Chapter II

Indian Diaspora

The experiences of migrancy and living in diaspora have animated recent postcolonial literature criticism and theory. The slippage between the terms “diaspora,” “migrant,” and “postcolonial” have been frequent and overlapping. The literature produced by diaspora writers, such as Buchi Emecheta, Amitav Ghosh, Hanif kureishi, Bharati Mukherjee Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Caryl Philips and Ben Zephaniah, has proved immensely popular in Western literary criticism. Similarly, in the work of academics such as Homi Bhabha, Avtar Brah, Rey Chow, Carole Boyce Davies, Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall, the new possibilities and problems engendered by the experience of migrancy and diaspora life have been readily explored. These possibilities include creating new ways of thinking about individual and communal identities, critiquing established schools of critical thought, and rethinking the relationship between literature, history and politics.

Diaspora communities are not free from problems. Too often they have been ghettoized and excluded from the feeling that they
belong to the new country, and suffered a lot owing to the mockery on discrimination against their cultural practice.

V.S Naipaul in his memoir “Prologue to an Autobiography” talks about his memorable moment as a child. He grew up in the Caribbean island of Trinidad and came from a family which descended from Indian migrants to the Caribbean. He records an incident which occurred in the summer of 1932, when Indian indentured labourers were promised the passage back to India from Trinidad by the government once their contracts had expired. This had also happened in the previous year, when the S.S.Ganges collected a number of Indian laborers in Trinidad and sailed for India. The ship returned to Trinidad in 1932, collected more immigrant Indians and set off for Calcutta once again. Seven week later the Ganges reached Calcutta. And there, to the terror of the passengers, the Ganges was stormed by hundreds of derelicts, previously repatriated who wanted to be taken back to the other place. India for these people had been a dream of home, a dream of continuity after the illusion of Trinidad. All the India they had found was the area around the Calcutta docks.

Naipaul points out that migration alters how migrants think about their home and host countries. Trinidad has been an illusion for the Indian migrants because it has not lived upto its promises.
When viewed from India, it seemed a place of opportunity and promise, but the experience of the miserable working conditions reveal that it did not live up to this expectation myth. When viewed from the poverty of Trinidad, India can be seen to the migrants a refuge from their miserable conditions (McLeod 209).

Naipaul’s example helps us understand Avtar Brah’s statement that “home” is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin (McLeod 192).

The concept of home performs an important function in one’s lives. It can act as a valuable means of orientation by giving us a sense of one’s place in the world. It tells one where one originated from and to where one belongs to. As an idea it stands for shelter, stability, security and comfort. To be at home is to occupy a location where one is welcome, where one can be with people very much like oneself. But the idea of home for migrants who live far away from the lands of their birth is different.

In all his work Naipaul has written extensively about aspects of post-colonial theory. He has more subjective approach towards the problem of identity crisis. His works delineates the traumas of a tainted and troubled past and the attempts to find a purpose in life, beautifully
analyzing the sense of alienation and the pangs of exile experienced by the characters. He also reveals that turmoils and the desperate situation faced by the feminist characters.

Salman Rushdie’s essay “Imaginary Homelands” best deals with the concept of home. Rushdie was born in 1947 in Bombay, where he spent his childhood. He moved to England as a youngman to attend rugby school and later the Cambridge University, and he eventually settled in London. In his essay, Rushdie reflects upon the process of writing his novel, *Midnight’s Children*, which is set in India and Pakistan, while living in north London. He records that on the wall of his London study was black and white photographs of his childhood home is Bombay. Rushdie reveals that on the wall of his London study was a black- and- white photograph of his childhood home in Bombay.

Rushdie also points out that the reasons which motivated his writing of the novel was an attempt to restore the world of his childhood home, distant in both time and space, to the present. But it proved an impossible taste to return home via the process of writing. In a sense, one leaves home at one time or another in one’s life and feels a sense of loss for doing so. Rushdie argues that the writer who is displaced and even speaks a language different from his mother tongue may
experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for the person by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his existence “elsewhere.” This disjunction between past and present, between here and there, makes home seem to be far-removed in time and space, available for return only through an act of the imagination.

