

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

He who binds to himself a Joy

Doth the winged life destroy;

But he who kisses the Joy as it flies

Lives in Eternity's sunrise. (OG 288)

Interaction leads to an interface of communication and the barriers of borders and boundaries dissolve. Literature as a mirror image of the society succeeds in lending it a uniqueness with its innovative and distinctive way of projecting the change and thereby reflecting the impact of ever evolving society on the people, culture and world at large. The socio-anthropological, political phenomenon also influence and revolutionise the literary world and the writers as well as artists in their own way start expressing themselves. Historical, biological, linguistic and anthropological approaches adopted by various researchers in the past helped in studying the pattern of migration and it gradually found a place in literature. In the words of Avtar Brah "Each such diaspora is an interweaving of multiple travelling; a text of many distinctive and, perhaps, even disparate narratives."(Brah 180)

The omnipresent phenomena of human geographical mobility is hard to ignore as it is making way for linguistic, social, economical and to a great extent political mobility bringing in lots of shades of interaction and interpenetration. Whether it leads to acceptance or rejection, whether it offers opportunities or rejects conventions one thing is

sure that it gives enormous scope of evolution and expansion. The growth and development, expansion and modification, intensification and escalation all seem to blend with the changed location, time and history. “While globalization thus breaks down even ethnography’s most fundamental sureties, it at the same time offers new freedoms to discover localities where we never looked for them before.” (Lewellen 201)

Because of the ongoing change, confluence of cultures, intersection of identities, a new theory emerged in academic field and literature in the form of diaspora studies encompassing an interdisciplinary approach. The way of life channelized into literature and Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and James Clifford, through their theoretical inventions, played a key role in promoting the diaspora studies. This led to the notion of diaspora as a theory which reflected migration as a process of ‘adaptation and construction’. Brah sees diaspora space as the “intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes.” (178) The deep rooted mixed feelings, sense of belonging coupled with loss, a desire to conform to the pattern of living and also a penchant to contribute to the progress of the home-land of the people living in diaspora found an expression in a new academic field known as the diaspora studies.

In relation to Indian diaspora also, it gained momentum and many writers started writing about their roots and routes which culminated in major literary productions. It was V.S. Naipaul’s penning of ‘traumatic memories’ in *A House for Mr Biswas* that made Vijay Mishra refer to him as the father of old Indian diaspora writing. He later called Salman Rushdie as the harbinger of the new Indian diaspora writing. In his analysis of the novel *A House for Mr Biswas* he has written that a, “novel ( ... ) begins and ends with death within

the confines of a house that encapsulates, allegorically a specifically diasporic negotiation of space in terms of indenture history and its (spatial) sites.” (Mishra 98) A close study of the works of Rushdie in the context of diaspora by Sharmani Gabriel Patricia makes her say: “Rushdie speaks of the possible heterogeneous existence of other Indias- ‘imaginary homelands’, Indias of the mind.” (qtd. in Ray 72)

Diaspora literature explores the basic questions of identity, home, memory, space, nation, belongingness, assimilation, acculturation and transmutation. The basic questions like who am I?, Do I belong here? Am I accepted? What is my identity? reflect in the works of various writers who form a part of the diaspora. The feelings of confusion, mystification, uncertainty, perplexity are the central objects of study and subjects of writings. It reflects an awareness of being different from the majority mainly because of one’s own perception and because of the outside world.

The sense of alienation, separation, distancing, and emotions of anger, confusion, humiliation and fear gets converted into a stream of words. Suppressed distress & anguish brought about by the change in environment creates a distinct and unique sensitivity which gets translated in the writings. ‘Acute Perception’ and ‘responsiveness’ which characterizes sensibility and is marked with heightened emotional expectancy found a projection in the writings of the diaspora, by the diaspora and about the diaspora. In the book edited by Jonathan P.A.Sell entitled *Metaphor and Diaspora in Contemporary writing* (2012) one can find essays which project the recurrence of diasporic consciousness in contemporary writers. Chris Weeden in his study of the novels of Nadeem Aslam points that the tropes of diasporic life are subjected to ‘politics of recognition of difference’, Felicity Hand finds ‘tropes of migrant identity’ characterizing Abdul Razak Gumrah’s novels,

Enrique Galvan Avarez in his essay has analyzed the ‘ancestry, uncertainty and dislocation’ in the novels of V.S.Naipaul and the way the discourse of roots and routes have now become all pervasive. Sofia Mufioz Valdivieso has explored the ‘metaphor of belonging’ in Andrea Levy’s novels. The diasporic subject now itself has become metaphorical trying to seek new meanings.

