 9/11. Like Europa, a woman is the worst sufferer throughout human history.

Jean Arsanayagam is one of the most powerful diasporic poets with a difference. Unlike, the South Asian poets living in the USA, Europe or Canada as immigrants, she is a Dutch Burgher married to a Tamil. She was born in a Burgher family in the hill town of Kandy. The Dutch Burghers are the offspring of intermarriages between Dutch men and women of the indigenous communities a kind of split inheritance. That is the reason why Jean Arsanayagam says, “I have suckled on a breast shaped by the genetics of history”. What makes her a true diaspora is her complete rootlessness and dislocation in Sri Lanka where she went through the terrible experiences of ethnic violence as a minority, both as a Dutch Burgher and the wife of a Tamil man. Arsanayagam’s major poetical works include *Kindura, Apocalypse’ 83, A Colonial Inheritance and other poems, Out of Our Prisons We Emerge*, *Trial by Terror, Reddened Waters Flow Clear, Shooting the Floricans, Women, All women* etc. The following are the characteristics of her poetry.

(1) Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is a major concern of Arsanayagam’s poetry. She has personally experienced insecurity and fear experienced by the
minorities in Sri Lanka. There were attacks on Tamil community by the Sinhalas in the post-independence period. This violence and its consequences are the theme of several of her best poems: for example ‘1958…71…77…81…83’. In other poems she brings out the impact of civil war on the country’s North.

(2) Issues and problems of identity and self-definition are another key theme of Arsanayagam’s poetry. As a member of an English-speaking Burgher minority, a descendant of the Dutch colonizers of the country, Arsanayagam is uneasy and feels marginalized in Sri Lanka. She is unable to arrive at a stable and valid sense of identity. In *A Colonial Inheritance* she says that all that “history’ has given her is “a name I do not want”.

(3) Jean Arsanayagam suffers from the burden of double diaspora. She is a Dutch Burgher, and a wife of a Tamil and a woman in violence torn Sri Lanka. During wars and violence, women are always the worst sufferers. Arsanayagam’s poems and short stories reflect the tragic, ethnic, social and political conflicts of the country. The tragedy lies in the facts that she tries to assimilate into Tamil culture respecting the rituals of her in-laws but her husband’s family never accepted her as own. In her earlier works, she even referred to Buddhist legends, showing her veneration towards Buddhism but the Sihala Buddhists did not recognize her reverence for Buddhism and she was not spared. Thus she could not belong anywhere.

(4) In Arsanayagam’s *Kindura*, the title poem is suggestive of hybridity as the bird Kindura is half human, half bird. Neither avian nor human, both avian and human – the Kindura appears self-complete in its hybridity and its profile imperturbable. However, her hybridity achieves unsettling dimension as its outward calm in re-signified as immobility. The doubleness of the Kindura – its capacity for dynamic action and arrested flight symbolizes the poet’s self identity as a woman and poet. It signifies submerged and unfulfilled, unrealized personality.

(5) There is different manifestation and ambivalence in the treatment of Buddhist mythology in Jean Arsanayagam’s works. Her fascinations for Buddhism waned as anti-Tamil racial violence broke out in Sri Lanka, of which she too was an unwitting victim. At first she was an onlooker, a
witness but once she was in it, she realized that history has a meaning. In *Apocalypse 83* she portrays the accounts of violence highlighting its futility but in her later poetry, she dwells on the theme of identity that arose from the traumatic experience of violence in 1983. Thus 1983 was a turning point in her literary career that marked a nose of urgency and political awareness in her post 83 writings. The sense of mythic calm of *Kindura* is gone and is replaced by hardened hybrid consciousness aware of constant threat by the majority community.

(6) As a sensitive poet, Jean Arsanayagam re examines her own colonial roots as her father belonged to the Dutch community that came to Sri Lanka during the days of colonial rule. She is aware of colonial violence and economic exploitations of the indigenous people. In one of her poems the persona looks at Dutch artifacts through a glass case. Her reflection on the glass surface reminds her of her connection to history. She knows that colonial legacy was one of the reasons for the marginalization of the Burghers. Though the Burghers are thoroughly assimilated in Sri Lankan society, they continue to be seen as the bearers of an oppressive colonial legacy. Arsanayagam therefore, blames no one but the forces of history that generates violence as consequence of economic exploitation or colonial subjugation. She does not shy away from colonialism’s exploitative history. In a poem *Genealogies*, she calls herself a product of “some brief Bliss” hinting at its accidental nature. However, this accidental union begets love, hope and dreams. Her Burgher identity was not acquired by weapons and violence but by the miracle called ‘birth’.