Speaking of Indian migrants, Rushdie writes that one’s physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that one will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that one will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India’s of the mind (McLeod 211). In this formulation, home becomes primarily a mental construct built from the incomplete odds and ends of memory that survive from the past. It exists in a fractured, discontinuous relationship with the present.

So, if one takes these remarks as applicable to other acts of migration, one can argue that the migrant occupies a displaced position. Rushdie remarks that when thinking back to his Bombay childhood, he could recall only fragmentary, partial memories, of small and mundane occurrences. The transformations wrought by the
experience of migrancy make impossible the recovery of a platitudinous sense of home. Reflections of home seize it in pieces only; a sense of displacement always remains.

In migrating from one country to another, migrants inevitably become involved in the process of setting up home in a new land. This can also add to the ways in which the concept of home is disturbed. Migrants tend to arrive in new places with baggage both in the physical sense of possessions or belongings, but also the less tangible matter of beliefs, traditions, customs, behaviours and values. This can have consequences for the ways in which others may make migrants feel at home on arrival in a new place.

Rushdie’s remarks about the Indian writer in Britain inevitably speak of the migrant as an adult who has experienced enough of India as a child to have memories of home to explore in retrospect. Naipaul’s use of the incident of the S.S.Ganges demonstrated an affinity between two generation; Indian migrants to Trinidad and Indian-born Trinidadian. Yet, the descendants of migrants of migrants are not always in the same position.

Hanif Kureishi born in Britain to a Pakistani father and English mother records in “The Rainbow Sign” his experiences as a boy growing up in London, his visit to Pakistan as a young man and some
comparisons between life in both locations as a child. Kureishi admits to having no idea of what the sub-continent was like of, how his numerous uncles, aunts and cousins lived there (McLeod 213).

His relationship with Pakistan is obviously different to his father’s visit to his relations in Karachi as an young adult. He also found it difficult to think of this in terms of home. He admits to have a little identity crisis. His uncles’ anti-British remarks make him feel uncomfortable and strangely patriotic towards Britain, the feelings he had not previously experienced. Conventional ideas of home and belonging depend upon clearly-defined, static notions of being in place, firmly rooted in a community or a particular geographical location.

He addresses the racial and cultural clashes in most of his works. The inspiration for his work has been drawn from his own life’s trials and tribulations as a culturally hybrid individual of two different races and cultures. His stories are about immigrants who were neither victims nor tradition-bound aliens. They’re comprehensible, modern people with an eye to the main chance, no better or worse than the rest of us. He prefers to depict the harsher realities of racism and class divisions. He also returns to one of his recurring themes by addressing homelessness. As the son of an immigrant, Kureishi has
written a great deal on the concept of home, describing the complexities involved in finding a place to belong. He delves into the theme of painful, lonely, and confused world. He justifies his thought in few of his works like *Gabriel’s Gift*, *Something to Tell You*.

Before turning to diasporic women writers, a glance at the remarks of Helene Cixous may be taken:

> If woman has always functioned ‘within’ the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to its opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this ‘within,’ to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; and make it hers. (878)

Apt to this quote stands the three displaced female writers: Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri. A careful analysis of their works through the lens of postcolonial and postmodern feminism reveals a feminine voice trying to subvert the repressions of gender, history, race and culture, and reinventing a new identity free from their double or triple edged marginal status.

Feminism is a complex subject which may be classified into various categories like liberal feminism, Marxist or socialist feminism,
radical feminism, cultural feminism, psychoanalytical feminism, postmodern or poststructuralist feminism, and so on. But the basic aim of the various feminists is to achieve emancipation and equality for women.

The migrant women authors and their characters strive to transcend the prohibitive barriers of race, class, colour or religion to dialogize their desire for reinvention and to voice their otherness. The writings of these three authors are double-voiced or dialogic as they contain not only their own authorial voice, but also the voices of the characters and the collective voice of the migrant women in general, who address the dominant patriarchal or cultural discourse.