Diaspora studies capture the apprehensions, anxiety and concerns of the people thereby trying to analyze the depth of dilemma and problem of predicament. The problematic puzzled affairs of the mind, the enchanted and captivated generational differences came to the fore reflecting the entire system of growth and realization. In the words of Scott, “Diasporic artists and writers not only represent, but also transmute, lived historical experiences; and their diasporic “arts of resistance” are important forms of political critique worldwide.” (qtd. in Braziel 163)

Diasporic experience characterized by co-existence of opposites like silence and dynamism, singularity and multiplicity, obvious and vague, individuality and universality, displacement and disorientation, opened up avenues for the poets, novelists, authors, critics to re-evaluate the self through their characters, locations, country, home and many other facets. Grace Daphne has remarked, “Literature is part of the self-referral quest of the human being to express consciousness.” (8) Even Rushdie, in his analysis on consciousness, has stated:

Literature is an interim report from the consciousness of the artist ( ... )

Literature is made at the frontier between the self and the world, and in the act of creation that frontier softens, becomes permeable, and allows the world to flow into the artist and the artist to flow into the world.(qtd. in Daphne 427)

Diasporic literature to a great extent explores not just the physical impact of the journey but it also delves into a higher level of metaphysical journey that transports into the inner consciousness or reality. For instance, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni expresses this in her novel *The Mistress of Spices*: “Sometimes I wonder if there is such a thing as reality, an objective and untouched nature of being. Or if all that we encounter has already been changed by what we had imagined it to be. If we had dreamed it into being.” (MOS 16) The diasporic predicament, dilemma can be summed up in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* which has an abstract as well as a concrete quality. Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison for example have graphically dealt with the African Diaspora (slavery) and its aftermath. Eileen Chang has dealt with the ‘old country’ though for the major part of her life she lived outside her motherland. Contemporary Canadian writing for instance is also marked by a wide variety of diasporic communities from Asia, Africa, South America, Eastern Europe and it has lent uniqueness to the writings. It has become ‘pluralized and globalized’. So writers from all over the world have expressed and explored the diasporic community. It sometimes also serves to act as a mediator between the material and spiritual worlds, between the by-gone and the future sphere of experience and tends to delve into the memory of the past to the thoughts of upcoming potentials.

Along with the world, India too has moved ahead and its writers have unfolded their thoughts in varied forms too. Indian Writings in English has acquired a status of its own. For instance Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan & Kamala Markandeye have been defined as path breakers for their portrayal of contemporary Indian life for dealing with themes of nationalism, partition, poverty, subjugated women, rural urban divide, East West encounter, casteism and communalism. However, there are many Indian

writers who write in English but are labelled as ‘diaspora Indian writers’. It is because they are Indians by birth but have lived outside India for a considerable period of time. Their subject matter relates to their separation from the motherland and explores the diasporic consciousness. They have a dual citizenship. By the world at large such writers are labelled as ‘South Asian diasporic writers’ because South Asia forms the southern region of the Asian continent and it comprises of the countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka which broadly follow certain common practices and traits related to language, color, race and gender .

Diasporic Indian writing is a forum for illuminating the emotional and psychic consequences of immigrant experience and it is also a search for self definition and self-identity. Through an intensive study of diasporic literature one is able to re-discover the commonalities when looked at from a distance. It works as a channel to strengthen the ties by serving as an outlet to the pent up emotions and feelings. Indian diasporic writers have tried to re-invent their birth place by casting the rhythms of ancient legends and exposing the cadences of mythology along with cultural assimilation and nostalgia. Bourdieu’s concept of ‘cultural capital’ and Nora’s views on ‘sites of memory’ with reference to diaspora is important as they study the link of the culture and memories which ultimately defines the identity of diaspora. Tropes of food, religion, custom, rituals occur recurrently as the writers delve into it in a nostalgic mode attend and tend to associate with it their feelings and emotions. It tends to provide them a kind of unexplainable refuge and relief. According to critics, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has ‘exocitized’ India in the *The Mistress of Spices*. Rubenstein (2001) thinks that in the novels of Bharati Mukhejee and Jhumpa Lahiri one can find nostalgia as a reflective predicament that:

Encompasses something more than a yearning for literal places or actual individuals. While homesickness refers to a spatial/geographical separation, nostalgia more accurately refers to a temporal one ( ... ) one can never truly return to the original home of childhood, since it exists mostly as a place in the imagination. (4)

The underlying approach of questioning is the precondition of migration and assimilation; homing is to a large extent evident in diasporic writings. Nostalgia functions as an emotional reassurance, as a bridge between the past and the present, as a path to explore east-west confrontation, and as a channel to relive and remember.

A host of Indian diasporic writers have appeared on the scene like Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Meena Alexander, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Anjana Appachana, Githa Hariharan, Bharti Kirchner, Indira Ganesan, Suketu Mehta, Tabish Khair, and Agha Shahid Ali. Only the writers who were born in India but have migrated and settled abroad have been listed here.

Apart from these, there are several writers of South Asian origin like Preeta Samarasan, Bapsi Sidhwa or writers having Indian origin but born outside India like Jhumpa Lahiri who has articulated the loneliness and the feelings of the second generation immigrants and who get tied up in the predicament of 'none-neither Indian nor western'. M.G.Vassanji and Shauna Singh Baldwin have studied India with multi-layered perspectives. Rushdie has attempted to self-define. Jhumpa Lahiri has tried to decipher rootlessness. Naipaul has touched the chord of two worlds he inhabited. All of them have defined the diasporic writings in various ways. Talking about her own dilemma, Jhumpa

Lahiri, in her interview to Public Broadcasting Service (2008), with Jeffrey Brown has said,

It's what my world is, and I've always been aware of my parents came from Calcutta. I have found myself sort of caught between the worlds of left behind and still clung to, and also the world that surrounded me at school and everywhere else, as soon as I set foot out of the door. (Lahiri n.pag.)

Her focus is the 'mindscape of characters' and 'human predicament' in its wider perspective.

The long and short fictional narratives of Naipaul, Rushdie, and Ghosh have given postcolonial India a global prominence. V.S. Naipaul's characters are individuals who are generations away from their original homeland, but it is the heritage and lineage which make them conscious of their past. In *Imaginary Homelands*, an essay by Salman Rushdie, he has stated, "past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is a part of our greater humanity." (Rushdie 12) Rushdie feels that a diasporic writer deals in 'broken mirrors' some of whose fragments have been 'irretrievably lost' but it is also a useful tool to work in the present. These authors seem to have overcome their deterministic "minority" status to emerge as highly influential contemporary writers in the West. They have the advantage of looking at their homeland from outside. Elleke Boehmer states, "The postcolonial and migrant novels are seen as appropriate texts for such explorations because they offer multi-voiced resistance to the idea of boundaries and present texts open to transgressive and non-authoritative reading." (243)

The themes in the works of these writers are varied and exhibit explored possibilities of dichotomies. Mostly the diasporic theme oscillates between 'yearning backward' and 'looking forward'. Search for identity, double identity, divided selves,

shadow figures persist in the writings of Rushdie. Naipaul pens the experiences of a minority culture trying to adapt to the cosmopolitan society and its impact on his characters. A split sensibility can be noted in his writings. Naipaul's 'unusualness' defines the uncommon experiences which befriends the diasporic community.

Basically the modern diasporic writers, according to the various researchers, are of two types—one who spent a part of their life in India and then moved abroad and the other category that has been bred since childhood outside India. Vikram Seth, for instance, projects the life in modern American society and he has focused on the disintegrating family life. His novels have people who have exclusively lived the life as an American or European as in *The Golden Gate* (1986) and *An Equal Music* (1999). Rohinton Mistry has dealt with the history of the Parsis. He has tried to depict their consciousness, anxieties and aspirations along with problems related to existence of individual. He has also touched upon communal and national issues.

In his novels we can easily find the themes of nationalism, alienation, oppression, human-relationship, fear and temptation. (Gupta 1) He has mentioned, "Memory is a strange thing: when assumed to be dead, it can surprise one by returning to life ( ... ) I refer to those moments which at the time of actual occurrence, may have seemed banal, but which, given the gift of remembrance become moments of revelation." (qtd. in Dodiya 4) Amitav Ghosh, through his novels has tried to give the message that though our culture is heterogeneous but still it is precious and to a great extent utterly indispensable. Tridib, the character from *The Shadow Lines*, conveys a lot in terms of the need for dissolving boundaries. In many of his works, we find the reworking of mythology with history. He says,

One could never know anything except through desire ( ... ) a longing for everything that was not in oneself-that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and ( ... ) to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (Ghosh 29)

Suketu Mehta looks at India in an overwhelming way as an immigrant who returned to India and who feels that the return to one's land is important. For him no one can go 'home' by eating certain type of food and for him home is not a 'consumable identity.' Tabish Khair has expressed his concerns and his experiences of being a minority in his own nation and then by immigrating becoming a 'minority of minorities'. He does not discard this. Infact, he feels that it teaches him to learn how to see and feel. He has tried to explore the coherent identity as a blessing. On the blurb of his first collection of poems entitled *Man of Glass* it has been mentioned that: "His works concerns life and loss, identity and indoctrination, humanity and divinity, and the nature of things and being." In the works of Aga Shahid Ali we find the paradoxical situation of longing and belonging, happiness and sorrow layered with multiple viewpoints of perspectives.

There are many women diasporic writers from India who have excelled in their own way and have enriched the field of Diaspora Literary Studies immensely. As they inhabit a new land, they seem to be torn between the freedom and liberation of Western values and tradition-bound life back in India. Diasporic literature is mainly an output generating from a unique feeling emanating in the minds of people who go through an avalanche of anguishes and emotions while taking efforts to acclimatize to new cultural environment. However the literature is not just subjected to discussions of identity and subjectivity. Krishna Daiya has written, "Feminine voices are strident enough to demand a

worldwide hearing ( ... ) The thrust, both centrifugal and centripetal, lends their literature dynamism and a stir.” (87) Gender is a constitutive element of migration that distinguishes the experiences of men and women. Women writers have seemed to explore their own dilemmas and their inherent traditional values which faced a conflict with the modern society and their liberated views. The women writers seem to be more influenced by the confrontation of the oriental and the occidental contexts.

Meena Alexander who was born in Allahabad of India in 1951 was raised in Sudan and now lives in New York City. She has tried to study the way in which the inhabited place, memory of the homeland, and language play a formative role in identity formation. In her memoir entitled *Fault Lines* her dilemma has come to the fore. In fact, the title itself suggests a questioning of lines, boundaries, definitions of oneself, "I am a woman cracked my multiple migrations. Uprooted so many times she can connect nothing with nothing." (Meena 3) She has written two novels namely *Nampally Road* (1992) and *Manhattan Music* (1997) and a series of volumes of poems. Meena Alexander's works reflect the unrelated and contrasting elements of her tradition and her cultural displacement, concentrating particularly on her status as an educated woman of the South Asian diaspora living and writing in the West. In *Nampally Road* she has expressed that unless women take up the "knife of justice" (90), there is little chance for freedom and justice. The protagonist in *Manhattan Music* is Sandhya Rosenblum. She has migrated from India, gets married to an American Jewish man and goes through challenging conditions. This novel is set in Manhattan and India and Alexander has clearly elaborated on the issues related to the Indian diaspora. Moreover she has also examined interracial affairs and marriages.

Another woman writer Anjana Appachana who was born in Coorg in 1972 now

lives in US and has written one novel titled *Listening Now* (1997). In it, six women tell the story of two lovers, Padma and Karan, spanning sixteen years. The novel is set in Bangalore, Delhi and Lucknow. She has realistically portrayed her women characters. She has shown the complexities with which individuals' life are encompassed but has also laid stress on the pointlessness of their existence perceived totally from Indian point of view. The inner emotional struggles of the characters have been contrasted with the meaningless of life in general. In an article "How I learned my Art" Anjana talks about the process of writing fiction and creating characters:

The joy of writing lies in discovering truths that are otherwise often elusive.

With my characters, I embark on a journey that is unpredictable as it is exhilarating. I may think I know them before I begin, but they often prove me wrong, doing and saying things that take me by surprise. They create my story by being who they are. Therefore, for me, writing is an act of discovery. The world within - the writing world (what I inhabit) is one where I am utterly, completely free. (qtd. in Poonkodhi 42)

Anita Desai, another woman writer, who was born in 1937 in Mussorie, now lives in the US. She has confessed that she 'feels about India as an Indian,' but thinks about it 'as an outsider'.(qtd. in Punia 76) She has written various novels like *The ZigZag Way* (2004), *Fasting,Feasting* (1999) *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1987), *In Custody* (1984), *The Village By the Sea* (1982), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*(1975), *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1969) *Voices in the City* (1965), *Cry, The Peacock* (1963). The way she explores sensibility is noteworthy:

Her central theme is the existential predicament of the individuals projected through the problems of the self in an emotionally disturbed milieu. Delicately conscious of the reality around them, her protagonists carry with them a sense of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. (Swain 164)

Desai's novels give a peek into the life of the people living in diaspora and have focused on the concept of tradition versus modernity. In each of her novels we find the dilemma facing the protagonist and the way displacement enhances and affects their psyche. The novels chart a psycho-analytical journey whereby she has been able to give a totally different perspective to the theory of diaspora.

Githa Hariharan who was born in Coimbatore in 1954 is now based in New Delhi. Her first novel was *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992). Her other novels include *Fugitive Histories* (2009), *In Times of Siege* (2003), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), and *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992). Her novels are replete with the notion of 'identity' and 'self'. The characters travel different time zones and inhabit varied spaces. Their physical journey is paralleled with their mental exploration and the problems which the characters experience are general representations of the crisis faced by society. She revisits and revisions. Her women question the existing social structure.

Indira Ganesan on the other hand was born in 1960 in Srirangam, Tamil Nadu. She published her first novel *The Journey* (1990) and *Inheritance* (1998). She has primarily focussed on the theme of inheritance. For her it is important to be self-aware and have a deep understanding from within rather than search for answers in the outside world. She seems to indicate that immigrancy by itself does not amount to any insurmountable problem.

Bharati Mukherjee was born in 1940 in Calcutta, moved first to Canada and later to the US. She has written several novels like *The Tree Bride* (2004), *Desirable Daughters* (2002), *Leave it to Me* (1997), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Jasmine* (1989), *Wife* (1975), *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971). "It is Bharati Mukherjee who has very explicitly covered all moods of exile namely nostalgia, frustration, isolation, disintegration and uncertainty. Bharati Mukherjee's main concern has been the life of South-Asian expatriates and the dilemma of 'acculturation' and 'assimilation'." (Pokhriyal 7) She has described her American experience and the confluence of two cultures very explicitly in *Darkness*:

I was not right to describe the American experience as one of the melting pot but a more appropriate word would be 'fusion' because immigrants in America did not melt into or were forged into something like their white counterpart but immigration was a two-way process and both the whites and immigrants were growing into a third thing by this interchange and experience. (Mukherjee 3)

Her characters Tara, Dimple, Jasmine try to integrate and assimilate within the new environment. The novel *Jasmine* (1989) expresses Mukherjee's position on the immigrant condition: "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake one self. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams." (Mukherjee 29)

Bharti Kirchner, born in 1940 in Calcutta, now lives in Seattle, US. Bharti Kirchner has written novels namely *Tulip Season: A Mitra Basu Mystery* (2012), *Pastries* (2003), *Darjeeling* (2002), *Sharmila Dancing* (1999), *Shiva Dancing* (1998). Bharti Kirchner's works are also a peek into the way the people living in diaspora undertake a journey to search their roots. Their quest is inexplicable and they get affected by their

location which in turn shapes their identity. She has even penned the way women and especially Indian women who have tried to be successful in America and accepted hybrid identity.