(7) Jean Arsanayagam’s work also seeks a broader identification with the sufferings of women who were victims rather than agents of a patriarchal colonialism. She chronicles the sufferings of Dutch orphan virgins who were brought to Sri Lanka to be sexual partners of second class Dutch colonizers. Many young virgins died in childbirths. Arsanayagam depicts the tragic displacement and deaths of such young virgins. She re-enacts the sufferings of a young woman who has been robbed of her right over her body, her life and her fate.
Jean Arsanayagam says that like all other women, she too is a victim of patriarchal power and initiations of society. But she is different from other as she is a poet. As a poet there lies within her a power for known only to himself.

“No one knows that I have a magic
in my brain”

On ordinary level of life, poets are not different from others. They are anonymous commoners who a magic in their brains. This is the magic of imagination. It is the power of nation that allows her to inform the world of her and follow being’s sufferings. Through this power she creates spaces that go beyond the spaces allocated to them (women) by society. As a diasporic poet, she is doubly burdened being a Dutch Burgher and a woman married to Tamil but at the same time, she feels that she doubly blessed both as a woman and poet.

Like all diasporic poets, memories, self-discovery, nostalgia for childhood and inheritance seeking one’s roots, history of one’s country or community, - these are the stepping stones in Arsanayagam’s journey to uncover her roots and the legacies that define her identity. Her inheritance, drawn from many genealogical strands in the west, forges a unique identity in an island in the east. Her works with poetry and prose abound in rich harvest of memories. She looks at her own life very dispassionately and impersonally.

Arsanayagam’s stylistic range is very broad. Her work *Women all Women* (published by writers’ workshop Calcutta, 2000) contains poems about women. Poverty, ageing and change are the other important themes that she deals with in this collection. Some of these poems describe cultural barriers. The most important aspect of Arsanayagam’s poetry is her stance as an outsider. Her power of observations is very sharp and she paints vivid pictures of women from all strata.
It must be acknowledged that among the five diasporic women poets under the study, Jean Arsanayagam’s is the most authentic voice. She can be termed as a true Cassandra in exile.

She voices not mere personal sufferings but universal sufferings of all who are victims of wars, violence, colonization and patriarchy. She does not claim to be a feminist but her poems and fictional works show how women are victimized in ethno-political conflicts, colonized countries and violence which are in fact the inevitable consequences of patriarchal system.

The common characteristics that bind these diasporic women poets can be summed up as follows:

(1) In the works of all the five diasporic women poets, sense of uprootedness and dislocation is clearly expressed. However, its intensity differs. For example, in Meena Alexander, it is quite dominant and in Arsanayagam’s it is the recurrent theme. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni feels happier abroad. Moniza Alvi stands for acceptance and inclusiveness. Sujata Bhatt feels that she carries home wherever she goes.

(2) Sense of insecurity and alienation in all diasporic poets are palpable as it is the destiny of almost all immigrants. Meena Alexander and Jean Arsanayagam have undergone these experiences in different contexts. After 9/11, Meena Alexander felt insecure and alienated in the USA. Arsanayagam was the worst sufferer during the ethno-political violence in Sri Lanka. Her life was in danger in those days. However, she holds no grudges against anybody.

(3) Nostalgia for homeland, family and traditions of one’s community is a recurrent trait in all diasporic poets. Meena Alexander recalls her maternal grandfather, grandmother and her house in Tiruvella. She also recalls her childhood days, family traditions etc. Sujata Bhatt remembers her mother, grandmother, grandfather and prominent places of Ahmedabad. She refers to animals and birds, mythological characters like Hanuman, Ganesha, Kalika and so on. She recalls rituals and customs also as a part of her
nostalgia. Moniza Alvi is fascinated by the clothes and jewellery from her aunt. She remembers colorful tattoos in India, the Sari and so on. Chitra Banerjee refers to Indian traditions in critical manners. She feels that most of the Indian traditions are anti-woman and aim at suppression and subordination of women.

(4) These diasporic women poets mourn the loss of the language, their mother tongue and their native culture. Foreign language encroaches upon one’s mother tongue. Sujata Bhatt says that one cannot live with two tongues in one’s mouth. However, she is reconciled that her dreams are in her mother tongue and English will never replace Gujarati completely. Meena Alexander also feels robbed of her mother tongue and is sad about the illiteracy in one’s own language. Moniza Alvi also remonstrates that she never knew her father’s language. Chitra Banerjee in a poem Leaving Yuba City says that though Sushma leaves her home for USA, she is bound by common language with her parents whom she has left.