The views of the various feminists justify the multicultural, nostalgic and expatriate nature of the culturally marginalized women. The gender-based marginalization implies that such women, reduced to ‘other’ by a patriarchal society, try to recreate their identities in a ‘Third Space’ in which they carve their own niche. Following the increasing trend of globalization, the displaced women feel the need to assimilate by negating the oppositions of race, class, culture or sex.

Bharathi Mukherjee is one of the most widely known immigrant writers of America. She deals with the problems and issues related with the South Asian Women particularly India in her works.
She upholds the cause of women in her works and her basic concern is to delineate the problems of cross cultural conflicts faced by Indian women immigrants.

A close observation of her novels reveals that she has written all the novels with predominantly feminist views. Since Bharathi Mukherjee’s women characters are the victims of immigration, all the critics focus her novels as problems and consequences due to immigration but actually the problems are not because they are immigrants but because the women characters fight for their rights as a woman and then as an individual. Bharathi Mukherjee has tried to create a new relationship between man and woman based on equality, non-oppression, non-exploitation so that the creative potentials of both are maximized as individuals and not gender dichotomies. The male, as a representative of the patriarchal society has, at last, being jerked off the center of woman’s gravitation. The woman is preparing now to be her own gravitational force, beyond the fullness of patriarchy. In her novels like *The Tigers Daughter, Jamine* and *Wife* she portrays the troubles of the feminine society and explains how women became the victims of evil society.

Simone de Beauvoir has made a famous assertion in *The Second Sex* (1981):
One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (295)

It means that birth only generates biological difference between a male and a female, but the assignment of roles to men and women is a social construct. Though the three of the authors write from outside India, their immigrant experiences are quite different and so are their creations. They touch upon various strands of diaspora in their fictions which are influenced by their imaginations as well as experiences.

Feminism has come a long way from being a political to social movement that talks of liberation of women from gender based discrimination, promotion of opportunities and standing on equal level with men to questioning the sacrosanct and has redefined its frontiers. Feminist literary criticism is not to interpret literature in various ways. The point is to change the world (Fisher and Silber 2003). According to EveKosofsky Sedwick, feminist studies specify the angle of inquiry rather than the sex of either its subject or its object (qtd.in Edwards 39).
The intention is to change the way readers understand themselves and conceptualize their surroundings. It is a criticism with a cause, seeking to correct the devaluation of women and transform the institution of literature, criticism and education.

Feminists have been using literature as a medium to suspect and subvert the established ideas so as to create effective belief systems. They argue that through thoughtful assessment of literary texts they bring out the essential oppression that women undergo and the passivity that gets developed because of it. The aim is to seek resource and strategies for dismantling stereotypical images that justify women’s subordination and other forms of social inequality. Prior to feminist criticism, a reader was forced to read as a man, and thereby assimilate the male perspective. The feminists were resistive initially but later on there was an alternative female perspective that demonstrate concealed attitudes to femininity, and effectively promoted the understanding of alternate and subversive motifs. Yet, a very pertinent question still lingers. Is it possible that the feminist critics and academics really make a difference in the way society has been dealing with women? Understanding a literary text from the feminine perspective, identifying the patriarchal tools of oppression and domination, getting to the core of a woman’s basic need as a conscious
and sensible human being are not enough to eradicate the claustrophobia associated with her endangered social space (Chottapadhyay vol.3.2010).

Women will be serving men and be subordinated to men. That a woman is always associated with passivity incapable of being independent and her womb as a handicap to her self-establishment is the idea that became central to feminist literary criticism. De Beauvoir’s crucial distinction between being woman and the society’s construction of a person as a woman challenged the essential imbalance. She rendered marriage as an oppressive and exploitive socio-economic means that function as fetters binding a woman to domesticity and sexual inequality.

Judith Butler rightly observes that gender is an aspect of identity which is gradually acquired (Butler 49). The belief system that operates in a male-oriented society concludes that a woman is happy if her needs are provided and she is protected. Her liberty, the freeness to know more, do more and have more is not considered as fulfillment of her human potential in face of the limited happiness that is given to her by her male partner.

