CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Diaspora literature, in the contemporary terms has become a fancy word in most literary/other fields. It is assumed, that this literature focuses on writings of and by the diasporic community, wherein, writers through their works convey their ambivalent position in the world and their oscillating condition between the homeland and the settled land. It is also thought that all diasporic writings question identity and belonging. It is, however, possible that all diasporic writings may not be having very similar concerns. In order to understand and deal better with this type of writing, an attempt is made herewith, to denote the various meanings associated with the word diaspora, as well as contextualize the historical perspectives of diaspora. A dictionary definition of diaspora reveals that it originates from the Greek verb ‘diaspeirein’ which can be translated as ‘to sow widely’. This term has generally been associated with the Greeks, as they have moved away from their land for the purpose of trade and business. Later on the term was utilized for the Jews when they were forced to disperse from their land which led to lot of sufferings.

Innumerable studies have been attempted to define and comprehend the term, diaspora and some illustrations are Gabriel Sheffer’s compilation of

---

1 The terms, homeland and settled land or home country and settled country have been utilized throughout the thesis to explain the locations of the diasporic community, wherein homeland refers to the native land of origin or belonging while settled land refers to the land into which the individuals have moved and settled into. In some of the diasporic literatures, critics and scholars have used the terms homeland and host land instead of homeland and settled land. Preference is given to the use of settled land as the term host has notions of welcoming and receiving guests.
definitions from dictionaries in his work *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*. Another point of view is the explanation given by Robin Cohen in the work *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, wherein he talks about it, as referring to different communities of people living together in a ‘new country’ by often thinking of their ‘old country’ (Preface, ix). Diaspora has also undergone classification wherein it has generally been seen as old and new diaspora. However “Diaspora Criticism” an essay by Sudesh Mishra reveals the tripartite nature of diaspora by referring to it as the classical, the modern and the postmodern (14). Additionally scholars have located similarities and dissimilarities between the old and new diasporas. The similarities notified by Gabriel Sheffer are the motivation of migrating out of homeland, determination in maintaining identities as well as developing solidarity, and organizing local and international network (243). On the other hand, it is pointed out by Reis, how contemporary diaspora can be understood more with dislocation than with exile as understood earlier (47).

Scholars such as William Safran and Baumann make a distinction between Jewish diaspora and other diasporas. William Safran in “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return” comments about the definition of the term diaspora as, “we may legitimately speak of the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, and perhaps Chinese diasporas at present and of the Polish diaspora of the past, although none of them fully conforms to the ‘ideal type’ of the Jewish diaspora” (84). At present more than 30 ethnic groups can be grouped under the label diaspora. Baumann in his article “Diaspora: Genealogies of Semantics and Transcultural Comparison” says that at present diaspora is free from its indication of any Jewish history and it can “refer to any processes of dispersion and to relate to countless so-called dislocated, de-territorialized communities” (314).
In spite of a number of discussions about diaspora it is only from 1960s that the term has gained popularity. This becomes clear in the work of Shepperson, who in 1966 used the term diaspora in his reading of the African diaspora. The ambiguity and the abstractness of the term can be well brought out by the remarks of Phil Cohen and Martin Baumann. Phil Cohen points out “Diaspora is one of the buzz words of the post modern age; it has the virtue of sounding exotic while rolling sibilantly off the English tongue; it whispers the promise of hidden depths of meaning yet assimilates them to the shape of a wave breaking gently on native shores … it offers a desirable feminine ending, and much versatilility” (3), while Martin Baumann states that “the idea of “diaspora” has been celebrated as expressing notions of hybridity, heterogeneity, identity fragmentation and (re)construction, double consciousness, fractures of memory, ambivalence, roots and routes, discrepant cosmopolitanism, multi-locationality and so forth” (324). With the growth of technology, media and communication network possibly the word diaspora has no longer a single, unified meaning.