(5) These diasporic women poets experience the sense of exile. However, it differs from poet to poet. Women in exile experience the loss of identity and they search for their identity. At first, it leads to unhappiness, then to eventual healing and regeneration. Sharing of mutual experiences help in healing the pain of exile. All cultures and religions limit the boundaries of women’s lives and segregate them from the rest of society. Education and training of women limit their physical mobility and sexuality. All such experiences create a sense of exile among these poets. Exile can become a positive thing for them. They have no fixed anchorages and enjoy freedom to choose. They continue to nourish old ties with music, literature, food, ceremonies and celebrations etc. in exile. Literary writings also flourish in exile and women in exile stand on their own feet, support themselves and others. The sense of exile among the women poets has given birth to creative upsurge. These five women poets are the product of these exiled states which has compelled them to seek their identity and give expression to their creative urges. For Meena Alexander and Arsanayagam, the exiled state is a catalyst for their creativity.
Diasporic poets, male and women, experience victimization, racial discrimination, intolerant attitude of the majority in one or the other way at one or the other time. Even highly placed South Asians have experienced racial/color discrimination in Europe, the USA or Canada. In a country like Sri Lanka, Arsanayagam’s family underwent violent attacks during ethnic violence. These women poets have come face to face with racialism, patriarchy, colonization, ethnic intolerance and violence. People often fail to notice incidents of intolerance and sufferings of minorities in their own South Asian country but when they face ethnic/racial intolerance abroad, they realize enormity of such incidents in their homelands too. When we read about the attacks on Asians in Australia, we are naturally shocked and angry. However, the incidents of ethnic violence in Gujarat, massacre of Sikhs in Delhi, killings of the Dalits in many parts of Gujarat should sadden us and make our heads bow down in shame. Double standard in our attitude is not only shameful but dangerous.

These five diasporic poets are genuinely concerned about ethnic violence, racialism, patriarchal subjugation and intolerance everywhere. Both Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt have referred to ethnic violence in Gujarat. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni deals with all kinds of injustice, evil practices and Subjugation of women. Her feminist stance is a voice of rebellion against any kind of discrimination against women. Arsanayagam has presented the fatality of violence and wars in her poetry. Moniza Alvi refers to intolerant attitude of the Western countries after 9/11.

These five diasporic women poets write women – centered narratives. They reject the yoke of a gendered feminine, feminine identity and reconstruct a new independent feminine identity in foreign culture. However, they look at motherhood in a different way from the usual western outlook towards motherhood, maternity, birthing and matrilineal relationships. For an Indian woman, motherhood confers upon woman a purpose and distinct identity. Meena Alexander recalls her matrilineal grandparents very fondly who had influenced her attitude towards life and the world distinctly. Sujata Bhatt refers to her grandmother, mother, aunt
and grandfather, recalling particularly the strength of Indian women. Moniza Alvi also remembers her mother, her aunt and even her English grandmother. Arsanayagam recalls her mother-in-law who initially neglected her but later passed on the mythological goddess like power to her. Chitra’s poems are woman centered and bring out the power and strength of third generation women and how the first and the second generations of women strategically strengthened and inspired their daughters to become independent and strong. Birthing metaphors are quite eye-catching in Meena Alexander’s and Sujata Bhatt’s poems. The poem Blood Line is dedicated to ‘Svati Miriam, one year old”. She writes:

“She is my mother’s
Mother who cries in me
My line of blood
Our perpetuity.”

In Alexander’s poetry, there is a frequent reference to women’s bodies, their burden and the fences of barbed wire caused by their vulnerability.

(8) All poets are born prophets who have been warning human beings against the dangers from within and without since time immemorial. Ved Vyasa, the author of Mahabharata said that he proclaimed to the world the dangers of war and intolerance raising his hands but no one heeded him seriously. This is the tragic fate of all poets. These five women poets are called ‘Cassandra’ for their prophetic voice that goes unheeded. All these five women poets have spoken against the evils of patriarchy, colonization, ethnic violence, intolerance, racialism and evil practices and superstitions in South Asian countries. They speak out against the so-called liberalism of the west and also against the age-old evil traditions that crush the spirit of women. They glorify womanhood where in lies the creative source of life, art and culture.