De Beauvoir felt that the kind of life a woman leads offers no liberty at all because it disregards female emancipation and tie a woman to her home where she performs household works that might
not involve any kind of rationalism and does not strengthen her thinking potential (301). Even her act of giving birth is a purely animal way and it does not lend her the status of a creator as her influence on the child is short-lived. No sooner the child starts adapting the phallocentric worldview, the mother is relegated to the background. What remains behind is a sense of self-annihilation and a silent submission to her androcentric cosmology. In such a male dominated social plight, where women in their struggle to survive with their individual identity are facing the storms and thunderbolts, feminist criticism try to highlight the inherent problems of being a woman through the critical analysis of literary texts. It is this way the feminist criticism has to touch upon other aspects such as womanhood and motherhood and upon the various shades of these aspects.

To understand how these key aspects operate in the literary texts of Indian diaspora writers, the idea of Indian diaspora may be elaborated. “Indian diaspora” is a generic term to describe the people who migrated from territories that are currently within the borders of the Republic of India. It also refers to their descendants. The diaspora is currently estimated to number over twenty million composed of NRIs (Indian citizens not residing in India) and PIOs (Persons of Indian Origin who have acquired the citizenship of some other country).
The diaspora covers practically every part of the world. It numbers more than a million each in eleven countries, while as many as twenty-two countries have concentrations of at least a hundred thousand ethnic Indians.

Diaspora is very special to India. Residing in distant lands, its members have succeeded spectacularly in their chosen professions by dint of their single-minded dedication and hard work. What is more, they have retained their emotional, cultural and spiritual links with the country of their origin. This strikes a reciprocal chord in the hearts of people of India.

Indian diaspora today constitutes an important and unique force in the world culture. The origins of the modern Indian diaspora lie mainly in the subjugation of India by the British and its incorporation into the British Empire. Indians were taken over as indentured labour to far-flung parts of the empire in the nineteenth-century, a circumstance to which the modern Indian populations of Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, Surinam, Malaysia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and other places attest in their own peculiar ways. Over two million Indian men fought on behalf of the empire in numerous wars, including the Boer War and the two World Wars, and some remained behind to claim the land on which they had fought as their
own. Finally, in the post-World War II period, the dispersal of Indian labour and professionals has been a nearly world-wide phenomenon. Indians and other South Asians provided the labour that helped in the reconstruction of war-torn Europe, particularly the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and in more recent years the unskilled labour from South Asia has been the main force in the transformation of the physical landscape of much of the Middle East. Meanwhile, in countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia, Indians have made their presence visibly felt in their professions.

In the United States, at least, the Indian community has occupied a place of considerable privilege and many Indians could deflect the moment of recognition that “Indianness” and being American do not always happily coincide. In recent years, with a declining economy on the one hand, and the congregation of Indians in clusters that visibly put them apart on the other hand, Indians have for the first time become the targets of racial attacks. An Indian woman in her native dress with the vermillion dot on her forehead is easily seen as an embodiment of sheer otherness.

Though a common culture has been emphasized in many countries such as the United Kingdom and the North America, the Indian arranged marriage defies the idea of a common culture.
Newspapers published by Indian communities flourish everywhere, and they invariably carry a section with matrimonial advertisements. Though these very advertisements help Indians to locate one another, they pose difficult questions about otherness, both the otherness of Indians in relation to Americans, and the internal otherness of certain Indians in relation to other Indians.

The religious practices of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims in the U.S. and other overseas communities might be assisting in transforming the nature of religious faiths in India itself. Hindus all over the world are showing alarming signs of susceptibility to a resurgent and militant Hinduism; indeed, it is even arguable that they seem to know the meaning of Hinduism better than do Hindus in the motherland. In thinking of Indian diaspora, other questions that come to the fore include: relations between parents and children; race relations between Indians, blacks, and whites; the place of Indian food and music in the preservation of Indian communities; the responsibility of the Indian Government to overseas Indians; and the future prospects of the Indian community in the U.S. (Lal N.pag.web).