Regardless of these above mentioned debates the diasporic community shares an emotional attachment with the homeland. Many diasporic individuals try to maintain their ethnic, religious and cultural identities in the new land and sometimes sustain the desire to return to their homelands. Some of the characteristics shared by the diasporas are explained in the articles of William Safran and Robin Cohen. William Safran in his article, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return” gives six characteristics as the collective experiences of diasporic people:

1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original ‘center’ to two or more ‘peripheral,’ or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not – and perhaps
cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (83-84)

It is, however, disappointing that Safran does not take into context the difference that could emerge due to gender, age and class. Yet, another diaspora scholar, Robin Cohen does not approve of Safran’s six features of diaspora and he thinks that there are nine diasporic characteristics, which are as follows:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions.
2. Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions.
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements.
4. An idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation.
5. The development of a return movement which gains collective approbation.
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate.
7. A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group.

8. A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement.

9. The possibility of a distinctive yet creative and enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (515)

He is also of the opinion that among the nine features all diasporas will have only some of these features and not the totality of it.

Diaspora is mistakenly identified or used synonymously with terms such as exile, expatriate, migrant and transnational. Tololyan substantiates this view with the idea that the term denotes, “a larger semantic domain that include words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community” (1991: 5). It is also understood that there is a differentiation in the terms diaspora and migration. As explained by Alan McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism*, migrant identities means a person who is influenced by the past migration history of his/her parents or grandparents (207). He further states that because of emotions and experiences several differences are available between these two terms.

Another word synonymously used with diaspora is exile. Although diaspora uses the notion of displacement it cannot be equated with exile, as exile refers to a forceful migration. Many times diaspora emerges due to voluntary movements. Diaspora, is also linked to the term, transnationalism and the difference between these terms is pointed out in Braziel and Anita Mannur’s work *Theorizing Diaspora*. According to them, diaspora refers to a movement: either forced or voluntary movement of people from one place to another. Transnationalism talks more about impersonal forces such as globalization and
global capitalism as a result for the migrant movements (8). All these varied explanations reveal to us that the diasporic experiences cannot be homogenized. The heterogeneous nature of diaspora is pointed out by Stuart Hall, who states that diasporic experience is, “defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” (1990: 235). He further states that [d]iasporic identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (1990: 235). So it is commonly understood in current diasporic studies that the term has moved a long way from the previous Greek definition and also from a simplified definition. Therefore, today diaspora has to be read through the idea of heterogeneity and differences.

The term ‘diaspora’ itself was associated with negative connotations such as forced displacement, victimization, alienation, and loss. As Safran mentions diaspora is associated with issues of “deracination, legal disabilities, oppression” (2005: 36) as well as difficult life styles in the settled land. People belonging to the diaspora, most often are torn between the land that they inhabit and the land that they had forgone. As a result of this they live in a constant state of anguish and continuously strive to return to their home countries. This kind of situation has been put down as a sense of doubleness filled with “nostalgia, filial piety and credulity” (47) by Dayal. Moreover, Sudesh Mishra, points out that the diasporic community, fears to practice their own traditional and cultural norms in the settled country for fear of repression. In some cases they are differentiated from the citizens of the settled country due to less opportunity. This point is substantiated when Clifford mentions, “Experiences of loss, marginality, and exile (differentially cushioned by class) are often reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked advancement. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of
survival: strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism and stubborn visions of renewal” (312).

Diasporas have been categorized based on the ethnicities or nationalities into various kinds such as Jewish, Greek, Armenian, African, Chinese, Indian, etc. Based on these kinds of categories, distinction has also been made in terms of culture and life style of each of these groups. As this thesis discusses Chinese, Japanese and South Asian diasporas, a very brief historical tracing is undertaken herewith. Chinese diaspora, had its initial beginnings in the nineteenth century, when the Chinese migrated to the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and parts of Europe. In the United States and Canada, most of the Chinese were employed in the rail-road industries and underwent hardships due to long working hours and less pay. Furthermore, they were taxed heavily in comparison to the local populations. It was only due to their determination and hard work that the Chinese immigrants were accepted as professionals from the second half of the twentieth century. Similarly the Japanese too migrated to the US for a better life style in the nineteenth century. However, the Japanese both in the US and in Canada underwent severe oppression during the World War II. People who moved from the South Asian regions such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives were termed as South Asian diaspora. The South Asians moved into the US and Canada in the nineteenth century for various reasons such as freedom from bondage, liberation from slavery as well as an urge to find out a better life style. On the other hand, immigration in the twentieth century was more for professional gain. It is also to be noted that the first immigrants were from the Punjab region and it was only later that other communities moved into the new land. South Asians faced racial tensions and poor living conditions in the new land.
Diasporic literature is an offshoot of the immigrants who have access to education and literacy. The diasporic literature characteristically focuses on discrimination, nostalgia, identity and a sense of belonging. Later readings of diaspora have begun to discuss new issues of diasporic existence. This trend setting growth of diasporic literature has also led to a number of writing from critical perspective. Some such important reactions to diaspora are briefly chalked out in this chapter. John A. Armstrong’s “Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas” published in 1976 mentions the multiethnic politics and places diaspora, within a historical framework. He also subdivides diaspora into two types: mobilized and proletarian diasporas. According to him, mobilized diaspora has a much larger complex history when compared with proletarian diaspora. Consequently he also reveals that mobilized diaspora can be subdivided into archetypal and situational diaspora. He finally concludes the article by giving the relationship between mobilized and proletarian diaspora from the angle of modernization.

There is a reciprocal relation between modernization and diasporas: (a) In polities where modernization is rapid and even, mobilized diasporas tend to become vestigial and their members are advantaged; whereas proletarian diasporas become increasingly important and their members are deprived. (b) In multiethnic polities where modernization is retarded, mobilized diasporas are temporarily advantaged as a group, but are successively discarded and their members are deprived; whereas proletarian diasporas are vestigial, and their members are no more deprived than the lowest strata of the dominant ethnic group. (408)

Yet another work that throws light on diaspora is the work of Gabriel Sheffer. He mentions in his preface to the work, Modern Diasporas in International Politics that the focus of the book is to look at the relationship between the homelands and host countries. He also promotes a triadic relationship between “ethnic diasporas, their host countries and homelands” (1), and reveals how the diaspora people
retain memory of their homelands and culture and the problematic of such a kind of awareness. Sheffer’s work does not focus at “distinct studies of particular diasporas, but rather on the comparative aspect of their experience and behavior” (14).

Yet another work of Sheffer’s, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* deals with creative ideas regarding diaspora. Sheffer also mentions that when people move away from their homelands they retain their identity with the people back home, and therefore such diaspora can be termed as ethno-national diasporas. Sheffer supports the use of the term, ‘ethno-national’ stating that this term is broad based and also refers to people having common trades and identities. Sheffer’s discussion of ethno-national diaspora is explained taking into contrast what is told as the classical diaspora. Furthermore, he portrays that migration need not be only for economic and political difficulties but many-a-time migration could be voluntary. Even within this group, there are two kinds of diasporic people. According to this, some of the immigrants are able to settle permanently in the settled countries and associate themselves with the people of the settled country, whereas the second group remains as core diasporic communities and maintains a distance from the citizens of the settled country. The nomenclature of ethno-national diasporas is defined by various divisions such as core members, members by choice and so on:

‘Core members’ are those persons who are born into the ethnic nation, who avidly maintain their identity, who openly identify as members of their diasporic entity, who are ready to act on behalf of their community and homeland, and who are recognized as such by the community itself and by its hosts. ‘Members by choice’ are descendants of mixed families, converts, and so forth, who fully participate in the life of the diaspora. ‘Marginal members’ are those persons who maintain their ethnic communal identity but do
not identify as such or purposely distance themselves from the community. ‘Dormant members’ are those persons who have assimilated or fully integrated, but know or feel that their roots are in the diaspora group; under certain circumstances those persons will identify with the diaspora and can be mobilized by its leaders and organizations. (100)

Sheffer concludes his arguments by mentioning about the present diasporas and the relationship they have with the homeland and their settled lands. Among diasporians, at present there is a confidence in their ability to survive and manage in the settled country.

“Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return” by William Safran was published in the inaugural issue of the journal, *Diaspora* (1991). As already mentioned Safran presents six principles which will be applicable for an understanding of diaspora. Interestingly enough, Safran refers to the genuineness of the Indian diaspora and points out that, “the Indian diaspora status has not always been associated with political disability or even minority status” (88). Later on, he makes references to the Parsees, Chinese and African-Americans:

In sum, both diaspora consciousness and the exploitation of the homeland myth by the homeland itself are reflected not so much in instrumental as in expressive behavior. It is a defense mechanism against slights committed by the host country against the minority, but it does not and is not intended to – lead its members to prepare for the actual departure for the homeland. The ‘return’ of most diasporas … can thus be seen as a largely eschatological concept: it is used to make life more tolerable by holding out a utopia – or *eutopia* – that stands in contrast to the perceived *dystopia* in which actual life is lived. (94)
“Diasporas” an article by James Clifford brings in the similarities between border theories and diaspora. Clifford also makes a reference to Safran’s principles and thinks that six principles cannot accommodate all areas of diaspora. He also differentiates the terms diaspora, immigration and exile. He argues that if diaspora is about dispersed people who share common “historical experiences of dispossession, displacement, adaptation…” (309) then the Fourth World People (autochthonist) should also be called as diaspora. Furthermore, in his opinion, even dispersed tribal people should be addressed as diasporic, when the tribal group disperses from their homeland. He sums up this view stating that there is no possibility for having clear cut definition for diaspora,--“it is not possible to define diaspora sharply, either by recourse to essential features or to privative oppositions” (310). The nature of the diasporic community forms the discussion in the later part of his article. He recognizes the similarities within the diasporic consciousness and thinks that many times, diasporic experiences are also tainted by gender roles. Clifford in the section titled as ‘The Black Atlantic’ makes a study of Paul Gilroy’s work and thinks that diasporic cultures are produced both by political domination as well as by economic inequality. He goes on to state that,

Gilroy’s work tactically defines a map/history in ways that may best be seen as “anti-antiessentialist,” the double negative not reducible to a positive. If diaspora is to be something about which one could write a history-and this is Gilroy’s politically pointed goal-it must be something more than the name for a site of multiple displacements and reconstitutions of identity. Like “black England,” the black Atlantic is a historically produced social formation. It denotes a genealogy not based on any direct connection with Africa or fundamental appeal to kinship or racial identity. (320)
He concludes the article by a discussion of Jewish diaspora.

Robin Cohen’s article “Diasporas and the Nation-State: From Victims to Challenges” thinks that the present diaspora is different from the classical one. He is of the view that to understand the nature of the diaspora, one has to understand the concept of Jewish diaspora. He also discusses four other groups which share conditions of the victim tradition, namely the African diaspora, Armenian diaspora, Irish diaspora and Palestinian diaspora. He comes to the conclusion that the African diaspora occurred due to the practice of slavery while the Armenian one occurred due to invasions. Similarly Irish migrated due to famine and the Palestinian due to war. His analyses presents that each region has its reason for diaspora. He also mentions that all the victim diasporas have the experiences being of “enriching and creative” as well as being “enervating and fearful” (513) in their modern nation-state. Cohen concludes this article by looking at the condition of diaspora in the pre-modern age and in the age of globalization as, “diasporas have predated the nation-state, lived uneasily within it and now … transcend and succeed it” (520).

