Introduction

The concept of diaspora goes back in human history and was initially used by the ancient Greeks to describe their spreading all over the then known-world. For the ancient Greeks, it signified migration and colonisation. The term ‘diaspora’ is derived from Greek word diaspora meaning a ‘scattering.’ It comprises the preposition dia meaning ‘through’ or ‘between’ and the verb speiro signifying ‘to sow’ or ‘to scatter.’ If we combine the two (dia+speiro), it means ‘completely scattered.’ Robin Cohen in his book *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, observes: “For the Jews, the Armenians and the Africans who later adopted the term, the concept implied more painful meanings of loss of a Homeland, violent deterritorialisation and longing for return” (Cohen X). For long the term, ‘diaspora’ was connected narrowly to the migration of the people of the Book, the Jews, from Israel to all corners of the world. Their history was represented through narratives of retribution and loss and often symbolised in European texts through the iconography of a wanderer or wayfarer whom even God had rejected. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), with its characteristic homage to the written word locates the first use of the term in *Deuteronomy* (xxviii, 25), the fifth book of the Hebrew Bible, where we find: “Thou shalt be a diaspora (or dispersion) in all kingdoms of the earth.” As such, from the original reference to the scattering of Greek, Jewish and Armenian people, diaspora has come to signify more metaphorical journeys of people from their original homes to other places for the purpose of dwelling and working there. Now, ‘diaspora’ implies the people living outside their traditional homelands. The recent opening up of the word to signify the lives of “any group living in displacement”
(Clifford 302) has been a phenomenon that probably marks a postmodern move to dismantle a logocentric and linear view of human affairs that connected narratives and experiences to specific races and to origins. In its widest sense, the term ‘diaspora’ connotes the evolution of all human civilization and culture as the primitive human was located in Africa and her progeny spread/dispersed to several sites of human societies all over the world rendering the human condition, even temporally, a diasporic one. Philosophically too, separation from God/paradise (in Judeo-Christian tradition), our home, as a result of the fall, constitutes a diasporic situation. Bill Ashcroft finds the very origin of the term political as it connotes a “voluntary or forcible movements of the peoples from their homelands into new regions” (Ashcroft 68). From this perspective, the twin projects of colonialism and empire-building were “radical diasporic movements.” (Ashcroft 69)

While European settlers spread across the world as colonizers and conquerors, the natives of Africa and Asia were sent across the dark waters initially as slaves and indentured labourers. After the abolition of slavery, the colonial powers devised a new strategy called the indenture-system to get the uninterrupted supply of cheap labour from the colonised countries. According to Ashcroft, “This involved transporting, under indenture agreements, large populations of poor agricultural labourers from . . . areas such as India and China, to areas where they were needed to service plantations. The practices of slavery and indenture thus resulted in world-wide colonial diasporas” (Ashcroft 69). The Indian indentured workers called girmityas² formed a substantial part of the minorities in the West Indies, Malaya, Fiji, Mauritius and the colonies of the East and South Africa. It is worthwhile to mention here that Gandhi as a girmit³ (or, “on an
agreement”) himself mobilized the disparate and despair-ridden *girmityas* in South Africa for at least twenty one years (1893-1914) (qtd. in Paranjape 68). In his *Autobiography*, Gandhi writes: “Thus God laid the foundation of my life in South Africa and sowed the seed of fight for national self-respect.” (Gandhi 117)

When Gandhi landed in South Africa, he saw the Indians—both indentured and free—to suffer indignities of racial abuses of all sorts. In order to mobilize the Indians politically, he carefully exploited the feelings of alienation, nostalgia, possession of mythical memories, etc. pervading the *girmityas*. Sudhir Kumar observes that

> The diasporic discourse is largely political as it involves an unequal power-relationship. Gandhiji was, perhaps, the first Indian thinker-activist to have realised this fact. Therefore, he never pleaded for a pure homeland for the Indians. What he wanted was a mutually shared and sharable socio-cultural space in the racist South African communities.”

(Kumar 70)

This makes Gandhiji (several decades before a Homi Bhabha or Spivak could theorise the hyphenated/ interstitial spaces) the first practitioner of the diasporic hybridity. Through his words and deeds both, he showed as to how well this ‘hybrid condition’ could be used for political empowerment of the most deprived diasporics. In other words, he based his diasporic discourse on the terra firma of the ‘here’ and ‘now’ dealing with matters of everyday concern. Gandhi’s narratives of diasporic imaginary have inspired the making of some of the important texts of diasporic consciousness such as Giriraj Kishore’s *Pahla Girmitya*, Raja Rao’s *The Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi* and Satendra Nandan’s *Lines Across Black Waters*. Giriraj Kishore’s Hindi novel *Pahla Girmitya*
(1999) has not only won several awards for its sensitive portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi's South African sojourn, but is remarkable for highlighting a new reading of Gandhi as a kind of indentured diasporic himself. Satendra Pratap Nandan in his essay “The Adventure of Indenture: A Diasporic Identity” and Sudhir Kumar in “In Gandhi and the Diaspora Question: Histories, Texts and Readings” have dwelt on this idea of Gandhi as a member of the diaspora. That the father of the nation was also a member of the diaspora forces us to redefine the relationship between Diasporas and nations.

II

According to Vijay Mishra, South Asian Diaspora can be classified into two categories—Forced Migration to Africa, Fiji or the Caribbean on account of slavery or indentured labour in the 18th or 19th century, and Voluntary Migration to U.S.A., U.K., Germany, France or other European countries for the sake of professional or academic purposes. He observes that “The first diaspora consisted of disprivileged and subaltern classes. Forced alienation was a one way ticket to a distant diasporic settlement” (Mishra 25). As in the days of yore, the return to homeland was next to impossible due to lack of proper means of transportation, economic deficiency, and vast distances, the physical distance became a psychological alienation, and the homeland became the sacred image in the diasporic imagination of the authors too. Mishra further says that

The first [diaspora] is the moment of classic capitalism, “before the world was thoroughly consolidated as transnational” (Spivak 245), the movement, that is, of cheap labour—slave and indenture—for the production of raw materials as well as luxury items for the growing British and European bourgeoisie. The second is
the moment of late capitalism with economic migrants and refugees entering the metropolitan centres of the ex-Empire as well as the New World. (Mishra 25)

But the second diaspora was the result of man’s choice and inclination towards the material gains, professional and business interests. It is particularly the representation of privilege and access to contemporary advanced technology and communication. Here, no dearth of money or means is visible rather, economic and life style advantages are facilitated by the multiple entry visas and frequent flyer facilities.

Thus, Mishra classifies the Indian diaspora as the “old diaspora of exclusivism” (of plantation or classic capital or modernity) and “the new diaspora of the border” (of late modernity or postmodernity)” (Mishra 26). The old broke of contact with India which, consequently existed for it as a pure imaginary space of epic plenitude as may be gleaned from the reactions of the older generation of characters in V.S Naipaul’s magnificent novel *A House of Mr. Biswas*. The new is the complex and internally fissured community of Indians, notably in the U.S., Canada, Britain and Australia that has been able to keep in contact with India through travel, video films and digital technology generally. The new diaspora also occupies a desired space in the dream-world of wealth and western luxury. But it is also the space where a new form of racism is on the rise and where race and ethnicity get dragged into debates about multiculturalism. This new diaspora includes critics like Spivak and Bhabha, novelists like Rushdie, Mistry and Vassanji, and filmmakers like Hanif Kureshi, Mira Nair, and Deepa Mehta.