Kiran Desai, born in 1971, has written two novels, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) and *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998). The major theme running throughout is the loss of identity and the way it travels through generations as a sense of loss. She has explored the issues of globalization, economic inequality and terrorist violence with common experience. She celebrates multiculturalism. The same voice echoes in the analysis of her novels:

“With the issues and episodes related to human and cultural hybridity, global multiculturalism, global fraternity, consciousness and wisdom of the masses of this era, Desai presents a wonderful, happy and positive response to colonialism/neocolonialism.”(Bhatt 122)

It is not just nostalgia that binds these writers but they succeed in creating a tradition of the past through their writings. Seven elements underlying the diasporic consciousness including memory, return, strangeness, desire to integrate, transience, desire for permanence, and a sense of belonging and embedding find expression in the novels. They give form and utterance to the hopes and despairs, the enthusiasm and apathy, the joy and pain involving experiences of success and elation or futility and failure. They deal with suppression, frustration, anger, identity crisis, resistance, humiliation and moral dilemmas. They become, “folk historians, myth makers, and custodians of the collective history of their peoples.” (Pandey 126) According to Enwezor (2002), a diasporic text can be examined in terms of location, dislocation and relocation. Debanji Banerjee has remarked,

Contemporary writing from South Asian Diaspora bears the mark of a cultural encounter that combines the rewriting of history with nuanced responses ( ... ) The raw energy of first generation politics is substituted by a more complex response to issues of race and unbelonging. The new writers retort to their attempted marginalization, not by dissolving into mainstream but by rendering their distinctive voices. (10)

It was with the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980), that South Asian authors gained a great deal of prominence and global recognition. Arundhati Roy's success in winning the Booker Prize in 1997 for her debut novel *The God of Small Things* ushered in a great interest in the South Asian Writers. Stories, memoirs and poetry which record the diasporic experiences have ushered in a great number after 1985. The contemporary Indian diasporic writers have made their work documentaries of affect; explored contemporary realities of shifting national boundaries, multiple locations of home, multiracial and multicultural identities by yoking together the local with the global. Abha Pandey in her book entitled *Indian Diasporic Literature* has attempted to understand the complex and intricate web of emotions which tend to become the reason behind expression in literature. She writes:

The feeling of rootlessness, alienation, confusion, nostalgia, dislocation and sufferings due to discrimination on the basis of race, culture, religion and language culminates into conflicts, fight for identity and on the other hand lead to birth of feeling of marginality in the minority group. (120)

About the diasporic writing Jasbir Jain thinks that a transformation occurs when languages and cultures meet and that it raises questions regarding home and nation.

Caught between the two worlds, the diasporic writers have tried to negotiate a new literary space. Homi Bhabha has spoken of the double process of scattering and gathering. He writes, “I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering.” (139) Indianness as a metaphor has been explored in most of the writings along with plurality of identifications and affiliations. Their works exemplify their own awareness of history and heritage, society & its problems, limitations and challenges.

Some of the Indian diasporic writers have turned their attention on India to assess and understand the nature of their relationship with the land of their ancestors. Conscious and unconscious connection seems to influence their views and affect their perception. Diasporic literature offers a fresh outlook to accommodate the diversity of multicultural reality. The diasporic subject most of the time itself emerges as a metaphor, constantly seeking its own meaning as it shuttles back and forth in its imagination between recollected homeland and adopted home. A sense of displacement is a perennial theme in all diasporic literature. The displacement also gives rise to the concepts of double consciousness and unhomeliness which mark the diasporic identity. It is apt to quote Lois Tyson, who analyses this concept thus:

Double consciousness and unhomeliness are the two features of postcolonial diasporas. ‘Double consciousness’ or unstable sense of the self is the result of forced migration colonialism frequently caused. ( ... ) 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)

## II

The aim of the present research is to explore a writer who migrated abroad almost three decades back and how her novels became an expression of her entire process of discovering and ascertaining the dilemma and thereby trying to re-affirm her own transformed self. In an interview to Preeti Zachariah on April 24, 2013, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has said, "I came from a traditional family ( ... ) The world around me was suddenly so different. Immigration was certainly a transformational experience and I tried to explore its intricacies."(Divakaruni)

Writing novels for Divakaruni is almost like discovering her own world and society but creating thereby a universal appeal of togetherness. By choosing women characters as the protagonist of each novel she has delineated the dilemma of the women and the way they have to adjust and accommodate themselves in a society and try to be a part of that existence. Her novels exemplify the emotions, feelings of the people of diasporic community. It also delves into the universal issues of man-made and natural disasters, discrimination and domestic violence. Issues of women in general which need attention are also brought forth through her characters. However, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni now as an outsider also has provided an insider's view on India critically and honestly. Nowhere an attempt is being made to glorify one's own country. The adopted land offers opportunities but the desire to return to one's land gives hope. Speaking about the portrayal of characters in Divakaruni, K.S Dhanam has written:

Divakaruni's books are directed mainly to women of all races and faiths who share a common female experience. All her heroines must find themselves within the contrasting boundaries of their cultures and religions ( ... ) she also

contrasts the lives and perceptions of first generation immigrants with that of their children born and raised in foreign land. And inevitably, it includes the Indian American experience of grappling with two identities. She has her finger accurately on the diasporic pulse, fusing eastern values with western ethos. Her writing course with her identification is with a brave new world forging to life. Her sensitivity to contemporary voices, today's issues are threaded through with an ongoing search for identity beyond anthropology, beyond sociology and beyond academia. (62)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni on whom I intend to study in great detail deals with the common plight of immigrants, especially Indian women's modern maladies of exile, loneliness, bewilderment, dislocation and loss of identity and she treats them as her subjects for factual discussion and imaginative expressions. Her literature is replete with the details of her experiences she has had in India before her arrival to United States and even charts the life of US where the characters try to fit in. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's humanitarian attitude is reflected in her works.

She has written many short stories and poems but I intend to look at her novels in detail as I feel this medium elaborately allows the writer to delve into each aspect of life comprehensively. It opens up a whole new world, acts as a commentary on the social issues and through characters project a slice of life. I would try to analyze her novels with an overview of the conceptual theories surrounding diaspora. I would take a look into the way in which she looks at past tradition and society and how she has used mythology, rituals, food and clothing as tropes of identity, nostalgia and memory. My research would also try to explore the human relationships which she has discussed in the wake of disasters-

both man- made and natural. The characterizing elements of diaspora namely alienation, assimilation, acculturation, nostalgia, memory, home, displacement, dislocation, identity, community which are all interrelated would be analyzed in her works.

My research is aimed at not just presenting the diasporic elements but also to show the gradual evolution and the adaptation process which marks the globalized world and the diaspora. From writing a novel dealing with a series of people in diaspora, she has chosen mythology to represent the New Woman. Not just this, her novels speak volumes about the bonds of women and the way the role of man has changed in the transforming world. My research is solely attributed to the works of this particular writer and how she managed to chart for herself a place in the tradition set by the Indian diasporic writers. It is my pursuit to establish her individual talent against the rich and loaded tradition of diasporic writers. Her sensibility, sensitivity, consciousness and humanitarian approach vividly establishes her as a person who carries forward the tradition but in its own way.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an Indian who has settled down in America. She was born on June 29, 1956 in Gurap village of Burdwan District in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and known as Chitralkha Banerjee to her family and friends. She has fictionally described her village in *The Bats* and *Names of Stars*, a collection of short stories written in Bengali. She is a short story writer, novelist, professor, poet, essayist, book reviewer, columnist and activist. She has also written children's fiction. She was born to her parents namely Tatini Banerjee and Rajendra Kumar Banerjee and has three brothers but no sister. The way she speaks about the importance of sisterhood and always writes about the bonds of women indeed garners attention. The major influence in her life was her maternal grandfather Nibaran Chandra Ghosh, the only one who was alive, when she was born.

Listening to the stories from mythology from her grandfather was really a good pastime for her which stayed ingrained in her memories. She was always and is still fascinated by the epic heroines and in most of her talks she has said that the only relationship the women had was with their husband and they did not have close women friends. This, according to her, contrasts with the real life situation. Perhaps as a kind of rebel; she in her novels has tried to present the bond of women. Though she was brought up in a nuclear family but had close connections to even her extended family which one finds reflected in her novel *Sister of My Heart*.

As for her studies, she had the honour of studying in Loreto House, Kolkata which is an all-girl Roman Catholic school and Presidency College. After graduating from the University of Calcutta in 1976, she went to the US. Though she lived in Calcutta but moved in many cities because of her father who travelled a lot. For three long years she stayed all alone and in order to meet her financial demands she did many odd jobs. She sliced bread, washed instruments in a lab, worked at a boutique and even went on to do a baby-sitting job. So the girl who stayed in a protective environment sought to seek independence in every way. She juggled through the tasks and came out on her own. She did her Masters in English from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio and there she met the love of her life, Murthy whom she later married in 1979 and now has two sons Abhay and Anand. In the foreword of all her novels she writes “For my three men Murthy, Anand, Abhay”. The men in her life positively influenced her and that is reflected even in her writings. She did her Ph.D. on Christopher Marlowe from the University of California, Berkeley in 1985 and her dissertation was titled as "For Danger Is in Words: A Study of Language in Marlowe's Plays."