The article “Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities” by Avtar Brah discusses four ideas wherein the first two ideas debate upon the term diaspora and border with regard to the issue of location. Brah thinks that the recent migration results in the formation of new displacements and diaspora. Due to it ‘diaspora’ and ‘border’ acquire new meanings. By giving definitions of the term diaspora, Brah suggests that the term diaspora is based on the idea of “multiple journeys” (616). Since the term diaspora is based on the image of journey, the term cannot be equated to casual travel. Instead it is based on the idea of “settling down, about putting roots ‘elsewhere’” (616). The answer for diaspora can be obtained when one tries to find out answers for questions like “when, how and under what
circumstances” (616) one began to travel? Similarly one should concentrate more on the process of arrival and settling down in the settled society. Each diaspora has its own history and one cannot homogenize the diasporic experiences of all the diasporic community. Majority/minority axis, which is primarily based on power relation, plays a crucial role in the diasporic community especially in Britain. Brah views different connotations of the word ‘native’ and explains that in the colonies the word ‘native’ refers to the “colonial Native” (623) (referring to a subordinate position) and in Britain it refers to “metropolitan Native” (623) (referring to a superior position). The meaning of the word differs according to the location. Similarly, the concept of ‘home’ differs according to the individual subjectivity. Brah states the idea of ‘home’ for the diasporic community differs because each and everyone face different experiences in diaspora.

The concept of diaspora and the concept of border are interrelated. Borders are arbitrary constructions which are “part of the discursive materiality of power relations” (625). Brah finds that the border and diaspora refers to “politics of location” (628). The term politics of location is used to denote “a position of multiaxical locationality” (628). By using two literary works, Minnie Bruce Pratt’s essay “Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart” (1984) and Angela Davis’ autobiography, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (1974), Brah shows how a single space such as Alabama is looked at as a place of safety by one writer and as a place of terror by another. Even though the concepts ‘border’ and ‘diaspora’ are common in some aspects like “notion of ‘border consciousness’” (631), the concept ‘diaspora’ is different from the concept of border as “there are multiple semiotic spaces at diasporic borders, and the probability of certain forms of consciousness emerging are subject to the play of political power and psychic investments in the maintenance or erosion of the status quo” (631). The later part of the discussion in the third section deliberates upon the contradiction between location and dislocation leading to part four wherein the author proposes a new
concept of diaspora space. Brah by connecting the three concepts border, diaspora and location raises a new concept called ‘diaspora space’. The critic is of the opinion that concepts and theories can be understood from the point of “confluence and intersectionality” (633) which Brah terms as “theoretical creolisation” (633).

Yet another article, “Making the Difference: The Differing Presentations and Representations of South Asia in the Contemporary Fiction of Home and Diasporic South Asian Women Writers” portrays the differences and implications of shaping and creating images of South Asians in the works of South Asian diasporic women writers and South Asian women writers. The critic, Lisa Lau focuses on how both diaspora as well as home writers try to present their self identity based on race, culture and family background and also attempts to explain the differences in the portrayal in the works of South Asian diasporic women writers and South Asian women writers. This article particularly concentrates on writers who stay in America, Canada and London. Lisa Lau groups them under the term ‘the west’ for convenience. She addresses South Asian women writers as ‘home writers’. She thinks that it is very natural to find differences between the writings of South Asian diasporic women writers and just South Asian women writers in their style and content. It is due to South Asian diasporic women writers’ different experiences, influence of the location they stay, different kinds of readers for whom they write and subject matters on which they concern that one can locate differences. If one compares the South Asian women writers and the South Asian diasporic women writers then the diasporic writers seem to achieve more global fame. The diasporic writers, in a way become the representative of South Asian culture. But many a time they may be unable to portray the correct issues with regard to South Asian culture. As Lau points out this leads to a position of “struggle to negotiate their identities and yet find themselves occupying a vantage point relative to those writing from within South
Asia” (243). During the discussion of these writings Lisa Lau divides journey under two headings namely the journey from east to west and the journey from west to east. For illustrations of writings, she utilizes Vijayaraghavan’s *Motherland* (2001), Meera Sayal’s *Anita and Me* (1997) and Kaveri Nambisan’s *The Mango Coloured Fish* (1998). One of the major issues brought out in her essay is the dynamism in the theme of identity: “The writings also suggest that the notions of self and identity, as conceived of by the women characters, change over time, and significantly, change depending on their location and environment” (252). She also clarifies that for the diasporic writers, identity is based on issues of origin “roots, and belonging”, while the writers at home discuss issues of individual identity and fulfillment “individualism and realizing self-potentials” (252). The writer concludes the article by stating that primary difference between the home and the diasporic writers is in the way how identity is “perceived” and presented by them in their works.

Diasporic studies is categorized or viewed from four perspectives by Khaching Tololyan in “The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies”. The perspectives taken are dispersion and diaspora, emic ‘study of diasporas’ and the etic field of ‘diaspora studies’, disciplinary appropriations and inflections of diaspora and the emergence of a supra disciplinary discourse of diaspora. He thinks that diaspora is most often seen as a part of the issue of dispersion and therefore, the present day distinction between the two terms diaspora and dispersal is collapsed. He then goes on to describe some characteristics of diaspora, which distinguishes it from other dispersed communities. The first of these ideas according to him is that diaspora refers to the notion of trauma, anguish and memory while in the case of dispersed community, migration occurs individually or in chain form due to economical reasons. Another distinction that he brings in is with reference to diasporic and ethnic communities. Even though all the diasporic communities can be seen as ethnic yet all ethnic communities are
not diasporic because diaspora is a specific sub-set of ethnic community. The third point with regard to this distinction is the fact that the diasporic communities wish to visit their homelands although this kind of travel may be few and far apart in the case of the ethnic communities. He further states that the diaspora is “multi local and polycentric” and are bothered about what happens to the kin communities. Tololyan thinks that study of diaspora necessarily has to include the notion of transnationalism and border crossing. He gives the history of the term transnational and defines it as the phenomena involving the crossing of one or more state boundaries by individuals or by non-government organizations. Thus, his study brings in the contradiction between concepts such as diaspora and dispersion, ethnic and diaspora, transnational and global, mobility and sedentariness. He concludes his article by referring to the significance of the diasporic studies and highlighting the condition of diasporic studies in future.

Besides these discussed critical works there have been a number of other works in this area. Since it is not possible to give an abstract of all the works few of the important ones are mentioned herewith – Stuart Hall’s “Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ (1990), Robin Cohen’s Global Diasporas: An Introduction (1997), Brent Hayes Edwards’ The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism (2003), Vijay Mishra’s “The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora” (1996) and “Diaspora and the Art of Impossible Mourning” (2001), R. Radhakrishnan’s Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Locations (1996), Victor. J. Ramraj’s “Diaspora and Multiculturalism” (2000), Samir Dayal’s “Diaspora and Double Consciousness” (1996) and Khaching Tololyan’s “Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Movement” (1996). In the review of the above mentioned articles one understands that most often, diasporic studies discuss the nature of exile, nostalgia, memory, alienation, inbetweenness and identity crisis.
One common feature that is part of all diasporic writing is the concept of space and time. Due to dislocation from the homelands and settling in new locations, diasporic communities continuously locate themselves in the homeland as well as in the settled land. Time is also a crucial factor as memories, nostalgia, recollection are part of the living present. Since the present research is trying to focus and read the issue of time and space with reference to Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café*, Bapsi Sidhwa’s *An American Brat*, Amy Tan’s *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*, and Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* an overall theoretical framework is applied utilizing Bakhtin’s idea of chronotope as put forth in the essay “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel.” In order to briefly explain Bakhtin’s idea a brief summing up of the theory is attempted herewith. Chronotope is a non-Russian word used by Bakhtin borrowed from Einstein’s ‘Theory of Relativity’ and mathematics. Etymologically, the term in Greek means time (chronos) and space (topos) which may be understood in literal terms as the inseparability of time and space in any art form. According to Bakhtin, ‘chronotope’ means “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). Bakhtin clarifies this when he mentions,

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. (84)

Bakhtin states that chronotope plays a vital role in literature and it is chronotope which defines genres. In order to present several major chronotopes, he has analyzed most of the important generic variations in the history of European novels. In his study he has applied this with reference to major trends in European literature. One of these is a reference to the Greek romance which he also refers to as the ‘adventure novel of ordeal’. He thinks that such a genre of writing is
characterized by a “technical, abstract connection between space and time” and also by the reversibility of the moments in a temporal sequence, and by their interchangeability in space” (100). Chance plays an important role in this kind of work. Bakhtin thinks that ‘the motif of meeting’ is essential in order to understand such works. In the second section, Bakhtin discusses the adventure novel of everyday life. Such works he thinks have the idea of metamorphosis as their main theme. In these novels chance plays no role and everything is dependent upon the hero and on his nature. In this part Bakhtin talks about the ‘chronotope of road’. In it space occupies a specific place: “Space becomes more concrete and saturated with a time that is more substantial: space is filled with real, living meaning…This type of space so saturates this new chronotope that such events as meeting, separation, collision, escape and so forth take on a new and markedly more concrete chronotopic significance” (120).

Bakhtin’s third reference is to works belonging to the genre of biography and autobiography. He discusses the models of ancient biographies with labels such as energetic type and analytic type. The energetic type refers to the activity of the person wherein the biographical time is not distinguished from the historical world, while in the analytic type characters and personal life are analysed. The fourth reference is to the folkloric chronotope, wherein the future is portrayed in a novel as presenting out of past, then the past could be used as an essence/purpose. Future is presented as something that is fragmented and empty but not as a homogeneous one. In historical inversion, it prefers the past than present and future. In folklore, time and space is inevitable. Even though it has fantastic elements, it can be termed as ‘realistic fantastic’, for “in no way does it exceed the limits of the real, here and now material world, and it does not stitch together rents in that world with anything that is idealistic or other-worldly; it works with the ordinary expanses of time and space, and experiences these expanses and utilizes them in great breadth and depth” (150).
A study of the chivalric romance forms the fifth basis of analyses. Bakhtin thinks that in the chivalric romance, time itself is miraculous and as it is excluded from action everything occurs in a single movement. Bakhtin believes that literature emphasizes three types of characters in order to produce satire and parody, these are the rogue, clown and fool. These characters have their own chronotope. They do not have a direct significance and their dialogues cannot be understood in a direct way: but they are presented in a metaphorical way. The transformation of the rogue, fool and clown has enormous significance but it is very less understood by people. In these novels importance is given to the spatial and temporal world of real and reveals a complex developmental level: “Novels of this kind paved the way for a restoration of the spatial and temporal material wholeness of the world on a new, more profound and more complex level of development” (166).

His seventh category of discussion is with regard to the novels of Rabelais. Bakhtin presents seven important elements which are presented in almost all the works of Rabelais. These are “(1) series of the human body, in its anatomical and physiological aspects; (2) human clothing series; (3) food series; (4) drink and drunkenness series; (5) sexual series (copulation); (6) death series; (7) defecation series” (170). Bakhtin talks about these elements in detail by analyzing Rabelais’ works. Bakhtin thinks that by using all these seven features Rabelais aims for “the destruction of the old picture of the world” and a “positive construction of a new picture” (169). By this destruction of the old, he devalues the real time and expects that a “new chronotope” would permit a linkage between real life and real earth (206).

In the eighth section Bakhtin foregrounds different types of time based on the development of human being. Illustrations of these time references are to the
agricultural stage, productive stage, generative stage and so on. Time is a collective one, which contains events of collective life that will allow everything to move and to be in movement. By using these time movements, Bakhtin talks about the temporal factors in the folklore, works based on war and epic. He finally refers to the idyllic chronotope wherein time is an important element and goes on to mention the five important idylls which are present in the modern novels. They are,

(1) the influence of the idyll, idyllic time and idyllic matrices on the provisional novel; (2) the destruction of the idyll, as in the *Bildungsroman* of Goethe and in the novels of the Sternean type (Hippel, Jean Paul); (3) its influence on the Sentimental novel of the Rousseauan type; (4) its influence on the family novel and the novel of generations; and, finally, (5) its influence on novels belonging to certain other categories. (228-229)

Even in the modern idyll, space remains static and time is dynamic. He further talks about the presentation of idyll by many writers.