The literature of the Indian diaspora constitutes an important part of the burgeoning field of anglophone postcolonial literature. Some of the better-known authors in this archive include
V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, RohintonMistry, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, M.G. Vassanji, Shyam Selvadurai, and Kiran Desai. The growing international visibility of these authors has gone hand in hand with the popularity of postcolonial criticism and theory in academe. Vijay Mishra’s scholarly work on Bollywood cinema, Indian devotional poetry, Indian diasporic literature, and postcolonial theory and criticism has contributed greatly to one’s understanding of this important area of writing (Giri N.pag.web).

These writers of the Indian diaspora have explored the identity crisis, racial and cultural conflicts, ethnicity, sense of belongingness, loneliness and alienation among immigrants. The history of immigration is the history of alienation and its consequences. For every freedom won, a tradition is lost. For every second generation assimilated, a first generation in one way or another spurned. For the gains of goods and services, an identity gets lost, and uncertainty found.

Literature should remain the faithful representation of contemporary society. So, it is the moral duty of the diaspora writers to remain faithful while mixing the facts with fiction in their writings. They would be considered “the flag bearers” of the history of their
time. Majority of the diaspora writers write about their own experiences, the problems that they face while settling on the new land.

Indians may appear to be a homogeneous mass of people, but in reality India is the world's oldest melting pot where the population can be classified and broken down by religion, caste, language and sex. Because of these divisions, ironically, every Indian belongs to a minority group. From the day an Indian is born, he/she has to assimilate, thrive and succeed in this environment. When one goes to the U.S. it is an extension of being able to assimilate and succeed in a different world.

But in India, one possesses the ability to disappear into the masses of the city because one does not look different from those around him. However in North America's white Anglo Saxon environment, one loses that capability and has to prove his worth constantly, especially in places where Indians are a rare commodity. Maintaining ties with India and preserving Indian tradition in America meant a lot to them. The idea of a melting pot is a metaphor that implies all the immigrant cultures are mixed and amalgamated at their own place. Most of the first generation parents have immigrated to
North America to improve their economic status. They look down upon the unbridled individualism of the west and privilege feministic values of their own ethnic culture.

Diaspora is basically an experience of dislocation and re-location. Indian culture is plural and fluid. It is the intrinsic plurality and the built-in tolerance of the Hindu system itself that provides a matrix where embedding is possible. Several migrant communities like the Parsis and Bahai have enriched Indian culture. At the same time, they have assimilated into Indian culture.

Diasporic literature mirrors a double vision of yearning backward and looking forward. The peculiarities found in NRIs have been successfully narrated by diaspora writers. The following are the major issues in real life that are discussed by the diaspora writers.

The children of the immigrants are called "ABCD" - _American Born Confused Desi_ (usually used as an insult). This "inbetweenness" can leave them with uncertainty about their own role in society – neither Indian nor American. As the NRIs may adopt foreign culture, it may be a threat to Indian culture. Identity is lost as they are treated as Indian on the foreign land and as foreigner on their motherland. They used to postpone returning to India every year; this is called “NRI syndrome.” Again, they talk ill about India and Indians. Those who return to India
after some stay abroad have to face public criticism of leaving the land of opportunity without thinking about any adjustment on that land. An immigrant novelist is a teacher who wishes to educate his fellow natives about the actual nature of colonialism. He wishes to inculcate in them, a deference for their indigenous value system. He is the spokesman who tries to de-mystify his natives about the glorified white race and at the same time to suggest to adopt what is best in them such as discipline and cleanliness (Pal 2004).

Regarding the diasporic experience, Adesh Pal observes:

The first generation has strong attachment with the country of their origin. From the second generation onwards ties with the homeland gradually get replaced by those with the adopted country. Food, clothes, language, religion, music, dance, myths, legends, customs of individual community etc. become the markers of identity. These are retained, discarded or adopted differently at different times and places. (Pal 2004)

Physical displacement from the motherland may also raise socio-cultural and psychosomatic identity questions. Cultural cross-currents have led to a hybrid culture and a new process of cultural assimilation. A mixed cultural milieu opens up new vistas of
communication and dialogue in this cosmopolitan world. As a result, diasporic reciprocation has become one of the recurrent themes in postcolonial world literature. Safran observes that the writers of Indian diaspora continue to relate personally or vicariously to the homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship (qtd. in Paranjape 2001).