Santosh Sareen in his paper entitled “A Home Everywhere: The Consciousness of Diasporic Belonging,” points out that there have been four major movements involving
Indian migrants: (1) the indentured labour that built for the empire; (ii) the seekers, who went mainly to the west in search of security, freedom or identity (iii) the aspirants, who went again to the west in search of opportunities and prosperity, and (iv) the re-migrants who, for self-preservation, had to move from where they had arrived, from India to another locale such as Uganda, to UK and USA and the Fijians to Australia. Then he goes on to analyse Satendra Nandan's *Lines Across Black Waters* (1997) and *The Wounded Sea* (1991). Sareen demonstrates that

Nandan's poetry is not only about himself but also about his father's generation. His father's/grandfather's generations would derive consolations from the exile of Lord Rama in Ramayana and could never travel back to India. Nandan's grandfather told him stories about Indian kings, gods, flora and fauna, to such an extent that even in Fiji he looks at everything from an Indian perspective. So, an ordinary river of Fiji becomes the Ganga and, hence, he does not feel alienated. Thus his origin, his Indianness is within him and he sees everything in Fiji from that vantage point.” (Sareen 83)

On the other hand, in his inaugural address, J. C. Sharma points out two obvious reasons of migration—extreme poverty and unemployment on the one hand, and forced migration for the development of plantation and agricultural economics of the colonies under western control on the other. Providing the data of Indian migration to Mauritius, Caribbean, Fiji, Malaysia, U.K., U.S, Canada and West Asia, he observes thus:

Indian migration spread all over the world was not only entirely peaceful but also considerably influenced and enriched these peoples socially, politically, culturally
and helped them boost up their economics. Indians in the First World proved highly productive in Medicine, Engineering, IT, Teaching, Commerce and Industries. (Sharma 21)

He also observes that the Indian government by accepting and implementing the recommendations of Singhvi committee, by granting dual-citizenship and conferment of Parvasi Bhartiya Samman has ushered in a new chapter in the history of the relationship between India and the Diaspora.

Makarand Paranjape in his essay “Displaced Relations: Diasporas, Empires, Homelands,” says that “The south Asian diaspora is more than eleven million strong. Though smaller than the African or the Chinese diasporas (supposed to number approximately two hundred million and thirty million respectively), it is more widely spread across the world and varied” (Paranjape 2). People of Indian origin now reside in over seventy countries, across all the continents of the world—from Surinam to Singapore, from Canada to Australia. Its members come from several regions of India; they profess about a dozen religions and belong to hundreds of castes and sub-castes. From Surinam to South America to Fiji in the pacific, there are sizeable South Asian population spread across the globe.

Nevertheless, the point is whether it is Guyana, Surinam or Guadeloupe or Mauritius, all these have become, as it were, case studies since each community is experimenting in different ways of coping with the experience of leaving the homeland. At the same time, the nature of the diaspora, its cultural location and politics, consequently, depend on the nature of the host, not just on that of the diaspora.
Diasporas, despite their common origin, may behave in a totally different manner depending on their country of relocation. As Avtar Brah has observed, “the diasporic experience is determined by who is it who travels, where and how and under what circumstance. The diasporic experience is a composite one made up of collectiveness, multiple journeys, still points and border crossings. Experiences are shaped by economic positions, personal skills and political relationships between country of adoption and origin.” (Brah 82)

The host country’s immigration laws, legal system and cultural openness or otherwise is equally important. The migration to the United States has been, on the whole, in pursuit of better material prospects, and naturally economic crisis in Europe has accelerated the process. Thus, a calamity like the Irish potato famine engendered a massive influx of migrants from the country concerned. Another impetus came from the political persecutions that led to exile and the quest for freedom and shelter. The persecutions of Jews in the Czarist Russia, the Russian revolution of 1917, the holocaust in Hitler’s Germany, and the descent of the so called Iron Curtain (signifying the fight based on ideology and geopolitical borders that divided Europe) after the Second World War, intensified the process of migration to the United States.

The purpose here is not to offer an overview of diaspora in its multiple forms but rather a discussion of literature concerning the emergence of the Indian diaspora in Canada and the United States. For South Asians, the desirability of North America, especially the United States, as a destination for (temporary or permanent) emigration derives to a great extent from the illusory idea of it as a place where wealth is available to everybody. This aspect of the “American Dream” 8 is persistent, and it was evoked in
a recent article in *The Hindustan Times* entitled "USA: Land of Opportunities" (30 May 2007):

The idealized prospects have drawn increasing numbers of South Asians to the United States and Canada to study, to work, and to live. All in all, since the mid-1960s the structure of immigration into North America has changed, and the emphasis has shifted from Europe to Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

(Grewal 4-5)

II

**Diasporic Literature**

Diasporic Literature involves an idea of a homeland, a place from where the displacement occurs and narratives of harsh journeys undertaken on account of economic, or other compulsions. Though in the age of technological advancement which has made the travelling easier and the distance shorter, the term ‘diaspora’ has lost its original connotation and yet simultaneously, it has also emerged in another form healthier than the former. At first, it is concerned with human beings attached to the homelands. Their sense of yearning for the homeland, a curious attachment to its traditions, religions and languages give birth to diasporic literature which is primarily concerned with the individual’s or community’s attachment to the homeland. Jasbir Jain in her essay on "The New Parochialism: Homeland in the Writing of the Indian Diaspora," rightly observes:

Diasporic writing today whatever mode it adopts, and whatever temporalities it relates to, is still primarily concerned with the contingent of being. The contemporary diasporic writer-intellectual functions quite differently from the
diasporas of the past. Migrancy has never been so central as it is now and perhaps not even as privileged. (Jain 79)

During the last hundred years or so different phases diasporic movements can be discerned—take for instance, the migrants from the white culture to another where the self was not threatened by the uprooting. No one from Henry James, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Joseph Conrad, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright to Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor and Saul Bellow to Arthur Miller is an exception to this trend. Interestingly, there was a reverse migration of American writers to London and Paris, starting with Henry James and Gertrude Stein. James found England to be a more congenial place for literary endeavours and showed in his novels, perhaps for the first time, a strong sense of contrast between the American and the European cultures. The treatment, however, is more ethical than psychological. Ezra pound and T. S. Eliot, who followed James to England, and Edith Wharton and Ernest Hemingway who joined the circle in Paris, further moved on to Italy, Spain and so on, with Hemingway going back to mother country. However, none of them engages James’ major themes.

In fact, Europe had its own tradition of exiled writers. As such, there was the Irish Diaspora with George Bernard Shaw moving to London and Joyce and Becket settling down in France. Bernard Shaw retained a sneaking admiration for the Irish as demonstrated in the plays like The Man of Destiny. But it was mingled with unsparing satire as in John Bull’s Other Island. Joyce remained preoccupied with Irish themes in works like A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses, but Ireland was not really set against France. Beckett, of course, became the “extraterritorial” and “unhoused writer” (Steiner 1971) writing in French but selecting abstract ‘unlocalised’ setting
instead of engaging the predicament of the Irish in France. In fact, the other exiled 
European playwrights, Ionesco and Adamov who lived in Paris, the great heaven of 
asylum seekers invariably preferred the abstracted settings typical of the Theatre of the 
Absurd. Perhaps it is the 19th century England in the poetry of Robert and Elizabeth 
Browning or for that matter Shelley that we can see traces of nostalgia for the homeland 
and contrast between the situation at home and abroad. Interestingly other great ‘exiled’ 
writers like Byron or later on D. H. Lawrence never became preoccupied with this theme. 
Away in Norway, Ibsen spent years in exile but did not really engage the theme in his 
major works from A Doll’s House to When We Dead Awaken. There are several 
characters exiled at the metaphorical level, like Stockman from his civic society in An 
Enemy of the People or old Ekdal from sophisticated social circles in The Wild Duck, but 
Ibsen does not really dwell upon exile from Norway, cultural differences or nostalgia for 
the home country.

Conrad, the major writer of central European origin to settle down in England, 
shows extensive “multiculturalism” in his fiction and often contrasts civilizations, but his 
dominant concern is the encounter of the western man and the Afro-Asian countries, i.e., 
the so called third world. He is not really preoccupied with the state and the mind of the 
Poles settled in England. Their nostalgia and the longing for the homeland and their sense 
of alienation in the country of adoption are hardly prominent in Conrad’s fiction. 
Perhaps, the absence of sharp contrasts between various national cultures or the existence 
of a shared cultural heritage in Europe, especially western and central Europe, accounts 
for the comparatively easier assimilation of these immigrants in spite of linguistic barriers 
and therefore, these concerns are sidelined in much of their writing. But assimilation was
never so easy a task for the South Asians. Issues pertaining to race, colour, community and language have been causing impediments in the process of assimilation.