Concluding the discussion of these nine categories, Bakhtin goes on to explain the chronotope of the road and the symbol of the castle in the eighteenth century gothic fiction.

Here there are no events, only “doings” that constantly repeat themselves. Time here has no advancing historical movement; it moves rather in narrow circle: … Time here is without event and therefore almost seems to stand still. Here there are no “meetings” no “partings”. It is a viscous and sticky time that drags itself slowly through space. (247-248)

He discusses the ‘chronotope of threshold’ which has metaphorical meaning, such as “breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life” (248). Bakhtin emphasizes that the chronotopes are the “organizing centers for the
fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the
knots of narrative are tied and untied” (250). He believes that through effective
narration, one can make time palpable. Along with major chronotopes, which are
already seen, several minor chronotopes are also available: and “any motif may
have a special chronotope of its own” (252).

Bakhtin feels that one should not confuse the represented world with the
world outside the text and between the author as the creator of the work and
author as the human being. Similarly one should not confuse the listener who has
an active mind with the passive listener. Bakhtin finally believes in the idea that
the authors are external to the works that they create. Even though the author
presents his/her autobiography or his/her experiences through the characters,
he/she becomes an outsider due to the availability of difference between the
spatio-temporal dimension which he/she presents in his/her work and in which
he/she lives.

He represents the world either from the point of view of the hero
participating in the represented event, or from the point of view of
the narrator, or from that of an assumed author or – finally –
without utilizing any intermediary at all he can deliver the story
directly from himself as the author pure and simple (in direct
authorial discourse). But even in the last instance he can represent
the temporal-spatial world and its events only as if he had seen and
observed them himself, only as if he were an omnipresent witness
to them. (256)

Bakhtin clarifies that even if an author had “created an autobiography or a
confession of the most astonishing truthfulness, all the same he, as its creator,
remains outside the world he has represented in his work” (256). He explains it as
follows:
If I relate (or write about) an event that has just happened to me, then I as the *teller* (or writer) of this event am already outside the time and space in which the event occurred. It is just as impossible to forge an identity between myself, my own “I,” and that “I” that is the subject of my stories as it is to lift myself up by my own hair. The represented world, however realistic and truthful, can never be chronotopically identical with the real world it represents, where the author and creator of the literary work is to be found. (256)

Bakhtin believes that in literature presence of chronotope is unavoidable, especially in diaspora fictions, where usage of time and space plays a vital role. Bakhtin concludes the essay “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel” by saying, “Without such temporal-spatial expression, even abstract thought is impossible. Consequently, every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of chronotope” (258).

This dissertation by using the concept of chronotope, attempts to read diaspora, and tries to reveal how Bakhtin’s remark that “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (84) can be analysed in diasporic literature. The remaining part of the thesis attempts to examine the novels with regard to the diasporic features and also analyse the narratives from the angle of Bakhtin’s idea of chronotope. Based on this structure, the second chapter, ‘Diasporic Features’ attempts to analyze the select six novels by using the general features of diaspora such as nostalgia, discrimination, survival, cultural change and gender inequality. This chapter tries to illustrate that diasporic experiences cannot be homogenized and it differs according to the situation people move from their homeland to the settled land and also due to various factor.
Chapter three, ‘Historical Perspectives’ uses Bakhtin’s idea of ‘Historical Inversion’ from the essay “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel” and attempts to focus on the portrayal of history in the novels Obasan, Disappearing Moon Café and The Bonesetter’s Daughter. By paying more attention to the past, it tries to trace out the portrayal of split identity by the writers. The major perspective in chapter four, ‘Cultural Perspectives’ is a reading of culture. The novels, An American Brat, The Namesake and Brick Lane are examined by using the Bakhtinian tools of ‘idea of metamorphosis’ and ‘public accounting’. The fifth chapter ‘Diasporic Chronotope’ attempts to read the select fiction from a spatio-temporal angle. Through this it proves that the concept diaspora is heterogeneous and tries to formulate a new concept called the ‘Diasporic Chronotope’. The final part of the thesis, ‘Conclusion’ is a summing up of the earlier ideas.