(9) Poetry is a source of strength and tenderness for these poets. Meena Alexander says that in the time of violence, poetry provides us the courage
and tenderness to live. The paramount question is how to live in strife-torn world. The very act of writing is intrinsic to the act a living. Poetry for her is ‘the music of Survival’. Jean Arsanayagam writes that on the surface, she is like all the women but there lies within her “a magic in her Brain”. It is the magic of creativity that can confront the harsh realities of life bravely.

**Relevance of the Research:**

My research is highly relevant in the globalised world today. E.M. Forster in one of his essays wrote that in modern world where peoples of different nations come close to one another due to scientific and technological advancement, of all virtues tolerance is the virtue that needs to be cultivated today. Intolerance leads to ethnic, racial tension resulting in violence and war. Diasporic literature reflects this tension but the ultimate solution lies in the acceptance of the other. South Asian people constitute the largest number of immigrants in the European countries, the USA, Canada and Australia. The Indian diaspora today forms not only the largest diaspora but a unique work force in the world's culture today.

Historically, the origin of modern Indian diaspora lies mainly in the colonial rule in India and the incorporation of India into the British Empire. The Indians were taken to far-flung countries of the Empire as indentured labor in the 19th century. Over two million men fought under the Empire in numerous wars including the two world wars. Indians formed a large chunk of traders in African countries who moved to England or other western countries after these countries were free from the colonial rule. Educated Indians migrated to England, the USA, Canada and Australia for further studies and better prospects. Indians have made their presence felt in all fields-trade, technology, IT, Computer Science, Medicine, space researching, economics, Music, art and literature etc.
These diaspora continue to keep in touch with their mother land, her rituals, traditions, festivals and so on. Hindi films (Bollywood films) and music play role of a unique bonding among all Indian diaspora. The Indian system of arranged marriage furnishes an example of common culture. Indian Kathakars who give religion discourses in the Gita, the Ramayan, and the Bhagvat etc are quite popular in Europe, the USA and Canada among the Indian diaspora. Newspapers published by Indian communities also flourish besides literary journals and magazines. Five diasporic women poets from diverse background are chosen here for the study. The research throws light on the impact of their diasporic sensibilities on their writings. These women poets are the most appropriate examples of women diasporic poets who express personal, diasporic and universal elements. Multiculturism in modern times should be seen as an opportunity for flourishing and flowering rather than as a problem. I reiterate that the solution of all problems regarding diasporic dilemma lies in acceptance of diversity, multiculturism, assimilation and expansion of one’s identity into global one. Nostalgia and memories of homeland are natural human phenomenon which occurs within the country also when one moves from one place to another. It is true that alien culture would often come as a shock but tolerance assimilation, harmony and understanding are the solution of all diasporic problems.

Extension of the Research

My research can be extended into full length study of major diasporic women poets, women fiction writers. While my research work, I felt that regional diasporic literature needs to be studied deeply. Gujarati diaspora writers/poets have also done a considerably remarkable work. The same is true of Punjabi poets and writers and of other regional writers. I would like to pursue post – doctoral research in Gujarati diasporic writings.
Challenges Faced In My Research Work

I enjoyed my research work on diasporic women poets immensely. It was a labor of love and sheer joy. However, I faced certain problems/challenges in finding all poetical works of these women poets. My friends in the USA took great pains and bought, some of the important collections of poetry and sent them to me through international courier services. One of my relatives went on Sri Lanka tour. He also took great pains for finding Jean Arsanayagam’s works. However, internet came to my rescue and I could find major poems of all these five poets. The study of poetry is always difficult. It contains layers and layers of meanings. Images and metaphors have to be unfolded and examined with care and utmost sensitivity. Poetry or literature for that matter exists in context-political, cultural, historical, and even autobiographical and hence they have to be studied with utmost care in the relevant context. Poets are a powerful witness who sees through the incidents of history inclusively. I feel deeply that poetry needs to be studied through research works extensively. Teachers should encourage the students to read and appropriate poetry as it has been assigned the title of ‘mantra’, the purveyor of eternal truth.

In my study I have found that the diapsoric poets are poet first and therefore labeling often harms rather than helps. To put these poets into pigeon holes of diasporic poets would do injustice to them. Their poetry contains elements that are other than diasporic sensibilities. There are elements of eroticism, romance, love for landscapes, love and appreciation of various arts like painting, sculpture, photography, films etc. Like all great poetry, it has elements that have permanent and universal appeal.
References:

4. Ibid. p.15.
9. Ibid. p.23.
12. Ibid. p.38.
13. Ibid. p.97.
17. Ibid. p.16.
20. Ibid. p.37.