**Indian Diasporic Writings: An Overview**

As compared to the white migrants to the USA, England and Europe, the Indian diasporic writers notice a more pertinent cultural difference which, of course, may lead to a cultural disorientation. In the absence of a shared cultural heritage, the differences become rather sharpened; the home country acquires a romantic glow. One feels insecure and has to fight against the possibility of an identity crisis. Erich Fromm's concept of "social psychology" may provide some insight into the mind of the immigrants. In his book *The Fear of Freedom* Fromm observes that the basic human/social needs are those of relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, identity and social orientation (Fromm). When an Indian is transported to an alien culture of the west, her/his needs for relatedness and social orientation are not fulfilled and s/he leads an unhappy life as a consequence. The growth of civilisation often entails replacing security by freedom. It is a process akin to child birth, a child giving up the security of the womb for the comparative freedom of the world. Fromm also compares it to the Fall of Man when the security of the Garden of Eden is replaced by the freedom of the fallen world. As P. K. Sinha in his article "The Indian Diaspora in the West and the Literary Imagination" observes: "The communitarianism and the family organisation when replaced by western individualism leave a void which is not easily filled up especially because of differences in value systems." (Sinha 199)
Many of the novels from South Asia are replete with diasporic consciousness which comprises social reality, longing for the native land and feeling of belonging. The novels such as *Train to Pakistan, The Dark Dancer, Azadi, Ice Candy Man, A Bend in the Ganges, Twice Born, Midnight’s Children, Sunlight on a Broken Column, Twice Dead, The Rope and Ashes* and *Petals* abound in the same tragic tale of woe and strife from different angles. Most of the South Asian fiction has post-colonial times as its backdrop. After a long battle for independence when these South Asian countries were liberated, partition occurred as another bolt from the blue. This theme became whys and wherefores of the most of South Asian novels. Partition was the most traumatic experience of division of hearts and communities. There is a fine blend of longing and belonging, of multiplicity of perspectives and pointed nostalgia, of mirth and sadness, and of Sufism and Bhakti epitomized in the work of Aga Shahid Ali. Similarly the novels of Rahi Masoom Raja (in Hindi) narrate woeful tale of partition, the foul play of politicians, the devastated form of the nation and its people after partition and longing for the home that has been.

Evidently, the diasporic consciousness, as some critics aver, presupposes the predominance of such feelings as alienation, dispersal, longing for the ancestral land, remembering myths related to homeland, identity crisis, protest against discrimination and a double identification with the originary homeland and adopted country. Makarand Paranjape in his “Valedictory Address” on “Interrogating Diasporic Creativity: The Patan Initiative” says that “India is an idea; the India of mind and spirit, not a territory only, and Indian diaspora has a mystic relation with the homeland. Indians abroad, like Jews, will never be able to forget their motherland.” (Paranjape 43-44)
Assimilation was never so easy a task for the South Asians. In a chapter entitled “The New Empire within Britain” in *Imaginary Homelands* (129-138), Rushdie pointed out that racism manifested a crisis of culture in the country of adoption. He writes: “British thought, British society has never been cleansed of the filth of imperialism . . . even British-born blacks and Asians are thought of as people whose real home is elsewhere” (Rushdie131-132). The land of hope to which they migrate often turns out to be a living hell of racial discrimination. Rushdie further observes: “A gulf in reality has been created. White and black perceptions of everyday life have moved so far apart as to be incompatible . . . . We stand on opposite sides of the abyss . . . while ground crumbles beneath our feet. . . . Britain [is] now two entirely different worlds, and the one you inhabit is determined by the colour of your skin” (Rushdie 134). This reality is far removed from the dream of equal cross-cultural relationships and transplantation to a new culture. Jasbir Jain in her article “Memory, History and Homeland: The Indian Diasporic Experience,” opines that

The immigrant or the diasporic self is simultaneously open to two epistemologies, two histories and two social realities. There is the history (and the memory) of the colonial past and the racial discrimination, which jostles with the native history of resistance and freedom struggle. Two systems of knowledge and two sets of cultural influences construct identity and the socio-economic reality of both the societies confronts the self. (Jain74)

As such, we see that there are several complex issues that relate to the diasporic self/consciousness. As Edward Said has pointed out that you “always feel outside in some way” (“On Palestinian Identity” 172). For Rushdie too, being Indian outside India is a
daily questioning of the self (*Imaginary Homelands* 17). There are also people like Naipaul who travel because they are not-at-home anywhere. V. S. Naipaul remarkably portrays the search for the roots in his novel *A House for Mr. Biswas*: “to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one’s portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one has been born, unnecessary and accommodated” (Naipaul 14). Similar is Mohan Biswas’s peregrination (journey) over the next 35 years as he was to be a wanderer with “no place to call his own” (Naipaul 40). In the same manner, Rushdie’s *Midnight Children* and *Shame* are “the novels of leave taking . . . from the country of his birth (India) and from that second country (Pakistan) where he tried, half-heartedly to settle and couldn’t” (Aizaz Ahmad 135). For Vassanji’s protagonist, Ramji in *Amriika*, home is Africa where his grandmother is and where he grew up, while homeland is India (Vassanji 124).

In times of conflict, acceptance of dual citizenship is not easy. There may have to be a daily choice as to which side you are, a constant conflict between heritage and citizenship, between patriotism and practical considerations. Jasbir Jain observes: “It is not very different from the state of schizophrenia and friction which writers like Nayantara Sahgal and Nirmal Verma have described as ‘states of being in a colonial regime’.” She further talks about the two aspects of diasporic experience- positive as “it reflects Indian-ness, history and identity” and negative since “it acts like a buffer” rendering us invisible on account of its greater visibility. So much so that “It obstructs our view and silences our voice. Even at times the diasporic vision becomes culture-blind, distant, prejudiced, may be frozen and static.”(Jain77-78)
But Paranjape in his book *In-Diaspora: Theories, Histories*, observes that while the old diaspora was cut off from the motherland, the new diaspora has “unprecedented access to it by virtue of its privileged Non-Resident Indian status” (Paranjape 10). Not forced to leave the motherland, these writers have chosen to relocate themselves in the metropolitan centres chiefly for economic gains. Therefore the texts of the new diasporic writers not only describe the motherland, but also justify why it has to be left behind, as Rushdie says, that “literature is self-validating.” (*Imaginary Homelands* 14)

As such, we can say that while the pre-independence Indian writer abroad worked through nostalgia, memory and a possible dependence on Indian philosophy, creating a mythical past from them or alternatively a return to India and a “redefining of the self,” the writers of the post-independence period work through other constructions which can be “broadly categorized as: exotica, history, fantasy, collision and use of third space” (Jain 82-83). Jain places, Shona Ramaya’s novellas *Beloved Mother*, and *Queen of the Night* (1993), Anita Desai’s *Journey to Ithaca* (1996), and Ruth Jhabvala’s *Shards of Memory* (1995) in the first category. Kamala Markandaya’s *The Golden Honeycomb* (1997), Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1962), magic realism in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and realistic mode in Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* (1995) in the second category. Amitav Ghosh in *In an Antique Land* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Vassanji in *The Book of Secrets*, Sunita Namjoshi in her novels such as *Feminist Fables*, *The Conversions of Cow*, and *Mothers of Maya Diip*, Kiran Desai in *Strange Happenings in a Guava Orchard* and Salman Rushdie in *Midnight Children* all resort to the fantasy mode. Contrasted with these is the novel of cultural collision, marked by bewilderment, a sense of shock, withdrawal or adaptation. First generation and second generation writers both
have written such novels where problems of adjustments and cultural differences are reflected. These are narratives of personal choices, of characters growing up and learning to cope with the problems. Farhana Sheikh’s *The Red Box* (1991), Meera Syal’s *Anita and Me* (1996), Bharati Mukherjee’s *Darkness, Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughters* are some of the novels in this category. Moving away from these are the novels using a third space which writers like Michael Ondaatje, Amitav Ghosh and Ashish Gupta have resorted to in *The English Patient* (1992), *In an Antique Land* and *The Toymaker from Wiesbaden* (1993) respectively. These novels move outside both the cultures of origin and that of adoption. But none of these writers is able to sustain this at length. Sooner or later they return to their home ground.

An overview of these novelists indicates that none of the above paradigms is exclusive or definitive but they do emphasize the fact that diasporic writer, like all other writers, has to reinvent himself constantly and work out new strategies to relate to his experience and then narrate it. Moreover, one cannot opt out of one’s origin as it will definitely surface either obliquely or directly. Theorising the dynamics of diaspora-homeland relationship Paranjape asserts “that not only homelands create diaspora but diaspora also creates homelands.” He further elaborates how diaspora shaped the history of Indian freedom movement and offered “a varied and interesting site of constructing and deconstructing the nation” (Paranjape 43-44). Thus, creativity in order to be significant needs to be about engagement not merely with one’s ‘self’ but also with the ‘other.’ It may have its traumas, its anguish and challenges, but finally it is not about enclosures but open spaces; it is about intermingling and interruptions. This is how
newness enters the world. This intermingling is one value which can be used to evaluate the diasporic experience.

Diasporic writing in India is a genre that was constructed in various ways. While on the one hand, it can be said to be a distinctive genre within the wider scene of post-colonial (transnational/cosmopolitan) discourse, on the other, it is not a monolithic, homogeneous genre but a complex, multifaceted field with a marked emphasis on inter/cross-cultural connections. The works of various authors like Kuketu Mehta, Amitav Ghosh, Tabish Kher, Agha Shahid Ali, Sonali Bose, and Salman Rushdie confirm a hybridity between diasporic and domiciled consciousness. As Ashcroft observes: “They are national not nationalistic, inclusive not parochial, respecting the local while being ecumenical, celebrating human values and Indian pluralism as a vital ‘worldliness’” (Ashcroft 31-56). Nevertheless, we need a contextualized understanding of diasporic Indian English writing and not just of diasporic discourse.

Despite complexities, there have been some indications that South Asians are beginning to carve out space of their own within the Asian America. This has been happening even in the literary field where it is manifest in the inclusion of Indian authors in several anthologies of Asian American writing such as *The Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American Women’s Anthology* (1991) edited by Shirley Geok-Lin Lim et al., along with *Yellow Light: The Flowering of Asian American Arts* (1999) edited by Amy Ling. One would like to be optimistic with Kuortti that “With the recent replacement of cultural pluralism, by multi-culturalism and of the melting pot by the salad bowl at least in North America, one can hope for a more frictionless and fulfilling existence for the Indian Diaspora” (Kuortti 13). One of the significant developments in the US over the past
decades has been the revisioning of the literary canon, that had once been white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant and predominantly male. This meant, not only the incorporation of female authors as well as writers of various ethnic minorities who were or would have been neglected or undermined previously, but also a radical change of direction in the selection process. (Sakardal, 1985)

The study of diaspora has become a more open-ended field of enquiry, less clear cut and no longer principally based on the Jewish paradigm of expulsion and return. It is now a vast project canvassed under various names through a variety of strategies. A brief list of its chief theorists would include Stuart Hall (black hybridity and diasporic empowerment), Paul Gilroy (diasporic flows and spaces), Homi Bhabha (diasporas as sites of a postcolonial counter aesthetic), Rey Chow (the Chinese diaspora (and questions of translatable), Gayatri Spivak (subalternity and transnationality), Edward Said (exile as the intentional condition of being "happy with the idea of unhappiness"), The Boyrian brothers (diasporic deterritorialization as the exemplary state of late modernity), William Safran (Diasporas as part of narratives of centre and periphery), James Clifford (diasporas as double spaces/sites), Appadurai (diasporic mobility and migration as the condition of the future nation state) and Radhakrishnan (the presencing of a double consciousness in an ethnic definition of diasporas). This summation does not take into account substantial and serious studies on the construction of nation-states undertaken by E. P. Thompson, Ernst Gellner, and Anthony Smith, E. J. Hobsbawm, Partha Chatterjee, Benedict Anderson and many others.

In the crisis of the present context, diaspora has made a dynamic comeback in the debates around ethnicity, nationality and nationhood, boundaries and identity. A concept
that has transformed in time, diaspora has returned to address and assist the understanding of migration, post-migration and reterritorialisation, people's multiple senses of belonging and loyalties beyond national boundaries. Marie Gillespie in *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change* (1995) argues that Diaspora has become “an intermediate concept between the local and the global that nevertheless transcends the national perspectives”. (Gillespie 6)

Thus diasporic writers with their stylistic devices and thematic concerns differ from other writers. They use English language with an unrehearsed and remarkable naturalness. Their contribution to the growth of the English novel has tremendous significance both qualitatively and quantitatively through their efforts. It is being acknowledged as a powerful medium to understand the nuances and, intricacies of both the eastern and western cultures. These writers investigate the life of individual when rootless and helpless in a culture distant and alien; he struggles for purpose and direction of life. Since these writers have experience of both the culture their account of east-west cultures assumes meaning and adequacy.

IV

Though writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, V. S. Naipaul and several others have excelled in the delineation of issues related to diaspora, women writers have also provided insights, a wealth of understanding, and a reservoir of meanings by handling diverse issues pertaining to diasporic predicament. As a matter of fact, we can see a different world through the eyes of women writers and can seek to realize the potential of human achievement through their help. One of the reasons that so many women have
taken up their pen is because it has allowed them to create their own world alongside responding to the world around them their way. It has also allowed them to set the conditions of existence free from interference of men. Similarly, so many women have taken to reading women's writing because it allows them a safe place from where they can identify with a range of characters and a variety of existences. Even though Indian woman did not have to struggle like her American counterpart for universal suffrage, she had to strive to attain recognition of her individuality and acceptance of an existence even beyond her "gender-based" roles by the society. In fact, patriarchy has been compelling the Indian woman to be totally subservient to the male in social as well as economic spheres. Indira Nityanandam opines: "The Indian women did not enter a phase of bra-burning-libber movement nor did she take extreme stance of a misogynist. Instead she attempted to effect a slow but sure change within her own home" (Nityanandam11). It is this change in the Indian woman that provides mainstay for much of the fiction written by women in post-independence India.

More than any other genre of literature, it is in fiction that women attempted to portray their capacity to introspect realistically. In earlier fiction written by male novelists in particular, women have been represented more as symbols and less as people in a uni-dimensional manner—either as virgin-heroine or temptress, the dutiful daughter, or all sacrificing mother, pativrata or redundant widow. The position and importance of women characters in fiction were determined and restricted by societal mores which no one questioned. As male writers by and large presented an idealised concept of womanhood, most of their women characters never approximated the real woman of the times and did not have a pivotal role in such fiction. The male writers were governed by
the general notion that "woman is innately weak, emotional, enjoys dependence, and is limited in capacities of work" (Karen Horney 231). These women characters could be epitomes of virtue or beauty or sensuality but never real women. Their obvious passivity doomed them to a secondary position and a life of submission and pushed them further into stereotyped roles which the male writers and characters envisaged for them. These women characters, like women writers themselves, belong to "a womanhood that has been for centuries... stilled into silence." (Wattal 14)

Even though the earliest fiction in English by Indian women was written as early as the middle of the nineteenth century (the first generation Indian women novelists include Toru Dutt, Raj Lakshmi Devi, Mrs. Swarnakumari Ghosal, and Cornelia Sorabji and Krupabai Sathanathan), post-independence fiction by women achieves a separate identity. It would be unfair and unrealistic to suggest that women have never been portrayed realistically in fiction. However, it must be stressed that this period witnessed an upsurge in fiction written by women who are aware of their individuality, their aspirations, their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Women's writing in the 20th century moved towards a modernist medium wherein feminist statements were combined with political messages. The writings of women such as Hamsa Wadkar conveyed an honest impression of a world of professional women whose careers in television and stage segregated them as a class apart, yet subjected them to the same brutality and force of patriarchy. Women writers such as Mahashweta Devi combined women's causes with political movements. Others such as Shashi Deshpande built a platform of universal female experiences examining the experiences of women coming from different echelons of society. There is an endless list of the women novelists such as Kamala Markandaya,
Anita Desai, Shobha De, Nergis Dalal, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Malati Chendur, Gauri Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Ruth Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, etc. Their novels are marked by complete departure from the way fiction was written traditionally and is characterised by boldness, forthrightness and candour to the core. There is a substantial element of resistance and protest and an enormous slant toward issues pertaining to gender discrimination and the position of women in society.