The writers of Indian diaspora have been fairly at the centre stage in the last decade primarily because of the theoretical formulations which are now being generated by the critiquing of their work and the growing interest in cultural studies. Language and cultures are transformed as they come into contact with other languages and cultures. Diasporic writing raises questions regarding the definitions of home and nation. Schizophrenia and nostalgia are often the preoccupations of these writers as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures. It becomes important to question the nature of their relationship with the work of writers and literatures of the country of their origin and to examine the different strategies they adopt in order to negotiate the cultural space of the countries of their
adoption. The contributors are both from India and abroad, both Indians and non-Indians and hence the work represents perspectives located in different cultures (Jain 1998).

Creative writers like Ashis Gupta and Uma Parameswaran write from their own experience of migration and their own questioning of their relatedness. Gurbhagat Singh explores and critiques the theoretical formulations while David Stouck is concerned with reading and reception theories. Others like Shyam Asnani, P.A. Abraham, Rajul Bhargava, B.R. Nagpal and Jasbir Jain work through comparative contexts.

The diaspora writers in particular interweave the Indian and the global that marks the development of cultural combination at a mass level in the times impacted by globalization and unique growth in the field of technology and communication. Their writings show how the developments in one part of the world have instant and broader impact in different parts of the world. Their fictional works become more significant for giving expression to cross-cultural encounter from a different perspective.

The writings of Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Kavita Dasvani, M. G. Vassanji, V. S. Naipaul, to name a few, provide an inside view of the difficulties faced by the displaced
people in their adopted homes in a way that questions the traditional understanding of the ideas like home, nation, native and alien. These writers challenge essentialist nature of the difference between cultures. Whereas the earlier writers depicting cross cultural encounter often created conventional forms of life and characters to mark the essential difference between the cultures, diaspora writers often contest fixed notions of identity and stable norms that govern life at home and abroad. Diaspora fiction highlights an altogether different attitude of the people from the erstwhile colonies in the postcolonial times.

Diasporic communities establish new and different relations and define their attachment to cultural roots. They are unable to leave their homeland and their culture though they are conspicuously away from it. They are inescapably Indian in their character and always bogged by the memories of their home country even as they are overwhelmed by the legitimacy of the new world. Most of the women writers face this cultural dichotomy. Kamala Markandaya settled in England being married to an Englishman; Ruth Pawer Jhabvala has a complex culture with Polish parentage; she was brought up in Germany,
educated in England and married to an Indian architect; Anita Desai who has a German mother and a Bengali father, and next in the list are Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri.

Jhumpa Lahiri fits neatly into the new age of East Indian writers of fiction which includes Arundhati Roy and Pankaj Mishra who break free from Rushdie’s magical realism and embrace truth. These diasporic writers give expression to their creative urge and express their longing for their motherland by portraying an objective picture of Indian society. The works of these writers consistently revolve around people who are caught in the act of juggling with multiple cultures.

Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee, the daughters of Calcutta are appropriately paired as representatives of East Indian voice in American fiction. Mukherjee takes up the response of the expatriate immigrants of the various nationalities whereas Lahiri contemplates and illustrates sentiments of dislodgement in Indians, their intention to stick to the native culture, incorporate into their new home, and their affliction over ethical and emotional issues. She persists on the themes of love, matrimonial complexity, betrayal and estrangement.
The writings of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri interpret the situations faced by migrant women live outside India. The cross cultural dilemma, alienation and ethnic struggle of diasporic women are revealed in their writings. Their writings concentrating on the problems of women and explore with a view to discover how far they support women’s struggle for liberation from patriarchy.

