Chapter VI

A Comparative Analysis of the Works of Divakaruni, Gupta, Lahiri and Desai
CHAPTER-VI
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS OF DIVAKARUNI, GUPTA, LAHIRI AND DESAI

The literary study of any corpus of writing involves various methods. Most often students of literature and literary critics employ a comparative method in order to make a proper analysis of the chosen literary works or the writers, for the proper understanding, especially when the study involves multiple writers or literary works. Comparisons and contrasts are the tools of comparative criticism to arrive at the merits of the texts. Even “the contemporary intellectual climate is in favour of the opinion that while the goodness of a literary work can be judged by absolute criteria, its greatness or otherwise cannot be judged unless it is compared with other literary works. The final evaluation must be relative” (Ray i:i). Hence the comparative analysis is desirable in the context of the present study which involves four different women writers of Indian diaspora settled in different parts of the globe, but still belong to the literary canon of the Indian English women writers of the present times. The comparison need not always be on each and every point of their writing but should focus on the major similarities and differences that form the overall content, emphasis and the method of representation. In other words it should basically focus on the relevance, contemporariness and literary value of the given literary text as a creative medium that touches the lives of the people. With this view, the present chapter brings to the forefront the glaring similarities and contrasts in the writings of the four women writers of this study, namely Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Sunetra Gupta, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran
Desai, as their works represent different aspects and the phases of Indian diasporic women's literature in English: along with the perspectives of contemporary Indian women writing in English.

As already noted in the introduction, in the analysis of diasporic literature, the factors like the place of birth and belonging, the regional culture of the native land and the types of immigration become important in understanding the literary works of diasporic writers as they carry their cultural background along with them to the foreign location. Every diasporic writer carries this cultural trait which is represented in his or her writing. Different conditions of migration and the mode of migration have certainly contributed to the differences in the choice of themes, and styles of writing in the case of the women writers of this study as well. Therefore the differences and similarities that arise in their writing due to this major factor are discussed here with reference to the following areas such as: i) differences and similarities in the patterns of migration and the background of the writers, ii) depiction of diasporic experiences and Indian women’s lives in diasporic space, issues related to diaspora in relation to gender, iii) portrayal of India, their mother country out of memory, iv) issues related to gender and feminism such as theme of selfhood, resistance to patriarchy, man-woman relations in marriage, expressions of body and sexuality etc., v) lastly the style of narration, thematic patterns, and stylistic experiments.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Sunetra Gupta have migrated independently for the sake of their education and without any family ties. Hence they are the first generation immigrants. Lahiri and Kiran Desai belong to the...
second generation immigrants as they are born to the immigrant parents and brought up in a foreign location. The themes of Divakaruni and Gupta are gender specific and subjective in nature as this phase of women's writing in diaspora reveals clearly. Their experiences of an immigrant woman include student's life in American university, racism, gender bias and domestic life of early immigrants of postcolonial era. Desai and Lahiri write on common experiences and their writing is androgynous in nature as gender issues of earlier phases have taken new dimensions in post-feminist phase. Three of the writers namely Divakaruni, Gupta and Lahiri share a striking similarity. They basically belong to West Bengal, Calcutta, though Lahiri is born in England and migrated to USA. Hence Lahiri's portrayals of India are limited to her childhood experiences. Desai by birth belongs to Delhi, India and have a multicultural background due to the mixed heritage of her parents and grandparents. This is responsible for her portrayal of Kalimpong in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. These factors of birth and belonging also carry the major differences in their writings.

Divakaruni and Gupta have spent their childhood and early life in India which has given them a deeper understanding of the culture of their motherland as well as their regional culture of West Bengal. This knowledge of the cultural past has given them a grip in handling their Indian themes and subject matters with more authenticity. This is characteristically seen in their use of Indian myths, legends, folklore and historical events in their writing. In *The Mistress of Spices* Divakaruni fuses Bengali folklores with Indian epic stories of Ramayana. Tilo the protagonist of *The Mistress of Spices* becomes the spokeswoman of the Bengali...
folklore and the epic events. She is abducted by the pirates and then by the serpents who belong to ‘Nagaloka’ an underwater world of Indian myths and is thrown on a spice magic island. The Island has magical herbs grown. The tradition of magic education imparted on the island is on the lines of ancient Indian Gurukula system which Divakaruni repeats in *Queen of Dreams*. The Shampati fire, a typical fire mountain, is built upon the story of Ramayana where Sita has to pass through the ordeal called ‘Agni Pariksha’. The process of purification in the novel carried out by fire or ‘Agni’ as per the Indian tradition resounds the typical epic idea of purification. Divakaruni recreates these beliefs and ideas through her childhood experiences of listening to the epic and folk stories from her grandmother. This typical upbringing of an Indian childhood is reflected poignantly in her fiction.

Similarly her *The Palace of Illusions* is an epic retold from the voice of its female protagonist Panchali or Draupadi. Divakaruni renders a new vision to the epic by endowing feminist consciousness to her heroine and the novel becomes the postcolonial feminist saga of postmodern writing. However the whole novel is based on Vyaas Mahabharata, the original epic, but with the subversive means. The parallel of Radha and Meera from myths and legends is found in the characters of Radhika and Meera in the story “Blooming Season for Cacti” with a feminist twist. Divakaruni, equally well versed in western tradition through reading, uses the myth of Raven in the creation of her male protagonist who is also a curendra like Tilo. In the indigenous culture of America the raven magic is a powerful medicine as per the native myth which Divakaruni makes use of. As the
women writing has this characteristic feature to adopt the myths and folklores
Divakaruni uses this feminist device in her writing. As a diasporic writer Chitra
harbours on the memory and this memory writing is due to her well grounded
nature in her culture.

Sunetra Gupta also uses Indian myths and folklore in her writings a feature
which she shares with Divakaruni in her memory writing of the cultural past.
Though she does not use the elements of the epic, occasionally the legendary
material appears in her novels. A reference to Rabindranath Tagore’s works or life
or the folk tales of Bengali tradition or the history of her town Calcutta gets cited
in most of her works. If the epic story of Vatapi and Ilvala appears in a different
context as a passing reference in *Memories of Rain*, the folk story of a captivated
village girl who cuts the grass appears in *Moonlight into Marzipan*. Through her
deep reading of Tagore, Gupta occasionally cites the lines of his poems or
references of the events of his life. The historical references about the Calcutta city
are made in *The Glassblowers Breath* and *Memories of Rain* as in the following
example:

He had drawn you a map of Calcutta, faltering only
briefly in the south eastern quadrant, digging his pen
thoughtfully into his representation of the lower
circular road. So, where do you live then, he had
asked, I hope it is not to the south of here, although I
am assured it is still very fashionable. You are lucky,
you had told him, rather taken aback by the depth of
the detail, you are lucky that, my home is within the confines of the circular road which by the way, was once a war trench against the Portuguese. The Marathas, he corrected you, without scorn, it was called the Maratha ditch, don’t you remember (TGB 42).

The same reference to the place ‘Maratha ditch’ appears again in Memories of Rain. Then, such details as the historically famous event of Durga puja, the craftsmen of Kumartuli who make the idols of goddess Durga, the legends and myths associated with this festival during which the belief of the people in Bengal prevails that, the goddess returns to her father’s home i.e on earth hence to be celebrated grandly, make Gupta’s writing marked with her cultural upbringing which she brings down in her fictional works. Gupta also uses western folklore like Divakaruni and brings textual references of the Western literature as she is well grounded both in her mother tongue Bengali and her adopted language English. The nursery rhymes, folk stories of children, references to writers like Nabakov, Rilke, Rumi and many others in all her novels make this fact explicit. Gupta’s style is full of such intertextuality.

In the writing of the younger generation like Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai this cultural past is not strong or almost nonexistent, since their childhood is spent in a foreign location. A few passing references are seen in Lahiri’s fiction where she speaks about the Indian festivals celebrated in diaspora especially Durga Pooja during Navaratri festival and Saraswati & Laxmi Pooja during Diwali. These facts
are dealt with the parody of postmodern attitude in Desai especially in her *Hullaballoo in Guava Orchard* where a fake saint is the protagonist of the novel. So also in the Christian celebrations of new year and Christmas in *The Inheritance of Loss* where Western celebrations of festivals and events are preferred to by the indigenous native celebrations such as “Sipping the blood of Christ and consuming the Wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a Phallic symbol with Marigold” (IHL) by the anglophile characters like Lola, Noni, Father Booty and Uncle Potty. Similarly convent bread girl Sai is also is aware of these rituals conducted during church services whereas Gyan the Indian Nepali and Biju the village born young man prefer the Indian festivals and rituals.

Divakaruni and Gupta have migrated to USA for their education in eighties and India of this postcolonial period was under a transitional phase. Glimpses of this transition are abundantly found in their fiction. Divakaruni’s heroines Anju and Sudha in *Sister of My Heart* belong to this period of modern India. They both go to School, and skip it one day to see the movie. The typical mentality and social life of the time is very well reflected in these two characters as they find their traditional attires old fashioned and buy new clothes without the knowledge of their mothers and change the dress in a ladies’ room before going to cinema. Sudha also applies some lipstick and Anju applies kajal which is not very much encouraged by their elders. The idea of social modernity prevailing in the period is reflected in the youthful acts of these girls which Divakaruni beautifully depicts. In the same novel titled *Sister of My Heart* the social problems of the day such as the bride burning for dowry or the female foeticide rapidly growing with the aid of
technology or the initiation of divorce cases or the widow remarriage. Sudha in *Sister of My Heart* has to face the problem of divorce as she refuses to abort the female baby that she carries. Her husband and mother-in-law force her to do it. The same novel also presents the gender atrocities on married women by their in-laws who control their sexuality and desire for motherhood in the incident of a young married woman from a village, whom Sudha meets at the goddess Srusti’s Shrine. The girl is harassed for more dowries and abused for not bringing it. The husband also is a party to this as he thinks it right because the girl has to compensate it for her dark complexion as he thinks that he has done a great favour by marrying her. When the girl does not conceive even after three years of her marriage family members of the husband decide to marry him with another girl, since it would be a double benefit for them as it would fetch fresh dowry on the one hand, and on the other, the man will have a beautiful wife in place of the ugly one. More over it will give them an heir to the family. The girl hints at the consequences of this marriage on her to Sudha, that first of all they will send her to her parent’s home permanently. In that event they have also to return the dowry of the first wife to her parents. Naturally being reluctant family members of the husband would opt to get rid of the girl herself by harming her or even kill her. The girl is convinced like Sudha that her survival is dependent on her becoming a mother. Hence Sudha observes with pain and bewilderment the predicament of women in the plight of fulfilling their gender roles assigned by patriarchy in the following passage:
The women are strewn around the courtyard like plucked blossoms. From their dust-wrinkled saris and wilted faces, it seems that many have been here for several days. Some lie face down on the heat-baked bricks, weeping quietly. Some lean into the pool, praying aloud, their tears falling in to the water. Some are writing on slips of paper which they tie, along with their jewellery, to the tree. Some sit as though in a trance, their gaze turned inward, listening to things I cannot hear. Next to me a woman beats her head in a steady rhythm against a concrete edge of the pool, calling, 'Mother, Goddess, speak to me, save my life.' Sorrow fills the courtyard, the air is acrid with it, as with smoke, it stings my eyes, I want to weep too, not for me but for us all- for rich or poor, educated or illiterate, here we are finally reduced to a sameness in this sisterhood of deprivation (SOMH 234-5). (Italics added for emphasis).

The ideas of higher education and career have gained ground in these times and it is shown in the example of Anju by Divakaruni. Anju's reading of women's literature especially the books of Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin is an indication of women's awareness about feminism and the ideas like women's emancipation and empowerment which initiate change in the lives of women. Divakaruni depicts
these issues of the Indian Society with precision and understanding as these are the parts of life that she experienced in India during her youth.

Similarly in Gupta's fiction the gender discrimination finds an expression through her minor characters. She touches upon the social issues only as passing references than taking them up in her main characters and plots in detail. Women's aspirations for education and the struggle for its fulfillment are seen in her minor characters in *Memories of Rain* and the *Sin of Colour*. Moni's aunt in *Memories of Rain* walks out of a tragic wedlock and opts for education and works as a teacher in a school for the sake of which she has to struggle against the social pressures. So also the young bride of Indranath Roy in *Sin of Colour* aspires for education and wishes to opt for a career rather than marriage. She even wishes to serve the nation in her own way by participating in the nation's freedom struggle. The patriotic fervour that was seen in forties and fifties among the youth is well depicted in her character. But at the same time the colonial nationalist ideology that the place of women is to be restricted to home and hearth works in her case and she was forced to sacrifice her desire for the sake of her husband and children. The class barrier also works in these stories. Thus Gupta through these minor characters depicts the social aspects of gender in the colonial and postcolonial India to some extent.

Lahiri's portrayal of India is limited to the extent of her limited experiences of her childhood, Lahiri visited her grandparents in Calcutta during which, whatever she has come to see she depicts them out of her memory. Hence the life in Calcutta that appears in her novels and short stories is limited to certain aspects.
like life in apartment buildings as in the story “Real Durwan” or visiting tourist places like Delhi or Agra or Konark in The Namesake, the story “Interpreter of Maladies” etc. Though the ancestry of all her characters is from Calcutta, they are mainly diasporic. She depicts India of 60’s and 70’s than the modern India of 80’s and onwards. As against Lahiri, Kiran Desai in both of her novels depicts the modern globalised India with its changing aspects brought about in the society by the new economic and political environment. The novel The Inheritance of Loss is a saga of postcolonial, globalised India with its neo-colonial economic domination by the western world and the postmodern influence on the social life of the people. Desai’s time frame is also India of 80’s like Divakaruni’s. But the focus of Divakaruni’s fiction is on the female gender where as Desai stresses on male since Desai’s male characters Biju, Jemubhai and Gyan occupy prominent place in the novel as against the single female protagonist Sai. In the very first novel Desai has created a male protagonist. If Divakaruni stresses on the social problem of women, Desai focuses on inner psyche and fragmented lives of both Men and women, wherein the men occupy the prominent place. Like Lahiri, Kiran Desai’s depiction of India is also based on childhood experiences of India and she accepts the facts that her locatedness in her Indian experiences is stagnant, and belonging to a single period of the past. Hence there are minor discrepancies in her picture of Indian life and its details. In the opinion of Shyamala Narayan, though Kiran Desai handles the shifts in time with great expertise … some of the scenes set in India lack the sureness of touch that characterizes the social realism of American scenes” (29). These discrepancies she notices in the description of Judge’s and Sai’s economic
After his retirement as a judge, who generally drew a handsome pension, judge lives a life of poverty which seems unconvincing. So also the cook’s stagnant salary, since the day he joins the service of the judge, speaks of the same misery. The cook repeatedly asks for the hike in salary but the judge turns deaf ears. Instead, he insists him to lead a miserable life which he himself leads. Another matter is Sai’s stay with him or her abrupt ending of the education for which the judge would have paid as he does for his daughter in the convent. But instead he keeps her with him and hires tutors. Besides Sai does not receive any money in the form of compensation as her father was in government service especially in the defense. So also, the caste and class status of Jemubhai’s community in Gujarat and the details of his going abroad as the first man of the community seem to be controversial. Shyamala observes in her article that:

The Patidar Patels in general are not such an impoverished community. They are landed peasantry with flair of business (half the motels in the USA are owned by Patels). When the rulers of Gujarat allotted land, “to maintain a Record of the annual crops on each pat (a parcel of land) the ruler appointed a record keeper known as Patlik. This name was later shortened to Patel. The Patels are classified as “other backward caste” in some states of India, but they occupy a high place in the caste hierarchy, coming just below the twice-borns. Kiran Desai tells us that Jemubhai was
the first member of their community to go study at Cambridge, "the year was 1939".... But this is unlikely; as early as 1910, Vallabhbhai Patel (Iron man of India) went to London to qualify as a barrister, and joined the Middle Temple (36).

But the portrayals of characters and situations in Kalimpong like the anglicized community comprising Lola, Noni, Sai, Jemubhai or Uncle Potty and father Booty are more realistic in Desai’s novels. They display a keen sense of her observation of multicultural community of postcolonial India. Desai’s locus operandi is the ancestral land i.e. India though diasporic experiences become part of her fiction.

As being diasporic writers, these women writers naturally take up the issues of diaspora in their works. The problems in diasporic living both Psychological and physical find representation in their fiction in which they show a greater similarity. These issues are mainly diasporic dislocation, cultural confrontation of home and host societies, alienation and rootlessness, dual identity, problem of racism etc. But the handling of these issues by each woman writer is different and distinct. The location and the period of migration matter in these representations. In Chitra’s fiction, most of the diasporic issues addressed are prominent themes in relation to gender. She shows greater depth and insight in dealing with these issues as she has undergone these experiences as a migrant and also due to the social activism she is involved in her personal life which has given her access to the experiences of other immigrant women. The plight of elderly women in diaspora
however is more prominent in her fiction. Mrs. Datta in “Mrs Datta Writes a Letter”, other women characters like Lalita, Pratima, the grandfather of Geeta, the elderly women and men in the stories of *Lives of Strangers* and *Arranged Marriage* speak greatly of these diasporic dilemmas. Migrated as a student to a University in America, Chitra has experienced a racist and biased attitude of the west towards women of color and she voices these experiences through her immigrant young heroines both in her fiction and in her poetry. Jayanti in “Silver Pavements and Golden Roofs” is one such example. Besides the cultural clashes with their home bound parents is seen in the unnamed protagonists of the story “The Word Love” (AM). Chitra’s fiction thus represents the confrontations and the negotiations of the people especially Indian women in diaspora and its practical aspect unlike Gupta. Chitra’s fiction addresses the social problems of gender in the diasporic life and becomes the fiction of social realism as in Lahiri. But Lahiri’s focus is on the problem of younger men and women the children of immigrants. The confrontation of east-west and questions of home and nation also form as themes of Lahiri as they do in Chitra. However Lahiri’s portrayals do not have the wider range as that of Chitra Banerjee’s characters. They all mostly belong to an early postcolonial period which made women’s lives comparatively difficult.

Lahiri portrays alienation and estrangement in elder generation women as in Ashima in *The Namesake*, Mrs. Sen in the story of the same title. Her elder generation women belong almost to the same class and background in their mother land. She depicts the east-west dichotomy that brings the identity crisis, dual identity and rootlessness in younger generation as in Gogol and Moushumi in *The
Unlike Chitra, Lahiri takes the issues from male perspectives also and in spite of her limited experiences of Indian life she tries to explore the cultural aspects of her ancestral land and shows the tussle between the two i.e. the cultural clashes of first and second generation Indians in diaspora. If Chitra’s women opt for merging the home and host culture to forge a new cultural identity, Lahiri’s women do not negotiate but accept the change without much hesitation.

As against these two writers Gupta engages herself with the psychological aspects of diaspora and depicts only the fragmented lives. Dislocation and its trauma becomes a major issue in all her novels and her protagonists deal with their migrational woes without practicality but emotionally which results in their tragedies. The dreamy and surreal nature of Gupta’s fiction makes migration and diaspora a traumatic experience rather than the one of joy or gain. Memory and nostalgia are the prime feelings of the heroines of Gupta. The personal experiences of frequent migrations have indelibly marked the psyche of Gupta which gets reflected in her protagonists also. As Sushiela Nasta points out in *Home Truths*:

Gupta’s vision...bears some relationship to the use of chaos theory as a literary paradigm for discovering the potential of transformation inherent in apparently disordered or creolized or hybrid societies. Moreover it provides a useful means of questioning the symbolic system expressed by the dominant society, thus enabling a reconstruction of postcolonial and migrant
identities on the basis of an open, shared and equal set

of discourses (237).

However Kiran Desai, the youngest among the four, writes on the diasporic postcolonial identity as her major theme. She also deals with several migrational problems like alienation and estrangement, feeling of rootlessness and the crisis of identity in her novel. Though there are only two novels that she has to her credit, the second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* handles multiple themes of diasporic life. Her characters and stories are situated in India from where the diasporic experiences are espoused. It is mainly the shadow class that she deals with in her novel. Like Lahiri, Desai also presents the male world which prevails over female. She has successfully depicted India’s present global scenario where western culture is increasingly capturing the native sensibility and dominating on the psyche of the postmodern nation which is turning ‘a native into an alien’ in his own culture. Though all these women writers deal with similar issues of diaspora, their approach, handling and treatment of these issues and their central focus is quite varied and offers a wide range of experiences from the diasporic life and its different facets.

As regarding the issues in women’s writing from the perspective of feminism, the question of cultural identity is prime common theme in all the women writers. Chitra depicts Indian women’s cultural identity undergoing a drastic change in diaspora. Majority of her women are Bengali Hindu women with different class and social status right from the aristocratic land owner class to the women from lowest poor working class. If Anju, Sudha Jayanti, Mrs. Datta, Abha,
Meera, Asha, all come from upper urban society of Calcutta, Lalita, Tilo, the mother in *Queen of Dreams* all belong to lower working class milieu of Calcutta. Sumita and the protagonist of the “Names of Stars in Bengali” come from villages of West Bengal and from a middle class family as against the other women from urban societies. These women are exposed to the problems of diaspora and some of them undergo the total change of identity like Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices*, Sumita in the story “Clothes”, Mira in story “The Word Love” and another Mira in “Blooming Season for Cacti” etc. In the face of changed circumstances these women opt for the negotiated changes in the value system that they have brought from their mother land. Sumita, Asha, Abha, Tilo, Lalita question the dominant patriarchal values transported by their men folk from their mother land and accept the suitable ones whereas reject those values which are detrimental to the gender and marked with sexist bias. They throw away the yolk of their fixed gender roles and adopt new ways with their own terms and conditions to identify themselves as equal, liberated individual human beings. The younger generation of course is more rebellious and wins its own freedom without much hesitation as Geeta, Leela, Preeti and Uma. Influenced by the western culture Chitra’s women opt for change in their clothes, dress and manners, food habits, career and education, cultural aspects like marriage. They are more successful in bringing these changes though they respect their Indian heritage, culture and history. They go progressively with economic and social freedom and liberation of thoughts. In Divakaruni, one can certainly witness the impact of second wave feminism which
has influenced her since her childhood hence the portrayals of Divakaruni’s postcolonial women of diaspora are more positive, practical and real.

Sunetra Gupta’s fiction deals with fractured identities in diaspora. Most of her diasporic women like Moni in *Memories of Rain*, Esha in *Moonlight into Marzipan* the unmarried protagonist in *The Glassblower’s Breath* or Niharika in *Sin of Colour* represent this fractured identity in one or the other way. But as Indian women in diaspora they stick to their ethnic cultural identity except ‘you’ in *The Glassblower’s Breath* who tends to adopt more cosmopolitan, postmodern, fractured identity rather than her ethnic Indian identity. Moni in spite of marrying Anthony the English man and Esha, who follows her husband Promothesh, stick themselves to their ethnic cultural identity which makes them alienated in the foreign space. However Moni returns to her native with positive self assertion whereas Esha becomes bitter out of her frustration. Niharika on the other hand also opts for a tragic uncertainty and does not bother to make herself assertive and successful in retaining her individuality. These women of Gupta therefore are only the reflections of fractured souls rather than the individuals that try to impact the minds of their readers. The fictional women of Gupta belong to earlier Diasporas at the beginning of postcolonial period and represent its traumatic aspect hence they tend to belong to the imaginary world rather than realistic world. However, Gupta does not, deal with second generation women and limits only to the first generation immigrants.

The younger generation Indian women of Jhumpa Lahiri however are totally westernized as compared to Chitra’s younger generation. They often suffer
from the syndrome of dual identity and feel alienated from their peers in their social surrounding. Their ethnic identity is rather a burden to them as they want to assimilate and being accepted by the society of their inhabited land. Therefore they opt for a complete makeover in dress, language, food, social habits and manners and cultural traits by falling to the society of their living. Though this aspect comes from the result of the tussle between their parents and themselves, it is but natural in their circumstances as much as it is inevitable. In comparison with Chitra’s second generation women like Ruchira and Geeta who do not completely forgo their ethnicity and adopt the host culture without surrendering their ethnic identity, Lahiri’s women like Sudha, Usha, Twinkle, Moushumi, and others totally reject their mother culture and embrace the western culture in their lives though they are still being considered as immigrants by their host society which makes distinctions between them and native women. However the elderly women in Lahiri try to cling to their ethnic identity of Bengali Hindu women in America. They try to accommodate and accept the host culture to the extent of accepting the change in the lives of their children. Thus for Lahiri’s women assimilation is best option of life and they go with the saying “home is where the heart is”.

The diasporic male figures of Kiran Desai are dichotomous in nature. If Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss* represents the return and surrendering to his native identity, the judge on the other hand embraces the hybridity and mimicry in forming his identity by sacrificing his native identity. The women characters also show the hybrid identities of postcolonial Indian society which is in favour of multiculturalism. Globalization and its effect on the nation is giving rise to these
plural identities and cosmopolitanism which is represented in the portrayal of Desai's men and Women. Hence there is a transformation in the native identities of middle class and upper class Indian societies and the novel represents this aspect in dealing with identities of individuals in the postcolonial India. Thus diaspora space is imminently a space for confrontation of two cultures and attitudes of home and host societies. Therefore the issue of identity is varied and vastly represented by immigrant writers. All the four women writers show the different dimensions of identity positions in terms of their individual experiences of immigration. 

When the cultural confrontations affect the immigrant lives its effect is most probably reflected at the home front and naturally affect the lives of women. In this patriarchal values are most responsible in creating the tension in the home space. The women in diaspora have not only to face the hostile world outside but even in their own homes. The values adopted in the home culture are often detrimental to the development of women which create gender issues like discrimination, marginalization and domestic violence. Women in diaspora suffer double marginalization as they are alienated from their homeland on the one hand and are subjected to victimization by the virtue of their own cultural values on the other. Therefore resistance is commonly the end result of such situations which sometimes end in the tragedy of the rebels. The women writers in diaspora address these issues more often in their writings. Chitra, Sunetra and Jhumpa Lahiri give voice to this aspect though it is more discernible in Chitra's fiction.

Patriarchal subjugation in the domestic sphere of native home as well as diasporic home is prominent in Chitra where she deals with this issue in most of
her short stories and novels. As a writer committed to women’s social welfare and also with her political concern in feminism naturally women’s lives are more of concern to Divakaruni and this is apparently seen in her portrayal of women who are caught in the evils of patriarchy which is a part of their lives. The women that Chitra portrays therefore are the first generation immigrants to America and naturally it is inevitable for them to confront these values in the face of new environment. Anju, Sudha, in the *Sister of My Heart*, Lalita in *The Mistress of Spices*, Asha, Abha, Sumita, Mira the in stories of *Arranged Marriage*, Meera and Radhika in “Blooming Season for Cacti”(LOS), are the affected figures of patriarchal dominance in various ways and they raise their voices against this system.

It is however noticeable in Chitra’s fiction that the resistance of women to patriarchy and its values end up in a positive note for gender since it either results in achieving the selfhood or in the liberation or emancipation of these women to lead an economically and socially independent life. It also ensures the freedom from the shackles of society and physical and mental subjugation. Anju, Sudha, Preeti, Abha and Asha get freedom from a notorious and meaningless marriage resisting marriage values of patriarchy which favours infidelity in men. For Lalita it gives liberty from violence in marriage. For Geeta, Meera and others it gives freedom to develop a sense of righteousness in shaping their lives as per their convenience against the patriarchy by making them self reliant, independent individuals. The women achieve emancipation from their subservient position and thus it leads to the positive turn in their lives. Therefore “Divakaruni’s texts are
powerful and significant; they are particularly effective in mapping the contours of the new south Asian community in the United States. They provide a lens with which to view the struggle for identity amongst women and to develop a critique of patriarchal structures that organize the life of Indian Diasporics” (Banerjee 29). The portrayal of native women characters also show resistance to patriarchy. The character of the wife in “Maid servant’s Story” and Panchali in The Palace of Illusions are some examples of this kind.

The resistance seen in Lahiri’s younger generation women also ends in positive note though it is a notable transformation of identity for them from their parental culture. Their resistance is not towards the men in the patriarchy but also towards their own mothers who are the representatives of the patriarchy. This leads to a confrontation in the home front to the younger women and their resistance often leads in the development of their own individuality which is more libertine and free. In the character of Moushumi we witness this spirit more noticeably:

Moushumi strikes out on the path that is decisively different from the Indian ways, as if in protest. Her search for freedom and individuality- it is one of Lahiri’s play on ironies that Moushumi, true to her character, works on French feminist theories for her dissertation- draws her instinctively to alternative ways of living. Again it was a gesture of Bovary like boredom, devoid of malice, that led her to betray her husband with her old acquaintance Dimitri... trying to
escape the claims of her ethnic inheritance she seeks
refuge in the freedom and individualism of American
life (Vinoda 148).

In Gupta however the resistance is more overt but not ideological. It is more
personal and ends often in tragedy rather than in any positive construction of the
women’s lives. The best example is that of the unnamed protagonist in The Glass
Blower’s Breath who breaks all the rules of patriarchy and tries to invent herself in
the rulelessness of the rules posed by the surrounding society, which ends in her
own confinement and tragic end. In her native women characters also resistance is
found but in passive form. However Kiran Desai’s fiction does not touch this
aspect from the point of view of gender except slightly in the case of Nimi who is
only figured as a victim of patriarchy rather than a resister of it.

Various human relationships provide the thematic patterns in the women
writers of diaspora. Moving from a country of community values and human
bonds these women writers very often explore the importance of relationships in
the diasporic space. Lahiri, Desai and Chitra write variously and profusely on the
relationships where gender prominently figures in them whereas in Gupta, it is
mostly the isolated world. Among the four women writers Chitra’s fiction depicts
human relations both in general and particular nature. Particularly two of her
books, Lives of Strangers and One Amazing Thing highlight human relationships
in general whereas Sister of My Heart and The Vine of Desire and other novels
particularly highlight the women to women relationship that goes in the name of
sisterhood or female bonding. The genuine concern among human beings in
helping one another in the time of crisis is well depicted in *One Amazing Thing* when nine people from diverse backgrounds of nationality and culture are confined in the collapsed Visa office of California due to the earthquake. Through their cooperation to each other they epitomize the human relationship. The other relationships in the society, family and human community are highlighted in the stories *The Lives of Strangers* as Divakaruni depicts the relationships between mother–son, mother–daughter, husband-wife, sister-brother, and person to person. In other words she portrays: “A plethora of delicate affinities among human beings in a broad spectrum. These relationships acquire new dimensions with perplexities, because of the writer’s settling down abroad with her roots in Bengal in Calcutta to be precise” (Sandhya 206). Similarly, in Divakaruni’s themes female bonding occupies the most prominent place compared to the other three women writers as Divakaruni’s focus is always on gender. As Urvasi Barat notes: 

For Divakaruni, who has known at first hand the terrible isolation of the newly arrived Asian women in America and has seen for herself the trauma of the unassimilated immigrant, and who has helped to found nauté the name itself significant- a woman’s self service organization in San Francisco (Pais 73), sisterhood has been both an inevitable choice of theme and an important political statement” (48).

Her *Sister of My Heart* epitomizes the sisterhood and female bonding by depicting the story of two sisters who bond together from their birth till their life time against the dominant patriarchy that gives them the challenges of life.
Sisterhood among fellow women is a recurrent theme in most of the stories in *Arranged Marriage* and the novels *Queen of Dreams* and *The Mistress of Spices* as well. This dominant theme in Divakaruni not only explores women's relationship with each other in the familial and the societal background but also manifests with its clear motive of feminism to rise against patriarchy, and achieve women's emancipation, selfhood and liberty.

So also in Lahiri's fiction female relationships are shown in the familial and societal space with a slight political motive. Relationship of mother – daughter occupies a prominent position in her stories of the collection *Unaccustomed Earth*. But unlike Chitra's women, Lahiri portrays this bond in a stereotypical manner of antagonism between elder and younger generation where the compromises are arrived at from the side of the mother than the daughter. The societal relationships where women support other woman are only in the Indian stories, the treatment of "Treatment of Bibi Haldar" and "Real Darwan" where as Lahiri prominently deals with other human relationships between son and father, friend and friend or colleague to colleague etc. Unlike the relationships in Chitra, Lahiri's relationships lack depth and variety. Social and community relationships are more prominent in Kiran Desai's fiction. The personal relationships in the familial space suffer and almost they are as good as nonexistent. As against these three writers Gupta's fictional world is totally devoid of human bonding. It is a fiction of loneliness and tragedies. Gupta creates a world of total alienation and estrangement both in Diaspora and home.
The ideas related to gender especially woman's body and sexuality get voiced predominantly in all these writers, another characteristic that all of them share as women writers. C. Vijaysree appropriately observes this phenomenon in the following terms:

Expatriate women's writing is strongly pre-occupied with the female body and sexuality. The writers no longer sing song of gentle love, nor do they celebrate self sacrifice and martyrdom in love. Their texts vibrate with female energy, unleashing a desire the terrain of female sexuality from a woman's point of view (130).

Body is celebrated as a site of physical and semantic aspects of experience and thus woman's desires, erotic pleasures are described by the writers freely. Besides, female body becomes an instrument for the political motive of resistance and also a means for motherhood in their writing. In Chitra's fiction expressions of body and sexuality are used both in terms of personal experiences and feminist political motive of resistance. However these expressions are judicious and appropriately used to reveal the motives of the characters. Whether it is to convey the erotic desires of woman or her bodily experiences typical to gender, of motherhood, pregnancy, child birth etc., or it is to convey the exploitation of woman's body and her sexuality by the society in terms of motherhood or wifehood. If Sudha in Sister of My Heart experiences the harshness of the situation where her husband and mother-in-law try to control her sexuality and desire for.
motherhood by trying to abort her baby; the woman in "Disappearance" or Lalita in *The Mistress of Spices* face the control of their sexuality by their husbands in the marriage relationships for which these women revolt against it. Meera and Radhika in "Blooming Season for Cacti" exercise their freedom of sexuality by developing a lesbian relationship against patriarchal dominance. Gupta’s women on the other hand do not bother about the social conditions which control their sexuality. They exercise more freedom in respects of the matters of the body and woman’s desires. ‘You’ the protagonist in *The Glassblower’s Breath* goes beyond any normal way meant for women to exercise her sexual freedom by engaging in adulterous relationships with several men and resist the rules of patriarchy. Desai on the other hand uses more liberated language for the expressions of sexuality and bodily experiences, sometimes crude and vulgar, as it is used for the political motive to expose the meanness in the treatment of female gender. Moreover her focus is on the male experiences rather than a woman who is a victim of patriarchy. Lahiri’s expressions however are limited to only personal experiences of men and women including women’s personal experiences of the body like Chitra. Thus in the terms of Cixous these women writers use body as a site for gender experiences and they are “trying to ‘write their bodies’, reconstructing and re-visioning the body as a site of difference” (Vijaysree130).

Lastly belonging to postmodern, postcolonial period with an exception to Lahiri three of the women writers adopt different styles in their writing. Chitra experiments with the post modern literary device of magic realism in three of her novels. She uses the device for subversion of common beliefs and to highlight her
characters and themes. *The Mistress of Spices* is the first novel with this experimentation and it is followed in *Queen of Dreams* and *Palace of Illusions*. The magical spice island created for the mistresses, the everyday spices assuming magical power, the training undergone by the women to become mistresses, the magic shop of Tilo in California, the Serpentloka of island and also the myth of Raven in the indigenous American tradition are all superbly conceived with the help of magic realism and they highlight the social realism used in the novel to deal with the lives of Indian diaspora. “Magic realism has been another devise for asserting indigeneity and nationalism, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the most celebrated example of this practice” (Jussawala 220), and *The Mistress of Spices* uses this nationalistic spirit and mapping the postcolonial Indian diaspora in the west it celebrates the Indian nation and its myths, folklores, epics and history. According to Firoza Jussuawala the novel espouses the essence of globalization from Indian point of view: “India as a globalizing nation – one that is willing to benefit from transnational capital and yet retain its ethnic identities” (221). She also argues that Divakaruni fuses this spirit in her novel since she does not see “globalization” or “hybridity” but heterogeneous lives come together in “mixing and merging” and still they retain their individuality (222). Thus the novel successfully uses the device to make this diasporic experience carried out in its characters and theme. Tilo’s marriage and union with Raven in spite of her finding her own individuality, and her decision to live in California with his and her roots intact speak about Divakaruni’s idea of globalization and diaspora identities.
Similarly she uses the same technique in the Queen of Dreams to speak about the identity of second generation and her formula of assimilation in the foreign land. The Palace of Illusions is a novel on subverted feminine myth based on the great Indian epic Mahabharata. The form and content of the epic subject certainly needs this device. Divakaruni infuses feminist spirit in her heroine Panchali and the device of magic realism gives the necessary subversive twist to the epic. Apart from this post modern technique of subversion Divakaruni uses myths, folktales, epic stories and popular beliefs of the time in her fiction which weave a rich tapestry of her stories and give an exotic touch as well as grace to her style. It also serves the political motives of feminism as it is also common for women writers to use myth, memory and tales in their writing.

A writer of the same phase Sunetra Gupta’s fiction is heavily marked with postmodern literary techniques like metafiction, intertextuality, subversive narratives and self reflexivity etc. Most of her novels make use of postmodern artifice and they are not easy to read from the point of view of a common reader. The dreamy and surreal nature of her plots and fractured diaspora experiences that she relates are complex and need to be read with the knowledge of prevalent theories of postmodernism and diaspora. As Nasta suggests in Home Truths that Gupta herself intimates this in one of her novel The Glassblowers Breath through the language of her character Jonathan Sparrow who: “Envisages it that an acceptance of an unregulated chaos rather than order is fundamental to creative freedom. Gupta’s vision of disorder as a correlative not for ‘dissipation’, but ‘a process inherent within the same rules that create and explain order’” (Nasta 210)
bears resemblance with the chaos theory of her character. Thus Gupta brings in complex devices of language as well as literary styles to convey the migrational experiences which are shattered, fractured and unstable. The experimentation is also in the narrative persona where she uses the second person narrative technique in *The Glassblowers Breath* rarely used by literary writers. The other narrative technique is the first person addressing the second person in *The Moonlight into Marzipan*. She also employs multiple viewpoints of different characters from the omniscient narrative persona in the other two novels.

Similar in the stylistic experiments in language and literary techniques is Kiran Desai who shares the feature with Divakaruni and Gupta. Like Divakaruni she has used magic realism in her first novel *Hullabaloo in a Guava Orchard* to relate the lives of postcolonial India to describe multiculturalism and postcolonial identities. Like Gupta she shares the stylistic features of language in dealing with the diaspora experiences of fractured hybrid identities. *The Inheritance of Loss* is rich in language experiments, stylistic features which remind Raja Rao’s experiments in *Kanthapura*. As against these three writers Lahiri does not use any literary devices. Her language is lucid and narrative technique is linear. However she employs different modes of narrative techniques in her fiction. She uses a community voice as a narrator in her story “The Treatment of Bibi Haldar”. She also adopts different perspectives specifically male perspectives in stories and novels. Her style is plain and easily readable. If Divakaruni focuses on female voice, Lahiri’s focus is contrastingly male. Thus each writer writes distinctly about the lived experiences of diaspora and home and this emerges as striking similarity.
among them all. But the difference in age, migrational experience and the status of migration, the country in which they are residing, host culture and its attitude and their own view towards assimilation with the host culture are the factors that make their writing distinct and different. They represent different aspects of migration in their writing with similarities and contrasts and thus provide diverse experiences of diaspora which are rich and varied and at the same time they are subjective and also common place.
WORKS CITED