There are many Indian women writers based in the US, Canada, Britain and other parts of the world who write about their situation in cross-cultural contexts, states of in-betweeness, and the theme of migration that leads to self-discovery with a negation of traditions of the country of origin is recurrent one among migrant authors. The east-west encounter along with the clash between tradition and modernity is the impulse behind the works of acclaimed migrant writers such as Meera Syal, Anita Rau Badami, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Uma Parameswaran, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana, and Kiran Desai. With the announcement of Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* as the 2000 Pulitzer Prize winner for fiction, the literature of the South Asian diaspora has attained official recognition as a part of the American literary tradition. This is not to say that Lahiri is the first member of this immigrant group to make an impact on the American literary scene.

The name, in fact, that is best known in this context is that of Bharati Mukherjee who won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1988, and whose works have become part of the America’s multicultural canon. Mukherjee’s work, however, especially since the award-winning *The Middleman and Other Stories*, has consistently focused on issues of migration from an American perspective. Bharati Mukherjee, “the
clear eyed but affectionate immigrant in American Society” (Steinberg 47) has become a
celebrity for her distinctive approach to expatriatehood as a metaphysical experience of
exile and as an agent of attitudinal change, both in the minority and the majority cultures.
Her concern transcends the run-of-the-mill issues pertaining to cultural shock and
adjustment problems to encompass existential angst. It is not that she does not touch the
issues related to traumas involved in a separation/disengagement from one culture to
another but she also talks about transcending the diasporic predicament. Bharati
Mukherjee considers herself different from other European writers as she says:

I am very different from other non-European writers in saying that, to me, the loss
of old culture is exciting. Is exhilarating. Is a plus rather than a minus. Just
describing the extraordinary wealth and comfort that was natural part of my
childhood—and which I would have inherited, in whatever damaged ways, if I
had stayed on in India—made me realize that I was thrilled to have the
opportunity to give it up, to assume a new identity. That kind of Third World
hierarchy where your opportunities are closed by caste, gender, or family was
horrendous to me. (“Interview” with Karen Moline)

The common thread that runs through her fiction being examined here is initially half­
hearted and later successful attempt to acclimatize oneself to the new society and in the
process retaining one’s individuality. Unlike Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai who
dealt with Indian immigrant situation as one of conflict and adjustment without much
understanding, “Bharati Mukherjee gives it a new, challenging perspective enabling the
immigrants to emerge out of their diasporic predicament into the openness of assertion
and say that they do belong” (Dhawan 169). From the limited sphere of the traditionally
ordained roles of daughter, wife and mother each of Mukherjee’s female protagonists strives for an identity of her own. She seeks to explore the promise of American style individualism and female liberation alongside negotiating the burden of old world responsibilities and cultural ties signalling female oppression. According to Sushila Singh, “Mukherjee employs frontier myths to project the psychological and cultural development of female protagonist who physically and metaphorically travels towards western philosophy. They achieve this not by being brazen feminists or iconoclasts but by a gradual process of introspection and self-realization” (Singh 65). Interestingly, these women are neither rebels nor conformists, neither trail-blazers nor self-effacers. In their reaction to role conflict in a patriarchal society, they show the strength to achieve their goals of self-realization.

Feminism in the 21st century has come a long way from Simone de Beauvoir’s petulant complaint in 1948:

This humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him, she is not regarded as an autonomous being . . . . She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.” (Beauvoir, 86)

Reinforcement for this exclusionary and devalued imagery in relation to women can be found in Creationism—Eve as part of Adam, or in Freudianism—“women as incomplete,” human beings missing critical parts of their bodies and obsessed by their incompleteness.” Komarovsky in Women in the Modern World (1953) observes that
“to be born a woman means to inhabit, from early infancy to the last day of life, a psychological world which differs from the world of men.” Millett, a fighter for gender equality for long, elaborates the same point: “Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different.” (Sexual Politics)

According to Karen Offen, the concept of feminism encompasses “ideology” as well as “movement” to effect change at socio-political level based on critiquing “male privilege and women’s subordination within any given society” (Offen). Cuddon defines feminism as an attempt to interpret/reinterpret women’s experience as represented through different genres of literature and also “questions the long standing, dominant, male, phallocentric ideologies (which add up to a kind of male conspiracy), patriarchal attitudes and male interpretations in literature (and critical evaluation of literature)” (Cuddon 338). Like gender theorists, feminists also argue that gender differentiation/discrimination is cultural rather than biological and that domestic roles assigned to women only, is due to “cultural practices and consequent pattern of socialization” (Sudha 2). Feminism challenges the politics of socio-culturally assigned roles in which women are by and large disadvantaged and also reacts to sexist bias against women alongside contesting traditionally gendered role playing. We may say that woman is in no way inferior to man and that the hoax of inferiority of feminine gender is a socio-cultural construct—neither natural nor immutable. It is a clever creation of patriarchal mindset, which is not an absolute/unquestionable given; it can be deconstructed and challenged. Rather than typecasting gender stereotypically, the sexual politics inherent in it needs to
be exposed to understand as to how gender differentiation is theoretically postulated and how it is made to obtain in the socio-cultural praxis.

Chaman Nahal elaborated thus: "I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. . . . When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materialises" (Nahal 30). Thus as a philosophy of life, feminism opposes women’s subordination to men in the family and society, along with men’s claims to define what is best for women without consulting them thereby “offering a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organisation and control mechanisms” (Sushila Singh 65). The present day feminist thought seeks to destroy masculinist hierarchy. It is necessarily pro-woman, but this does not mean that it has to be anti-man. It advocates women’s rights, status and power on a par with men on the grounds of equality of sexes.

Feminism in Bharati Mukherjee’s female protagonists is equipoised to make them vibrant and flamboyant in the sense that it challenges the politics of socio-culturally assigned roles in which women are by and large disadvantaged. It also reacts to sexist bias against women alongside contesting traditionally gendered role playing. Each one of the characters is an individual. Even though the element of feminism does not come through harshly, Mukherjee’s characters do have a tinge of feminist attitude in them which, rather than making them arrogant and dismissive, makes them resilient and adaptable. The power inside each one of them which is dormant at some point is forced out to make its presence felt. The very aspect of femininity and vulnerability turns into pulsating self-empowerment, which helps them move forward in life. The metaphor of
‘Shakti’ is used ingeniously to project the power within and it has been highlighted in each of Bharati Mukherjee’s works. Her mother being an inspiration for her, Bharati Mukherjee believes that her writings can have an impact on the readers. Talking about this in “Being a Woman writer” to BBC World Service, she says:

I use my mother who in her very, very quiet way in a hostile crowded household in Calcutta made sure no matter what the physical cost to her body that we three sisters got the best education. That’s the kind of feminism, quiet but full of action that I have adopted as my motto. What I want to do is change the world, make people alert to the good and the bad and if at all possible, provoke them to see everyday life in a fresh way and then make it happen through social action, political action in real life after they’ve finished my novel. (Mukherjee 1)

The influence of her mother, a strong-willed lady who is not subjugated to the atrocities of society, is etched on Bharati Mukherjee’s mind. The strength that she gained as a child, the nurturing qualities of her mother (that is evident in the character of Jasmine) fashioned Bharati Mukherjee’s overall personality. The resilience power inherited from the parents enables her to take an unwavering stance in life which sees her through all the experience in Canada and North America and helps her in her delineation of powerful characters in her works. In one of her articles on “Key influences and themes” she says:

When I’m writing I’m not conscious of anything other than getting in the skin and into the skill of my character but when I’m finished with a draft and look at it to realise that very often it’s about mother-daughter relations and about the formation of a very strong woman. And that strength may sometimes express
itself in negative and violent ways but I still think of all my characters as women
who’ve asserted themselves according to their own improvised moral code even if
they murder or hurt other men who’ve hurt them earlier, the hurt that they inflict
comes out of their own very precise sense of Right and Wrong. (Mukherjee 1)

The female protagonists seem to spread all over Mukherjee’s fictional canvas. In fact,
theirs is a life size projection whereas the male counterparts hardly seem to get to inch
into the scene. The strength in the female leads, the feminist attitude, especially in
Jasmine, Holder of the World and Leave it to Me, leaves the reader bemused. It feels as if
the female characters are metaphorical extensions of Bharati Mukherjee herself. She has
tried to bring together all types of temperaments in her fiction to work out the mental and
physical interaction within the female mind. The complexities of human feelings have
been delineated through her characters.

Bharati Mukherjee was born on July 27, 1940 in an upper-middle class Hindu
Brahmin family in Calcutta. The second of three daughters of Sudhir Lal, a chemist, and
Bina (Banerjee) Mukherjee, she lived with 40 to 50 relatives until the age of eight (Alam
1). Born into an extraordinarily close-knit and intelligent family, Mukherjee and her
sisters were always given ample academic opportunities and thus have all pursued
academics in their careers and have had the opportunity to receive excellent schooling. In
1947, her father got a job in England where he brought his family to live until 1951. This
gave Mukherjee an opportunity to develop and perfect her English language skills. The
dominant influence on Mukherjee’s early years was that of her father as she reveals in an
interview given to Canadian Fiction Magazine, he was “an extraordinary man . . . very
much the benevolent patriarch” who “wanted the best for his daughters. And to him the best meant intellectually fulfilling lives.”(Alam 1)

Mukherjee earned a BA with honours from the University of Calcutta in 1959. Then she moved to Baroda (India) where she did her Master’s degree in English and Ancient Indian Culture in 1961. Having planned to be a writer since her childhood, Mukherjee went to the University of Iowa in 1961 to attend the prestigious Writer’s Workshop. Her father, Sudhir Mukherjee seemed to have shaped Bharati Mukherjee’s decision to be a writer, not only by imbuing her with his belief in “the power of the word” (“Interview” 1987; 39) but also by “taking the initiative in sending her off to the Writers’ Workshop at the University of Iowa” (Alam 2). She planned to study there to earn her Master of Fine Arts and then return to India to marry a bridegroom of her father’s choosing from her class and caste. However, a lunch break on 19 September 1963 changed that plan, transferring Mukherjee into a split world, transient with loyalties to two cultures. She impulsively married Clark Blaise, a Canadian writer, in a lawyer’s office above a coffee shop after only two weeks of courtship. She received her Master’s in Fine Arts the same year and thereafter went on to earn her PhD in English and Comparative Literature from the University of Iowa in 1969.

In 1968, Mukherjee immigrated to Canada with her husband and became a naturalized citizen in 1972. Her 14 years in Canada were the hardest as she found herself discriminated against and treated as a member of the “visible minority” (Mukherjee: “Voices from the Gaps”). She has spoken in many interviews about her difficult life in Canada, a country that she sees as hostile to its immigrants and one that opposes the
concept of cultural assimilation: “In Canada I was frequently taken for a . . . shoplifter, frequently assumed to be a domestic and praised by astonished auditors that I did not have a singsong accent” (Mukherjee *Darkness* 2). Although those years were challenging, Mukherjee was able to write her first two novels namely *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1971) and *Wife* (1975) while living up to her professorial status at McGill University in Montreal. During those years she also collected many of the sentiments found in her first collection of short stories namely *Darkness* (1985) that in many sections reflects her mood of cultural separation while living in Canada.

Finally fed up with Canada, Mukherjee and her family moved to the United States in 1980 where she was sworn in as a permanent US resident. She continued to write and was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant in 1986. After holding several posts at various colleges and universities, she ultimately settled at the University of California, Berkeley in 1989. Because of the distinctly different experiences she has had all through her life, Mukherjee has been described as a writer who has lived through several phases of life—first as a colonial and later as a national subject in India. She then led the life of an exile and also of a post-colonial Indian in Canada. Finally, she shifted into a celebratory mode as an immigrant and then as citizen in the United States. “She now fuses her several lives and backgrounds together with the intention of creating a ‘new immigrant literature’.” (“Being a Woman writer” at *BBC World Service*)

Having written two novels and a collection of short stories, in 1988, Bharati Mukherjee wrote a controversial and thought-provoking essay on “Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalist.” Published in *The New York Times Book Review*, it focussed
on the American fiction and its policy of immigration. With this piece, Bharati Mukherjee not only established herself as a decisive voice in the US multiculturalist debate, but also “consolidated her position as one of the best known South Asian American writer.” (Grice 83)

The questions argued by Bharati Mukherjee revolve around the position of the new Americans from non-traditional immigrant countries. Being a multiculturalist country for a very long time, the literary imperialism still does not adequately reflect on the existence of its multicultural society. The question which is asked by her in the essay is, “But where in fiction do you read of it? Who in other words, speaks for us, the new Americans from non-traditional immigrant countries? Which is another way of saying, in this altered America, who speaks for you?” (Grice 83)

All through her fiction, Bharati Mukherjee has been discussing the condition of Asian immigrants in North America with particular attention to the changes taking place in South Asian women in a new world. While the characters in all her works are aware of the brutalities and violence that surround them and are often victimized by various forms of social oppression, she generally draws them as survivors. She sees immigrants who are confident, sophisticated and poised as ones who will not melt into an American mainstream but visibly expand the margins of what one may call ‘the American experience.’ The main strategy is adaptation without surrender. To honour their potential and vitality, Bharati Mukherjee formulates her “Maximalist” credo:

I can imagine a poster over the United States Court House: WELCOME MAXIMALISTS, HELLO EXPANSIONISTS. The New America I know and
have been living in for the last seven years is a world, by definition of doubles . . .

They have all shed past lives and languages, and have travelled half the world in
every direction to come here and begin again. They are bursting with stories, too
many to begin telling. They have lived through centuries of history in a single life
time . . . village born, colonised, traditionally raised, educated. What they have
assimilated in 30 years has taken the West ten times that number of years to
create. Time travel is a reality . . . I have seen it in my own life. Bionic men and
women are living among us. (Mukherjee; “Maximalist” 29)

As such, Bharati Mukherjee in her essay has distinctly categorized the two types
of American literary circulation, as “minimalism” and “maximalism,” the former
concentrating on fictions revolving around subjects like mid-life crisis, childlessness,
divorce and prevalent hazards in the society like drugs and AIDS. Maximalist fictions
evince the experiences of the immigrants, their emotional upheavals characterized by
change. Immigrants who have shelved their past lives, culture and language, rummaging
through new realms, live through centuries of history in a life-time. These form a basis of
myriad themes for the novels of Bharati Mukherjee.

Instead of viewing the immigrant experience as burden, Mukherjee celebrates it.
She claims herself to be labelled as an “American writer and her writings mirror the
social and historical reality of America’s demography and experiences” (Mukherjee;
“American Dreamer” 1997). Her two essays, “American Dreamer” published in Mother
Jones in 1997 and “Two Ways to Belong in America” in New York Times in 1996 are
contentious pieces on policy of immigration and citizenship in America. “American
Dreamer" has more of personal musings upon Bharati Mukherjee's life and her transition, her marriage to Clark Blaise, moving to Canada, the turbulent years spent there and her sabbatical year in India that changed her decision to become an immigrant and proved a pivotal moment in her life, innervating her evolution as an individual and as an author. Her continuous self-assertion regarding her status as an immigrant and her viewing it from America's point of view somehow proves her undoubted allegiance to her new homeland. Bharati Mukherjee vehemently denounces the terms such as ‘melting pot’ and ‘cultural mosaic’ in terms of immigrants infiltrating and changing America. She prefers to discard the notion of centre versus periphery and favours the paradigm of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality, “one that will think of American culture and nationhood as a constantly reforming, transmogrifying ‘we’ that is a labile and plural communal identity” (Grice 85). The label of ‘Asian American’ writer is also rejected by Bharati Mukherjee rather vociferously as it is replica of “hierarchical model of ethnic relations” (Grice 85). A question that recurs through her novels is infliction of hyphenated existence on the non-white American. To quote Mukherjee: “Rejecting hyphenation is my refusal to categorise the cultural landscape into a centre and its peripheries; it is to demand that the American nation deliver the promises of its dream and its constitution to all its citizens equally.” (Mojowire 3-4)

Mukherjee has been criticised by many critics for shrugging off her own Indianness. During her 1989 tour of India, she refused to answer questions about her Indianness several times. Yet the audience saw her sari-clad, dark-eyed, dark haired, retaining an obvious Bengali-Brahmin name, and heard her use Indian material in the extracts she read from her fiction. One can easily find the echoes of Indian English and
Indian sensibility in her novels. She explains her position to Jerry Pinto in “Bharati but
American” in The Sunday Times:

I think my position has been misunderstood largely in India. I insist on being
considered an American writer because I want America to realise that in the late
20th century there can be no American Centre and periphery . . . I am fighting the
American establishment to be regarded as central. I want to destroy the whole
notion that Asians, or people of different colour are ‘sojourners’ whereas those
who arrived in America from Germany or Sweden are ‘settlers.’ It’s also a way of
resisting exoticisation. (Pinto 2)

The dual experience of immigration provides challenging subject for Bharati Mukherjee
to dwell on in her novels.

Bharati Mukherjee has authored seven novels till date, two books of non-fiction
and two collections of short stories including The Middleman and Other Stories for
which she won the National Book Critics Award. Her 2002 novel, Desirable Daughters
has been hailed as “an amazing literary feat and a masterpiece of storytelling” by Amy
Tan. From The Tigers Daughter (1972) to The Tree Bride (2004) it has been a long and
consistent journey into the complex yet vivid world of, feminine needs, compulsions,
obligations, responsibilities and above all individuality. Her female protagonists are seen
striving for an evanescent experience of the reality of the outside world vis-à-vis the
internal reality. In order to seek psychic harmony amidst their existential despair and
anguish, they strive towards arriving at a more authentic way of life, a more meaningful
living for a concrete feeling of relatedness.
There are at least two implications of survival that readily come to mind in this context. Firstly, the term 'survival' invokes some sort of social Darwinism signifying the survival of the fittest. We have known how Darwin's observations were manipulated to rationalize unjust occupation, conquests and domination. The application of Darwin's theories to social processes has had hazardous implications. In this sense, 'survival' becomes synonymous with upward mobility and success. Secondly, we recall Margaret Atwood's theorization of survival in the context of Canadian literature. Atwood argues that the central symbol for Canada is "undoubtedly survival, la survivance" (Atwood 32). Survival in this sense is primarily human struggle to cope with the hostilities of nature. In the former sense, the survivor is a victor and survival, a conquest of sorts. In the latter sense, however, it is associated with victim position and an instinct for self-preservation. Atwood's theorization is more relevant in the context of the present dissertation since South Asian immigrant women (writers) also occupy an embattled space marked by multiple marginalization. Survival, in their case, is primarily the need to survive the shock of uprooting and this is followed by an incessant struggle to surmount the obstacles to one's assimilation into or comfortable adaptation to the new environment.

Diasporic predicament may be better conceptualized as a case of rupture and disjunctive crisis. "This rupture and crisis acquire an extra edge of urgency and poignancy in the case of female immigrants because for them diasporic living entails double distancing/ double exile" (Vijayasree 132). Therefore, consequences of migration are specifically different for women and men. The present dissertation focuses on the psychological and socio-cultural predicament of the female protagonists in the novels of
Bharati Mukherjee. She contrasts the paradoxical pattern of social limitations and spiritual freedom in India with the social freedom and spiritual limitation of life in the adoptive land/ new world. There is an ironic conflict between the eastern concept of fate and human destiny and an American concept of self-making in the heroines of Bharati Mukherjee. Their predicaments have a lot to do with nostalgia and discovery: "how much of original culture to let go and how much American culture to embrace." (The IOWA Review 1990)

In recent years, Bharati Mukherjee's work has drawn considerable critical attention. Many books, essays, articles and full-length studies have been done on her novels. Fakhrul Alam in Bharati Mukherjee: Criticism and Interpretation (1996) presents a detailed analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's work on her immigrant experiences and her contribution to the study of cultures and modern fiction. The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Cultural Perspective by Nagendra Kumar is a full length study of Mukherjee's creative corpus from a cross-cultural perspective. The book presents an exhaustive account of the major concepts of culture and traces the nature of formative influences on her psyche. Mukherjee's fiction has been examined in three well-marked phases — Expatriation, Transition, Immigration—in three substantive chapters. The quality of cultural conflict in all its multiplicity forms the crux of her accomplishments as a creative artist. The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Cultural Perspective marks a milestone in the critical scholarship on the Third World literature. Another important contribution to criticism on Bharati Mukherjee is by Sushma Tandon in her book Bharati
Mukherjee’s Fiction: A Perspective (2004). This study analyses her novels starting from The Tiger’s Daughter (1972) to Desirable Daughters (2002) thereby focusing on the struggles, pains and joys of the immigrants trying to realise their dreams in America. In The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Symposium (1996) edited by R. K. Dhawan, Mukherjee’s fiction has been critiqued as the contemporary woman’s struggle to define herself and attain an autonomous selfhood especially in cross-cultural crisis, a subject which has assumed a greater significance in the present world of globalisation, as observed by scholars like Christine Gomez, F. A. Inamdar, Shobha Shinde, Ananda Prabha Barat, S. Indra, Jaiwanti Dimri, S. P. Swain, M. Rajeshwar, A. V. Krishna Rao, Urbashi Barat, Shagufta Imtiaz, Subhash Chandra, Yasmine Gooneratne and Indira Bhatt. In her paper on “The On-Going Quest of Bharati Mukherjee from Expatriation to Immigration,” Christine Gomez argues that in Mukherjee’s writing, there is a discernible movement from the theme of expatriation to immigration. F. A. Inamdar, on the other hand, shows how the immigrants in the two novels try to adapt to American society and how, in consequence, are portrayed as rootless in his article on “Immigrant Lives: Protagonists in The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife”.

Bharati Mukherjee’s characters have been studied from psychological viewpoint as well. S. Indira’s article “Splintered Self: An Approach to Wife” analyses the world of neurotic and solipsistic individual, Dimple, presented by Bharati Mukherjee through a series of grotesque images. In his article “Dimple in Wife: A Study of the Lacerated Self,” S. P. Swain argues that Mukherjee’s treatment of the theme of rootlessness and expatriation is totally different from that of Naipaul and Markandaya. Mukherjee delves
deep into the inner recesses of Dimple’s psyche that moves from a state of mute resentment to an escalating disgust and intolerance which finally culminates in disaster.

Issues related to women are central to the vision of Bharati Mukherjee in her novels *Wife, Jasmine, The Holder of the World, Leave it to Me* and *Desirable Daughters*. C. Sengupta article “Feminine Mystique in *Jasmine*” argues that *Jasmine* can be read as a feminist novel where the protagonist rebels not only against age (old superstitions and traditions), but also effects a proper balance between tradition and modernity. The novel celebrates the strength of a woman, not her weakness. She advocates many faces of feminism encompassing agitation for equal opportunity, sexual autonomy and right to self-determination. Mukherjee’s depiction of women and their different relationships portrays the dominance of patriarchal practices in traditional society as well as the forms of liberation and empowerment which are available to women in their diasporic situation.

As evident from the foregoing critical survey, Bharati Mukherjee’s fiction has been appropriated from diverse perspectives but how her female protagonists transcend diasporic predicament consequent upon encountering a new world, has eluded due critical attention. The present scholar believes that since it forms the very core of her fiction, it deserves to be critiqued at greater length and hence, this dissertation that seeks to analyse her novels from *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1972) to *The Tree Bride* (2004) mainly focusing on the experiences of her female protagonists. Since no full length study has been done from the viewpoint of how the female protagonists face and transcend diasporic predicament in Mukherjee’s fictional universe in her entire fictional corpus, it is hoped
that the present dissertation will be of great interest for the academic community in India and abroad.

The trajectory of Bharati Mukherjee’s own life lends authenticity to her female protagonists as they are metaphorical extensions of her own self and present a slice of her personal experience back home and abroad. Through most of her female protagonists, Bharati Mukherjee demonstrates that survivor is the one who improvises and adapts according to the changing circumstances and not the one who plays by the rules. She views herself as individually unique and portrays her characters in the same light. The success of any interpersonal relationship depends on the autonomy and strength of each participant. This dissertation seeks to examine primarily the growing relationship between the Indian expatriates and the West. It aims at working out the diasporic predicament especially in respect of Bharati Mukherjee’s female protagonists who suffer a sense of predicament as they try to start life afresh in the new milieu.

Even though these novels focus on Indian characters, they cross all sorts of cultural boundaries thereby connecting all of us through common, deeper human experience. In the present project, the term ‘transcending’ has been used in the sense of ‘moving beyond.’ Diasporic predicament on the part of Mukherjee’s female protagonists comprises the way the protagonists deal with the struggle against the unfamiliar peoples and places, the pain of leaving the familiar and transplanting oneself into the new and different socio-cultural surroundings. An attempt will be made to trace the stages of growth of the protagonists via dealing with issues pertaining to gender, sex, and socio-economic status of women characters along with their psychological dilemmas with a
view to underscore human and para-gender considerations that by and large stand obliterated.

The first chapter has been titled as "Roots: Locating the Female Protagonists" and it deals with the roots/ locale of the female protagonists in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee before they are dislocated/ displaced from their native land, cultural conditioning, consciousness, dreams and aspirations and the circumstances which impel them to move out. The second chapter entitled "Disengagement: Challenges and Problems" undertakes the study of the female protagonists who upon getting disengaged from their cultural roots and entering into a new socio-cultural setup, have to face different problems and challenges. Most of Mukherjee’s characters are Indian either by birth or heritage. They span different generations and continents and have different reasons for migrating into a new culture such as taking up a job or joining a school. The female protagonists find themselves at their wit’s end on account of newer world that seems to be absolutely out of joint on many accounts. Most of them find it hard to come to terms with their diasporic predicament as they remain torn between attachment and alienation, desire to live and the wish to die, need for recognition and the self-effacement drives at an inner level, and an attempt to say ‘no’ to the reality of life and striving hard to find the method and means to live it.

Chapter 3 has been entitled “Negotiating New Space” and it focuses on the question of identity. The protagonists who are all Asians and settled abroad are afflicted with a sense of exile. Their experience of the lack of a sense of belonging makes them resolve to negotiate new cultural space meaningfully. The heart breaks and aces of acculturation are not absent but at the same time strong will to adapt as well as adopt also
makes its presence felt. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to enquire into the cause and nature of the psychic states that impel the protagonists, to develop self-protective tendencies and also to employ different strategies for survival.

Being natural corollary of the subsequent chapters, chapter 4 has been entitled “A Movement Beyond.” It deals with the female protagonists’ transcending the diasporic predicament that they have to undergo consequent upon their expatriation to an alien land. Transcending implies ‘a movement beyond’ without getting stuck in the mire of hostile and unfavourable circumstances in the adopted land. This movement also points toward the integral growth of her protagonists from socio-economic, psychologic, religious-spiritual and cultural perspectives in the light of Jungian postulation of the individuation process. Muklherjee’s female protagonists after going through the traumas and tribulations evolve into mature beings. It’s not that they achieve something extraordinary, but certainly achieve an equilibrium that enables them to transcend the diasporic predicament, and are at peace with themselves and the world around.

NOTES

1 Here, the attempt is not offer an overview of diaspora in its multiple forms but rather aim for a discussion of literature concerning the emergence of South Asian diaspora. For history and typology of diaspora, see Robin Cohen’s. Global Diasporas: An Introduction.

2 The term girmit was the corrupt form of the English word ‘agreement’. The indentured labourers were those who went to Natal on an agreement to serve for five years, and came to be known as girmityas.
It is significant to remember that the narrative of Gandhi’s autobiography covers a period of about 51 years (1869-1921) and runs into 420 pages. Of these 420 pages at least 270-odd ones (36-310) are primarily concerned with the most crucial and formative years of his life during which, he as a diasporic himself (in England and South Africa), learned to cope with and fight against the structures of oppression and racism by politically and culturally mobilising the Indian diaspora in trying circumstances.

Sudhir Kumar in his essay “Gandhi and the Diaspora Question: Histories, Texts and Readings” ironically points out that the one who historically intervened in the re-construction of diasporic identities in South Africa and experimented successfully with the weapon of truth and non-violence to galvanize and activate the latent political and spiritual potential of the Indian diasporas, stands unnoticed in the diasporic historiography. Gandhi does not figure, for example, in some important contemporary discourses on the diasporic condition, such as Homi Bhabha’s Location of Culture (1994), R. H. Brown and G. V. Coelho’s (eds.) Migration and Modernization: The Indian Diaspora in Contemporary Perspective (1987), Vijay Mishra’s influential essay, “The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorising the Indian Diaspora” in Textual Practice (1996) and M. Carter’s Voices From Indenture: Experience of Indian Migrants in the British Empire (1996).

The designation ‘South Asian’ implies an imagined community, for there is no political or social entity as such. Geographically South Asia comprises seven countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka—but broader
definitions also include Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Tibet. Largely due to statistical reasons and popular imagination, this extended term is regularly conflated with India. (Cooppan 2004)

6 The Singhvi committee is named after M. Singhvi (November 9, 1931-October 6, 2007). He was an Indian jurist, parliamentarian, constitutional expert, scholar, distinguished diplomat. Singhvi was the longest-serving High Commissioner for India in the United Kingdom (1991-97). He was conferred Padma Bhusan in 1998. The Supreme Court of India held the first Dr. L. M. Singhvi Memorial Lecture on “Law, Technology and Society: Its dynamics” on January 17, 2009 delivered by Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, Former President of India. Using a donation by the Trustees of the British Indian Golden Jubilee Banquet Fund, “Dr L. M. Singhvi Visiting Fellowship” is given out by University of Wales and Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, for visiting students and scholars of Indian nationality.

7 The Parvasi Bhartiya Samman Award is the highest honour conferred on overseas Indians. It is conferred by the President of India as a part of the Parvasi Bhartiya Divas Convention organized annually since 2003 on a Non-Resident Indian, Person of Indian Origin or an organization or institution established and run by the Non-Resident Indians or Persons of Indian Origin, who has/have made significant contribution in any field.

8 In the present context America metaphorically symbolises the West that the modern diaspora longs for. However, the fact of the matter is that America now is euphemism for what earlier used to be the West.
To elaborate this point, Makarand Pranjape has quoted the example of the creation of Israel. He says that Israel of course was the creation of the Jewish diaspora in Europe, though with the complicity of the British colonial rule. The British encouraged Jewish state in the middle of Arabia knowingly so that it might be very convenient for the western powers. He goes on to say that this implies to some extent to India as well because the nation that India is, to some extent is Pakistan also, was conceptualized and debated, if not created, in the diasporic community. See “Interrogating Diasporic Creativity: The Patan Initiative” in eds. Kavita Sharma et al. Theorizing and Critiquing Indian Diaspora, 2004, 43-71.

It will be pertinent to differentiate the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. Whereas the former is a biological category and has an ascribed status, the latter has an achieved one as Linda L. Lindsey observes in her book Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective. Writing about gender roles, she defines them as those expected attitudes and behaviours which a society associates with each sex. It attains alarming proportion when ‘female’ as a category is considered ‘inferior’ to male.

The term ‘feminism’ (from adj. ‘feminine’) derives from Latin root femina meaning woman/female. Besides signifying a belief in the social, political and economic equality of sexes, feminism also stands for the movement that advocates equal rights for women, and also an attitude that disallows political, social and professional discrimination against women. It advocates women’s rights, status and power on a par with men on the grounds of equality of sexes. The present researcher has intentionally not gone into discussing movements of feminism in detail (such as first wave, second wave and third
wave feminisms) as the idea here is to provide a broad overview rather than a detailed history of this body of writing.

12 Freud's female colleagues such as Joan Riviere, Karen Horney and Melanie Klein disapproved of his theory of femininity, in particular the female oedipal crisis—the unconscious rites of passage that elicit penis envy in a girl. Karen Horney, however, critiques Freud's theory of female psychology and suggested that "his theory of penis envy was a symptom of male envy and the fear of the womb." She further observes that the "womb envy felt by all men results in the devaluation of motherhood."(Gamble 171-72)

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