In her book *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee illustrates the situations confronted by diasporic women. The main protagonist, Tara, after her divorce stays in San Francisco with her teenage son. Her journey as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother and moreover as a woman is well represented by Mukherjee. The writings of these two writers concentrate on the life and problems of the women kept at the margins due to the compulsions of gender, caste and ethnicity.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in 1967 in London, in an Indian Bengali family. Lahiri’s real name was Nilanjana Sudeshna. When she was enrolled in school, her teacher decided to call her Jhumpa, as it was easy to pronounce. Thus Jhumpa Lahiri became her proper name. She grew up in Rhodes Island, America, and graduated from Barnard College in English literature. At Boston University, she completed one M.A. in English, another M.A. in Creative Writing, and a third M.A. in Comparative Studies in Literature and the Arts. She
was awarded Ph.D. in Renaissance studies as well as granted fellowship at Provincetown’s Fine Arts Works Centre (1997-1998). Her stories were published in various American journals including *New Yorker*. Lahiri was conferred several awards for her literary genius in fiction and short story writing. The awards that have been bestowed on her include Trans Atlantic Award from the Henfield Foundation, O’Henry Award for short story *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), PEN/Hemingway Award (Best Fiction debut of the year) for *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), Addison Metcalf Award from the American Academy of Arts and letters (2000).

Lahiri became the first American of Asian descent to bag the Pulitzer Prize, the highest literary award of America for her debut collection *The Interpreter of Maladies*. M.F.K. Fisher Distinguished Writing Award from the James Beard Foundation (2000) and Guggenheim Fellowship (2002) were also awarded to Jhumpa Lahiri. Lahiri depicts Indianness in an unusual foreign setting stuffed with Indian characters, food, costumes and habits. Her fiction is more reality than fancy weaving her characters admirably with a suppleness of a matured writer.

In 2003, *The Namesake*, her second literary work appeared on the arena. Her second book, a full length novel, was received with great
expectation after the success of her initial collection of short stories. *The Namesake* released in 2003 deals with characters exiled between India and the United States. The protagonist, Gogol, tries to discover his identity being caught between two cultures and explores the other characters through his inner thoughts.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s second collection of short stories and third book, *The Unaccustomed Earth*, presents the immigrants’ life in the Indian American diaspora. She describes the lives of the first and second generations of Indian immigrants who have settled in America. Most of her protagonists are second generation characters. These characters face the opportunities and challenges of belonging to two different cultures, and must continuously negotiate an intermediate position within and between two cultures. They occupy a middle ground which could easily turn into a battle ground between the Indian and the American parts of their identities, but the characters in “The Unaccustomed Earth” strive to maintain ties to both cultures, identifying themselves as Indian Americans. Thus, no matter how predominantly Indian or American they feel, Lahiri’s characters still retain a sense of self as Indian Americans. Lahiri once again exposes the diasporic communities, trying to root themselves into the
unaccustomed earth. Immigrant experiences of the characters are similar to those of the characters of her earlier works.

There are three categories of Indian diasporic writers: those living in the United Kingdom, those living in the United States of America and those living in other countries. The first category is of the writers who are completely assimilated in the host country and refuse to call themselves immigrant writers. Bharati Mukherjee does not wish to be called an exile or an expatriate. It is because acculturation, for her, is an important process which has the exuberance of acceptance or assimilation and not the pain of difference or exclusion or alienation. The second category presents a group of diasporic writers who drift between different continents. These writers have a variety of themes in their writings. Some of them write about the experiences of immigration whereas others define the exoticism of their home country or of characters who go as aliens and try to fit into the western world. The third category presents the writers of Indian origin whose writings are not connected to the country of their origin. Instead, they write about the culture and life-style of the host country (Mandal 40).

Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second category of Asian American writers who deal with India as an exotic land, and also with
the problems of Indian immigrants adjusting in an alien land. Her short stories are often compared to those of Bharati Mukhrjee, whose characters also expose immigrant sensibility. Most of them are connected to one another through sexual impulse which is a transient passion, whereas Jhumpa’s characters are attached to one another on account of their cultural proximity, which is a permanent tie among individuals.

The next chapter explores the various shades of the key aspects of Indian diasporic womanism as found in Lahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies.