Introduction
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The Diasporic Indian is like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world.


Diasporic Indian English Writing has gained greater prominence in the last two decades. The writers of Indian Diaspora both men and women have been contributing to the richness and vividity of Indian writing in English by extending the boundaries of human experience across the borders. There is a substantial and significant contribution both in the field of creative writing as well as literary criticism. In the words of Jasbir Jain:

Expatriate writing occupies a significant position between cultures and countries. It generates theory and defines positions as it constructs a new identity which
negotiates boundaries and confines and relates to different temporal and spatial metaphors. Cultures travel, take root or get dislocated and individuals internalize nostalgie or experience amnesia. Writers living abroad live on the margins of two societies and cultural theory is today being created by people who live on the margins (11).

The above quotation pertinently leads us to a number of questions in our mind such as what is diasporic literature and how can we define it? What makes it a part of Indian English literature and what distinguishes it from the main stream Indian English writing? And finally why it becomes important to study this literature in today's global context? The answers to these questions focus on the scope, importance and relevance of this study. To begin with therefore diasporic writing can be defined as a body of writing written by the writers originated by one country and settled down in another country and are a part of the diaspora of their motherland on a foreign soil.

The word 'diaspora' denotes a state of exile and migration from the mother country. Originally a Greek word it literally means 'dispersal' and connoted in ancient times to the dispersal of Jews from their original land. In the words of Baumann:
Etymologically, the term diaspora is derived from the Greek composite verb ‘dia’ and ‘speirein’ (infinitive) literally meaning ‘to scatter’, ‘to spread’ or ‘to disperse’. It was used originally to refer to the dispersion of Jews after the Babylonian exile in 586 BC and to the aggregate of Jews or Jewish communities scattered in exile outside Palestine. In current parlance, however, the term is applied to describe any group of people who are so dispersed” (qtd in Jayaram 16).

The Hebrew word ‘Galut’ for diaspora in the Biblical use referred to the dispersal of Jews from their home land or holy land was in the form of curse (thou shalt be a diasporas (thrown out of all places) in all kingdoms of earth) by God. Hence it included exile, homesickness, a loss of homeland and identity. The modern definition however is wider which according to Judith Shuval:

...refers today not only to such classic groups as Jews, Greeks, Armenians, but too much wider categories which reflect processes of politically motivated uprooting and moving of populations, voluntary migration, global communications and transport. The term has acquired a broad semantic domain and now encompasses a motley array of groups such as political
refugees, alien residents, guest workers, immigrants, expellees, ethnic and racial minorities, overseas communities (29).

Diaspora therefore is the result of migration either voluntary or forced. The migrated people find a home outside their country and share the ethnic, cultural, social and historical characteristics of their native land.

According to Shuval any migration to be called diaspora it has to fulfill the following conditions viz:-

1) History of dispersal 2) Myths and Memories of the homeland kept alive 3) Alienation 4) Desire for eventual return 5) Ongoing support of homeland and lastly 6) Collective identity defined by the above relationship. Even sociologist N. Jayaram also renders the same opinion. According to him human migration not only involves a mere physical movement of a person but also of a ‘socio-cultural baggage’, which a migrant carries with him. This includes a set of beliefs, norms, values and cultural habits and practices that govern human life. Further, it is significant that, these migrants are recognized as belonging to the place of their origin not only by the members of their homeland but also by the people of the adopted land, the fact which makes them diasporic (16).

Though the concept of diaspora is age old it has assumed importance only in the postcolonial period. Today a number of diasporas are in existence and they can be classified on several grounds. In the broader classification they can be
categorized as old and new. Under old diasporas we have Jewish, Armenian and Greek diasporas. Under new diasporas there are colonial and post-colonial diasporas which are recognized by various terms like Black diaspora, trade diaspora, ethnic diaspora, labour and imperial diaspora, global diaspora etc. These new categories are the result of globalization. The colonial and post-colonial diasporas share different characteristics and thereby the literature of these diasporas and the issues that they address also differ significantly.

The immigrant experiences related to the issues of diasporic life give way to the need of expression in literature as literature is a vehicle for the expression of human thoughts, emotions and lived experiences. Like any literary writer even for a diasporic writer, either man or woman, writing is a strategy for it "opens up a space that invites movement, migration, a journey. It involves putting a certain distance between ourselves and the contexts that define our identity" (Iain 10). With the help of language it creates a path or a trajectory to establish the connection between the perception of the writer with the outside world. Distance and dislocation from the homeland due to migration render a new vision of life to the diasporic writers who in turn express these experiences in their writings. Jasbir Jain aptly observes this phenomenon thus:

Diasporic writing has developed its own theoretical position privileging a double vision. But these theoretical explorations work in different ways and throw up questions which affect both personal and
social concerns and have political and cultural implications. The expatriate as he moves from one culture to another may need to locate himself / herself afresh in relation to the centre (16).

Thus the literature produced by the diasporic writers becomes the part of the nation’s literature from which they have migrated. Indian diasporic literature also shares this phenomenon and Indian diasporic writers in English thus extend the scope of Indian English literature by being part of it through their valuable contributions.

In its theorization in the postcolonial period diaspora addresses two important issues which find their representation in diasporic literature. They are diasporic identity and its relationship with home and nation. Diasporic identity as an umbrella term covers a number of issues overlapping with each other which may be listed as cultural identity, multiculturalism, hybridity, double consciousness etc. Similarly the concepts of home and nation play another significant role in the diasporic life and literature, which includes the issues of alienation, homelessness, un-homeliness, imagined communities, home and host situations, transnational’s, assimilation and acceptance in the mainstream culture of the adopted land. These key features of diaspora have been amply represented in the literature of every diasporic community away from its homeland in the postcolonial period including Indian diasporic literature, and are crucial in understanding the diasporic writing.
Diasporic identity, a key feature of diaspora, may be either a group identity or an individual identity. The identity of an individual is shaped by his / her self-perceptions of the world surrounding him / her based on the nationality, religion, race, class, gender, economic and social status of his / her family and cultural beliefs. When most of these social, religious, cultural beliefs are commonly shared by the community in which he / she lives including certain national characteristics like patriotism it assumes the shape of group or collective identity of which an individual is also a share holder. As already noted when a person migrates from the society of his / her birth and bearing, he carries most of these beliefs to the country of migration the concept which is termed by Jayaram aptly as migrating with “the socio-cultural baggage” (16). Once in a foreign land migrated people “find in their culture a defense mechanism against a sense of insecurity in alien settings” (Sharma 49), and they try to stick to their collective identity.

The concepts of home, nation, cultural identity, and a sense of belongingness to the place of birth and ancestry differ from individual to individual. Especially to the children born of the immigrants, the country of their birth is not similar to the country of their origin. This fact makes the difference in the development of identity of those children as they are tossed between two different cultures and societies, one being the host culture and another of the home culture which is held steadfastly by their parents in the land of migration. Thus torn between two polarities they develop a sense of in-betweens which results either in the loss of identity and alienation or lead to hybridity, which is the result
of fusing the elements of both the cultures in their lives to their convenience. As Somdatta Mandal observes, “this issue on the one hand, develops the tension between the desire for assimilation and the need for ethnic identity” in the younger generation, “on the other hand”, it creates “a conflict between generations, between mothers and fathers who want to maintain cultural ethnicity and the children who want freedom to be more American” (12). In the cases of dual identity, hybridity and desire for assimilation the place i.e. the affinity with the homeland loses its consideration for the new generation. It is the postmodern notion of diaspora which negotiates hybridity as a natural phenomenon with its slogan “think globally and live locally” (Hidle 85).

In the first generation immigrants, however, migration creates alienation, nostalgia of the past and rootlessness at the place of migration as he or she is still clinging to the cultural beliefs, practices, norms, of the homeland, which Makrand Paranjape observes as, “there is a clinging to the old identity and a resistance to making a transition” (61). It is this sense of loss that Bhabha calls as displacement or dislocation which creates a position of ‘live in between’ or ‘living on the border’ which Bhabha discusses in his *The Location of Culture*. The displacement also gives rise to the concepts of double consciousness and un-homeliness which are the major features of diasporic situation. It is apt to quote Lois Tyson who analyses this concept in her essay “Postcolonial Criticism” thus:

In the diaspora this feeling of being caught between cultures, of belonging to neither, rather than to both, of
finding oneself arrested in a psychological limbo that results not merely from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which one lives is referred to by Homi Bhabha and others as unhomeliness. To be “unhomed” is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak (421).

The group identity of diaspora is associated with nation. Nation as a geopolitical entity marked by physical boundaries gives a sense of security, belonging and identity to its people who share certain racial, political, social, and cultural beliefs and characteristics. But this gives them the sense of security and identity in the form of collective memory. The collective memory is a combination of myths, history and folk narratives. Therefore group identity is a collective identity of one shared culture, history, ancestry within a geopolitical boundary (Hall, reprinted in Mongia 111). For the diaspora the nation and the home remain in the realm of imagination, especially, the picture of home and nation carried in their memory at that particular juncture of time of their departure from their country, and it is also a place of possible return. It is this people that Benedict Anderson refers to as, “imaginary communities”. Further the collective memory of the nation
acts on the principle of the attitudes of host and home country. As Judith Shuval observes:

Diaspora and host-attitudes of a diaspora group towards its homeland is often ambivalent – a combination of yearning and distancing, when they have a choice, many people do not choose to return to their homeland because it is often too disruptive or traumatic to leave the diaspora. In many cases a homeland does not actually exist or it is not welcoming them politically, ideologically or socially (34).

Nevertheless for such people there is a utopian goal, a longing to return which sometimes creates a problem of existence.

Similarly for some, “‘home’ is also a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no-return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’” (Brah qtd in McLeod 209). According to Shuval this desire finally leads to the position of, “maintaining an eschatological stance regard to the homeland”. This means, the desire to return home remains as a future goal, whether virtual or utopian goal, and without any definite time frame for its fulfillment. In the meanwhile the immigrants adopt a much practical view towards the land of their adoption which may be summarized as “ubi lucrum, ibi patria i.e. my home is where I can make a living” (34). Thus the
inclinations towards assimilation and embracing multiculturalism become the marked features of post colonial diasporas which is also reflected in the literature of the diaspora, especially in the writings of South Asian women writers like Bharati Mukherjee.

In the context of Indian diasporic literature in English its diaspora is conveniently divided into three historical divisions by scholars like N. Jayaram, Vijay Mishra, Abha Pandey and others. These are a) Pre-colonial phase b) Colonial phase and c) post colonial phase. The early Indian migration in ancient times is identified to the Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro civilization where for the purposes of trade and commerce people crossed the seas and archeological evidences prove this migration as economical and cultural migration. Early Buddhist monks from India travelled to Ceylon, Java, Sumatra islands and helped spread the religion. As Abha Pandey rightly observes:

Since time immemorial people of India have been migrating to other countries for various reasons. Though Indians are not reputed to be very mobile people their presence abroad can be attested from the days of remote antiquity. In spite of the fact that crossing a sea was considered as breaking a proscription in India, a large number of Indians crossed the sea in different periods of history (20).
In the colonial phase during 19th and 20th century Indians migrated under the recruit of colonial government to various places like Malaya, Guyana, Caribbean Islands, Fiji, Mauritius, Ceylon, Burma and Africa as indentured labourers and Kangani or Maistry labourers to work in the plantations of white settlers. If indentured labourers were under a five-year term with a facility to extend, Kangani labourers were non-contracted. These migrations resulted in the exploitation of the workers in terms of cheap labour and were naturally traumatic. It is under this category V. S. Naipaul’s forefathers migrated to Trinidad and we find the representation of these experiences in Naipaul’s *House for Mr. Biswas*, *Miguel Street, Mimic Men, Mystic Masseur* and other works. Many migrants tried to return following bad conditions of workplace but could not cope with the system at home which had changed since their migration. Their passage to India created their original homes into a dark continent for them as Naipaul’s *Area of Darkness* reveals.

Another type of migration existed in vogue during the colonial period. This is termed by Jayaram as ‘free passage’ migration. This refers to the “immigration of members of trading communities from Gujarat and Punjab to South Africa and East Africa. These labourers were not officially sponsored: they themselves paid their ‘passage’ and they were free in the sense that they were not bound by any contract” (21). These Indians settled down there and later a faction of them migrated to USA and England when the migration rules were relaxed in these countries. But this phase was full of struggle for the immigrants to establish
themselves in the new location. Several writings like *Leaving Yuba City*, a poetry collection by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, are dealing with this aspect of migration. The popular culture today is unearthing these experiences and movies like *Mississippi Masala*, and the recent *Patiala House* are some notable examples of this kind of emigrational experiences.

Another important development occurred during 1940s and 50s when in USA and England the emigration rules were relaxed. This resulted in “a large scale emigration of skilled and scholarly professionals such as doctors, engineers, scientists, teachers and other semi-professionals to the industrially advanced countries of the west”. This was particularly after independence and 60s and 70s witnessed increase in this phenomena which was individual in nature and was popularly known as ‘brain-drain’, and Jayaram names this type of migration as “voluntary migration” (22). These migrations are marked with a sense of alienation, rootlessness and cultural conflict represented in the writings of writers like Rajarao, Arun Joshi, A. K. Ramanujan, Parthsarathy etc. Rajarao’s *The Serpent and The Rope* is an example of the cultural conflict of the east-west encounter and alienation. “Given the fact that east is east and west is west, many “Indians” who went westwards became victims of cultural disorientation and identity crisis, leading sometimes to schizophrenia. Perhaps a sense of insecurity in a new land was the more common lot” (Sinha 196). Arun Joshi’s *Foreigner* and Anita Desai’s *Bye Bye Black Bird* come under this phase of diaspora writing, along with Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and The Rope*. 
In the post colonial period migration is marked with modern developments. Most of these migrations are voluntary migrations in search of better opportunities of work, modern amenities, comfortable and luxurious life and the attraction of civil society which is influenced by the internalization of British culture, education and globalization. Expressing similar view Imtiaz Ahmed writes, “Modern education and global communication have literally ‘brain-washed’ people into becoming international migrants”(3). Moreover, “with the second and subsequent generations having emerged, and the emigrant population enjoying economic prosperity and socio-cultural rights, this stream of emigration has resulted in vibrant Indian communities abroad” (Jayaram 22). It is this aspect of Indian diaspora in the postcolonial period represented in its literature is relevant ground for the present study since it is the literature of our time, when today’s society is witnessing the tremendous changes under globalization and postcolonial situation, as literature holds the mirror to society and the observation of its reflections will help extend human knowledge, understanding and experiences.

The Indian English diasporic literature in the post colonial period after 1980’s has taken a historical turn with the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. Following the tradition of several postmodern writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Angela Carter, Rushdie uses the technique of magic realism in this book to portray a picture of post independent India. This novel has been instrumental in theorizing the discourse of home and nation in the diasporic literature of the post colonial era. As already noted the writers who migrate from
the motherland carry their nation in their imagination and in their memories. When they write from memory the country becomes alive and thus gets extended in their writing. As Rushdie himself speaks about this concept in his *Imaginary Homelands* thus:

> Our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind (10).

Memory of home, nation, diasporic belongingness, in-between situation and alienation become the important themes in the writings of most of the diasporic male writers. Writing on the depiction of Amitav Ghosh's *An Antique Land* Sandhya Shukla says that there is “an epic relationship between India and her diaspora. I read in this term and in much of his work an emphasis on the tremendously historical and imaginative nature of diasporic belongingness” (14). Anurag Mathur’s most celebrated novel *Inscrutable Americans* is a novel that deals with the diasporic concept of double consciousness. The protagonist Gopal who goes to America for higher education experiences the discrimination on the basis of his colour. His basic images of America undergo a change when he really lands in America and they find a clash with the later images. He experiences differences in his understanding that render him into a vulnerable position of an
object being under observation and the novel creates a postmodern experience. The distance plays an important role here. It brings memories on the one hand and changes in one’s perception about one’s imaginary images in the past on the other.

Rohinton Mistry and Boman Desai traverse the path of memory by recreating the past history of the Parsi communities in their memorable works *Such A Long Journey* and *The Memory of Elephants*. “Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* at the schematic level is about the diasporic loss and does deal with the repossession of immediate postcolonial history”, and it also “encompasses within itself several layers - fictional, historical, ideological and socio cultural. It is set in the 1950’s and records the changing socio cultural moves, the comings in of new wealth, the decreasing influence of the westernized elite, major socio economic changes wrought by Nehru’s level reform politics which moved India from the federal to socialist age – and above all the changed status of women in post colonial India” (Bharucha 361). Similarly Amit Choudhari’s *Afternoon Raga* and Allan Seally’s *Trotternama-a chronicle* have heartening pictures of Indian life reconstructed by memory whereas Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* has exotic India for the western reader’s palate.

The male writers of the third phase of Indian diaspora in the neo-colonial period after 1980’s have been mainly addressing the issues of identity, nation, home and the role of memory in the diasporic life and have thereby extended the boundaries of nation and home by extending the discourse of the nation as a part of postcolonial experiences. In this way the literature of the diaspora becomes part of
Similarly the contributions of the women writers of the diaspora are equally significant as they represent the gendered experiences. In the early colonial phase till 1960’s and 1970’s migration was a ‘male phenomenon’ (Jayaram 23). In the later period women followed their men either as spouses or parents. Change of environment, culture, lack of education and professional skills marked the initial migrations, but the subsequent migrations were totally different in nature. Writing on the demography of Indian diaspora in his survey Pravin Sheth observes that emigration of Indian women to America increased after 1970s and most of them were from upper and middle classes, who came as spouses. But after 1990s, women emigrated independently as aspirants of higher education and career. They had professional skills and higher degrees (128). This accounted for the changed trend in the emigrational aspect of postcolonial diaspora.

The experiences of these first and second generation immigrant women are voiced by the women writers of diaspora. These women writers of diaspora can be categorized as i) First generation writers of post-independent and postcolonial era ii) Second generation writers in the new millennium.

Among the first generation women writers of the post-independent period before 1980, the prominent Indian English women writers are included. These women writers are late immigrants who paved way for Indian diasporic women writing in the west. Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Anita Desai and
Attia Hossain belong to this group. Most of these writers followed their spouses and their immigrant experiences were hard. Hence they wrote about alienation and displacement, cultural differences and the trauma caused by it, racism and its effects on the psyche of immigrants etc. The writing was not gender specific but it specified immigrant experience in general. Kamala Markandaya's *Nowhere Man*, Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird*, Santha Rama Rau's *Remember the House* are some of the novels belong to this category.

Among the first generation writers who have migrated after 1980, Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Suniti NamJoshi Anita Rau Badami, and Sunetra Gupta are prominent. These are postcolonial immigrants writing mainly about the diasporic issues of home and nation, personal and gender experiences as they are influenced by feminism and postmodern developments. Some of them have migrated independently either for pursuing higher education or career. Woman's experiences are at the focal point in their writing.

In the category of second generation writers in the new millennium, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Amulya Malladi, Atima Srivastava, Sujata Massey are some notable names. Writings of these women writers are centered on the themes of cultural identity, hybridity caused by generation gap, tussle between parents and children of the migrant communities. Thus the diasporic issues seen through the eyes of a woman writer as well as their personal experiences of exile and migration are dealt with in the fictional works of these women writers. Along with the men writers these women writers touch upon immigrant problems like nostalgia,
alienation, home and host situations, identity and dislocation etc., from a woman's point of view. However the female perception differs from the male perception of writers like Salman Rushdie, Rajarao, Amitav Ghosh etc. In the context of Asian American women writing Somdatta Mandal rightly observes the difference between men and women writers thus:

The expatriate women novelists are in a state of permanent migrancy and they transform the pain of dislocation into a celebration where exile helps them to discover new territories of experience (30).

In view of the above statement however, a few notable differences can be taken into consideration here. In the first instance writing for women is an act of liberation and self expression. Most of the women writers have expressed this feeling in their interviews and writing. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, states that, “I started writing only after I had left India. I think distance gave me a better perspective of things, of women caught in an oppressive social system, of conflict between cultures and ways of life (Watanbe 146). For Meena Alexander writing is a mode of self expression and a mark of identification in the state of dislocation. She finds that there is a violent tendency to curb the art of Asian American in USA. Hence her writing has a purpose, “of evoking a chaos, a power equal to injustices that surround us (South Asians)” (Katark 206 qtd in Mandal 19). For Bharati Mukherjee it is a strategy to relocate herself and assimilate in to the mainstream culture of her adopted land. In her interview to Telegraph with Shuma
Raha she says that she writes in order to, “in order to explore what it means to be American” (qtd in Mandal 20). In case of Sunetra Gupta writing is an act of redemption to cope with the stress and trauma of dislocation (Kunapipi 289). Most of these women writers of the second phase postcolonial diaspora are in the process of relocating themselves in the accepted land by way of establishing their identity and opting for assimilation and acceptance in their new-found situation. Writing for younger generation women writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Amulya Malladi, Sujata Massey is an exploration of their diasporic situation and self expression. They are trying to connect themselves to their ancestral home and also give expressions to the predicaments of the second generation i.e., the children born to the immigrant parents. The problems of adjustment between parents and children, hybrid and plural identity are some of the issues voiced in their writings.

Secondly some women writers combine the elements of the two worlds which are contrasting. These elements are the myths, folklore and cultural aspects of their motherland and adopted land. In this memory plays an important role and sometimes it creates an exoticism about their motherland which attracts the attention of the foreign readers. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Bharati Kirchner, Kirin Narayan, Shona Ramya are some of the writers who combine the elements of east and west in their novels. Though they recreate their homelands in their writing like male writers, the portrayals of women are different as they present the lived experiences of women’s world. Perspectives from gender become important in their writing rather than dealing with the critique of politics, history and other
subjects related to the nation as their male counterparts do. For instance, Geeta Mehta’s *The Raj* is a postcolonial political text with comparable authenticity of Indian history during the time of raj presented through the consciousness of the woman protagonist and remarkable for its gender portrayal. Her *A River Sutra* tries to create the pious feeling for the Indian River Narmada in the style of Rajarao, and is an attempt to recreate history and myth. However distance gives them an advantage to stand aloof and critique objectively on the history, politics and culture of their motherland. Latha Rengachari makes an apt observation of this point in her essay, “Debating Expatriate Women’s Writing” in the following terms:

They write of communities and nations not only with nostalgia or disillusionment but critique and review contemporary history and culture of their nations from objective viewpoints of expatriation. These novels emphasize and celebrate women’s perspective and authority as carrier and creator of culture and history. There is nothing that is dramatically radical in these novels, except that the novelist speaks with quite confidence, dignity and strength about their experiences. The novels are explorations of contemporary histories – western and sub-continental – and contemporary societies that are in a state of transition (35).
Another important feature of difference between male and female writers of diaspora is the mode of narration. Women writers in order to convey their experiences of selfhood and liberation adopt narrative technique of autobiography that suits best for self expression. The element of self-conscious is often present in the novels as, "the life-story is also seen as a way of forging political solidarity, reaching out to expatriate women in similar situations from patriarchal societies of south Asia" (Rengachari 36). However, it should not be mistaken here that all the women writers write about their autobiographical facts in their novels and the narrative mode need not be taken always as the true autobiographical facts of the novelists in the female first person narrator of their writings.

The concepts of cultural identity, hybridity and transnationalism are dealt with a difference in women's texts since reasons of expatriation in case of women are different and migration was mainly a male phenomenon before 80s. Besides, in the postcolonial era post 80's the migration of women has a tinge of globalization as expatriation is associated with economic considerations. Many women writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Sunetra Gupta, Meena Alexander have independently migrated for higher studies and career prospects. The campus life of universities, racial and gender bias, new challenges of the new land for the young women are represented in the poems and fiction of Divakaruni, Alexander and Sunetra Gupta. Most of the stories in *Arranged Marriage* and a few poems in *Leaving Yuba City* by Divakaruni, and *The Glass Blower's Breath* and *A Sin of Colour* by Gupta have female characters who represent these experiences of
the writers. These writers have different attitudes toward dislocation which they describe from female gender perspective. Writers like Bharati Mukherjee have turned towards cosmopolitan and transnational identities and wish to assimilate in the main stream culture of the migrated land. Mukherjee’s protagonist Jasmine is illustrative of this fact. Second generation women writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Amulya Malladi, Atima Srivastava negotiate histories and cultures of the land of their parents and their own world of living, to find their identity in the multicultural world. Thus women’s texts are the instruments through which they negotiate their gendered experiences of culture, ethnicity, social and political experiences of diaspora to establish their identity.

The most important difference found in women’s writing is the influence of feminism. The post feminist stage and the concept of gender in feminist theory as a focal point have initiated to explore women’s personal experiences in their writing. This is specifically seen in the writings of the second phase writers from 1980s who dealt with feminist themes. For instance Suniti NamJoshi, a lesbian woman writer, writes about alternative sexuality in her recent novel *Goja*. Her earlier works also have feminist themes. Thus women’s writing differs from the writing of the male writers of the diaspora in their gendered representations of diasporic experiences. It opens up a new channel of diasporic experiences from the woman’s point of view in all the three phases depending upon their state and type of migration and also their attitude towards it. The gender perceptions of these writers are discussed in detail in the next chapter.
Finally as an answer to the question of relevance and the significance of diasporic writing one can agree with the view of Rajendra Chetty who opines that Indian Diasporic writing raises difficult questions on the issues of home and host cultures and their relation to the migrant; it also “address issues of human need and significance and challenge the readers to aplomb deeper levels of thought and feeling” (179). The study of diasporic literature enhances our knowledge of human experiences in alien conditions as it provides greater insights into the native readers as it conveys “the joy of double vision and the pain of being split through and through of carrying a nation on their back as they work through a different history, distant culture and fluid memory which characterizes the diaspora, its Indianness and its experiences” (Pal XV), of which the reader becomes a part. In fact, diasporic literature provides a relevant ground for deeper probe to enhance human knowledge and experience both in the field of academia as well as the general reading public since diaspora combines a multiple disciplines like sociology, anthropology, political science and importantly literature.

Therefore the present study is situated on this premise with a view to offer a fresh ground of analysis on the works of four selected diasporic Indian English women writers of importance in the postcolonial literary context. It attempts an in-depth study of gender perceptions in their fictional works. The feminist perspective here is to study a woman’s point of view or to unearth female sensibility of a woman writer as a creative writer, as revealed in her fictional works.

Perceptions play a vital role in the lives of human beings. They are
instrumental in creating the knowledge of the self and the others, self through the others and others through the self. They are a combination of sensory elements and cognition which create the human knowledge of the things surrounding our world. In other words they form the subjectivity of the self in relation to the world around us. They create the awareness of feelings, emotions and vivid experiences both conscious and unconscious which govern the life of a human subject. Thus perceptions become important for psychologists, philosophers, and literary writers.

However these perceptions are subjective and gender specific as subject is a gendered being in the society. As perceptions vary from one human being to another they also create the category of gender experiences depending on the subject being a male or female. Naturally these experiences form the basis and distinctions among writers as men or women writers whose perceptions differ considerably from one to the other and also their expressions in their literary creativity even though they live in the same society under similar circumstances. Therefore the present study deals with gender perceptions of women writers in their literary works which are typical images of a given society and given social milieu depending on the experiences of the woman writer. These perceptions are analyzed here from feminist perspective since feminism and gender are closely related. However the term 'gender' is a wider category and has different connotations in different disciplines like sociology, anthropology, literature etc. Hence it is desirable to see the connotations of the term gender in feminist literary criticism in which sense the term gender is used in the present thesis.

25
In its revived phase from 1970’s onwards the word gender becomes an inseparable part of feminist literary movements. Gender and sexuality are the two widely used terms in the feminist literary criticism. “The term ‘gender’ has been used since early 1970s to denote culturally constructed femininity and masculinity as opposed to biological sex differences” (Jackson131). Whereas the words “sexuality and sex” refer to the biological sexual divisions into male and female and which encompasses “erotic pleasure, activities, desire and identities” (132). Sociologically gender is defined as “the socio-cultural definition of men and women, the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles” (Bhasin1). Gender plays a key role in forming individual identity, self perception and perception of others by us or of us by them. Since it is attached to the biological sex it attributes the qualities to the respective sex and the females are considered feminine and males are masculine.

Ann Oakley was the first feminist scholar to use the concept of gender, by distinguishing between biological sex and gender as, “Gender is a matter of culture, it refers to the social classification of men and women into ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’” (qtd in Bhasin 2). She in turn borrowed this term from Robert Stroller, a psychologist and emphasized: “Masculinity and femininity are defined not by biology but by social, cultural and psychological attributes which are acquired through becoming a man or a woman in a particular society at a particular time” (Jackson 133). This accounts for the term gender that it is socially and culturally given and differs from society to society besides being a wider term to
encompass more than male and female sexes. Determining 'gender roles' or 'gendering' takes place within the family and society which is known as the process of socialization which according to Ruth Hartley involves the processes of manipulation, canalization, verbal appellation and activity exposure (cited in Bhasin). According to Jennifer Marchbank, “gender matters because it denotes hierarchy, one in which men usually dominate over women and often also over younger men” and it also “refers to economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female” and “this hierarchical system is usually referred to as patriarchy” (10), which is major ground of resistance for feminist theories.

As already noted feminist approach to gender is different from sociological approach and meaning even though “feminism has been configured as an ideological category that promotes gender equality and emancipation. Although feminist concerns may be the province of both the genders, historically women participated and invested in its discourse more prolifically than men” (Phoca 56). The use of the word in feminism stresses on femininity at the centre stage because as Dale Spender explains, “fundamental to feminism is the premise that women have been ‘left out’ of codified knowledge: where men have formulated explanations in relation to themselves, they have generally either rendered women invisible or classified them as deviant” (cited in March Bank 4).

It is Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement in The Second Sex, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (267), conceptualized the idea of gender as
social and cultural construct from feminist point of view. However, according to feminists like Juliet Mitchel, Freud’s psychoanalysis theory bore the genesis as he was the first to put forth the idea that gender is a social construct that forms the identity of male and female as ‘gendered subject’ by following the fear of castration by the father. His “account of sexuality as socially and not biologically constructed and his theory of the unconscious” were important for feminists to explain the construction of gender and also negate the inferiority of female subject position due to biological essentialism (Morris 94-95). Thus gender becomes an inseparable part of feminist ideology and feminist criticism has the following objectives:-

1) Questioning the patriarchal ideology that marginalizes women on the basis of gender.
2) Constructing selfhood by negating the male dominance
3) To achieve the gender equality in all walks of life.

Surrounding the whole debate on gender, the present day feminist critical theories are evolved to fight gender discrimination or its representation in literature as a resistance to patriarchy. Feminism involving the concept of gender becomes a major critical tool in the assessment of women’s literary achievements. Pam Morris suggests that literature offers a social insight into human experience and sharpens our perception of social reality. So her definition of literature is useful in the study of the literary texts by the female writers:
Literature is normally used to refer to a body of texts that are perceived to have certain aesthetic qualities; this body of writing is often also called the literary cannon'. Secondly 'literature' is also an institution which is embodied primarily in education and publishing. And, finally 'literature' is a cultural practice involving the writing, reading, evaluation, teaching and so on of the literary canon (6).

The literary texts therefore help us to understand the ways of society including women’s problems, life around us and the world. Feminists are interested to study the literary texts which are representations of perceived knowledge in words and language. The gender perceptions of a woman writer, formed by her surrounding world and her own lived experiences represented in her literary work will prove valuable as her works reflect the society she lives in, in a given time and a given social milieu. However in applying the feminist theory of criticism to women’s literary works, it is to be essentially noted that all women’s works are not feministic. The basic division of “feminine, feminist and female” the terms of Showalter in her book The Literature of Their Own are important to be taken in to consideration in the context of present thesis. Interpreting the terms “Toril Moi defines ‘feminism’ as a political position, ‘femaleness’ as a matter of biology and ‘femininity’ as a set of culturally determined characteristics. The words ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ says Moi are ‘political labels’” (Singh 73).
Hence a female writer may not be essentially a feminist in her concern and her works may not be feminist texts. Nevertheless for a female writer her gender is crucial in determining her experiences of life which may be diverse and different than that of a male writer which brings her work still in the purview of feminist writing. It is this attitude that the present study adopts in the reading and analysis of four women writers of Indian diaspora. Female gender perceptions are essentially put to analysis in relation to their works. As K.K.Ruthven holds in his *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction* that:

> Every critical method is a scanning device for picking up particular types of information, which it logs by means of a technical vocabulary specially invented for this purpose. The point of inventing a new device is to reveal what was previously invisible, and in that way to articulate a new kind of knowledge.... Feminist criticism is a scanning device in this sense it operates in the service of a new knowledge which is constructed by rendering visible the hitherto invisible component of ‘gender’ in all discourses produced by the humanities and social sciences (24).

At the same time he also offers that feminist criticism can have pluralistic approach with different dominant literary theories like Marxism, structuralism, deconstruction etc. Keeping this in view the study therefore adopts the approach
of postcolonial theory in the analysis of gender since the writers belong to
postcolonial Indian diaspora. It is with the adoption of the above theoretical frame
work viz feminist approach to gender in the postcolonial situation the study of
the writers will be undertaken in the whole thesis.

The four women writers chosen for this study are Chitra Banerjee
Divakaruni, Sunetra Gupta, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai. All these women
writers are diasporic writers as three of them have settled down in the USA and
one in the UK. These women writers through their works have carved a niche for
themselves among the creative writers in the country of their settlement as well as
have brought laurels to their native land or ancestry by being recipients of
prestigious literary awards like Pulitzer and Man Booker. As women writers, their
perceptions of men and women and the lived experiences of their surrounding
world differ from the male writers of diaspora though they share common
problems like identity crisis, alienation and estrangement, rootlessness and
hybridity and such other problems of migration. This study attempts to unearth the
woman's point of view in their fictional work. The point of view becomes relevant
since women writers also form the part of the literary tradition.

Though there are several acclaimed women writers in the present Indian
diaspora like Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Anita Desai, Suniti Namjoshi,
Meera Syal etc, for this research work the choice is made from the point of view of
vividness in diasporic representation of post colonial Indian English writing, since
these writers represent two different phases of diaspora. As such there are
similarities and contrasts in their writing, which represent different political, social and cultural aspects of the ever changing globalized world. The study also becomes relevant in the present context of Indian Women Writing as these diasporic women writers also belong to the Indian English literary tradition by being a part of its diaspora. As women writers they contribute to the continuity and growth of Indian writing in English by providing us different perspectives and world views, by offering an insight into the diasporic life of the immigrant Indian women.

The structural arrangement of the thesis is as follows: The Introduction provides background analysis from which the theoretical framework of the thesis is adopted for this study. Beginning with an introduction to the theory of diaspora it undertakes a brief literary survey of diasporic Indian English literature in general and women writing in particular. This is followed by a short discussion on the term gender from feminist approach which includes the genesis and development of feminist theory on gender. It then pinpoints the ideological framework adopted for the thesis with the aims and objectives of the study. The Introduction is followed by six chapters. The first chapter introduces the feminist theory of both western and Indian and the gender ideology used for the framework developed for the thesis. It also provides a brief literary survey of Indian English women writing and diasporic women writing with gender specific themes. The next four chapters are dedicated to each individual writer chosen for this study and the sixth chapter
makes comparison and contrast of the works of all the four writers. The last part is conclusion which aims to observe the objectives of the study being fulfilled.

The schema is as below:

**Introduction** - The Introduction provides the background to the theoretical adopted for the thesis. It is followed by six chapters.

- **Chapter I**  - Feminism an Ideological background.
- **Chapter II** - Home and abroad: Woman centered fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.
- **Chapter III** - Trauma of dislocation: Women in Sunetra Gupta's Fictional works.
- **Chapter IV** - The woman of next generation: Diasporic delineations of gender in Jhumpa Lahiri's fictional works.
- **Chapter V** - Man's world in woman's vision: Perceptions of gender in Kiran Desai's Fiction.
- **Chapter VI** - A Comparative Analysis of the works of Divakaruni, Gupta, Lahiri and Desai.

**Conclusion** - Observation of aims and objectives fulfilled in the study and its relevance and utility.

**Bibliography** - A Select bibliography.
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