In 1991 she founded Maitri, a helpline for South Asian women helping them in combating domestic violence and is also involved in various social causes and organizations like *Pratham* and *Daya*. She started Maitri with a group of friends after experiencing some really bad incidents in her community. The turning point was an incident where in a woman tried to commit suicide because of her helplessness. The small group with a helpline phone at her residence has now blossomed into an organization which is very large and successful. She now lives in Texas, where she teaches at the University of Houston (Creative Writing Program) but has also taught at Diablo College and Foothill College in California.

She is an avid reader but her area of interest is Indian/ South Asian Authors. She considers Mahashweta Devi as a role model for her and the reading of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* as a big moment of her life as it enriched her and gave her the confidence to write on issues which she thought needed attention. She also acknowledges the influence of the poet Adrienne Rich which gave her the courage to write. She considers Anita Desai as a person who could inspire and is greatly appreciative of Rohinton Mistry. Other writers whom she considers her source of inspiration are Toni Morrison, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Jane Austen and Amitav Ghosh. She loves to go back frequently to Tagore's works. She has also been greatly admirable of the multicultural voices of Sandra Cisneros and Louise Erdrich and finds the novel written by Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo* very intriguing. She loves Garcia Márquez and Isabelle Allende's use of magic realism. She has greatly admired Tolstoy especially his story *Anna Karenina*.

As for her other interests are concerned, it is evident from her blogs that food

and culinary art holds a centre of attraction for her. This therefore gets reflected in her writings as well. She likes to watch a lot of Indian movies, especially independent cinema as she thinks it a good way to know a culture. In most of her novels one finds a reference to either the Bollywood songs or movies.

However there is another side to her personality and that is her love for spirituality. In Gurumayi Chidvilasananda she found her spiritual teacher. She met her for the first time when she was writing her first novel *The Mistress of Spices*. It is this metaphysical love that gets reflected in her writings as well. She considers her grace as the illuminating factor of her life. The compassion and wisdom, love for humanity, and search for the world beyond this world, oozes out of her faith in spirituality which is a non-detachable part of her fictional narratives.

Divakaruni began her writing career as a poet. Her two volumes of poetry are *Black Candle* and *Leaving Yuba City*. Her short story collection, *Arranged Marriage*, won an American Book Award in 1995, and two of her novels *The Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of my Heart* were adapted into films. She has written a young adult fantasy series called *The Brotherhood of the Conch*. She has also edited two anthologies *Multitude* and *We, Too, Sing America*. In March 2013, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni also contributed towards making a first picture book – *Grandma and the Great Gourd: A Bengali Folktale*. Her novels have been translated into twenty nine languages. The themes of her novels are basically related to contemporary Indian-American women, their experience and challenges, history and myth, changing India and the perceptions and views of Indians. She writes for adults but has also catered to the tastes of children. She has published novels in multiple genres ranging from realistic fiction to magic realism, from historical fiction to fantasy. Regarding her journey as

a writer she in an interview with Bookchums (2013) has mentioned that,

I was interested in expressing or exploring different things at different stages.

First I was interested in the image, or the experience of the moment, and I wrote poetry. Then I became interested in character growth and narrative and I wrote short stories. Then I was interested in creating an entire fictional world so I wrote novels. (Divakaruni)

A recurrent theme in her novels is the way women undergo various problems especially resulting from matrimony like divorce, domestic violence, female foeticide, problems of adjustment between husband-wife, lack of understanding and communication. She has also touched on the loss of identity and the struggle of the women to re-assert their need for independence. Importance of financial independence has also been reiterated through her writings. As a writer who is involved with 'Maitri' and 'Daya'- organisations helping women caught in abusive situations, her work involves in dealing with their problems and helps them gain self-confidence and stand on their own feet which also get transferred to the way her women protagonists think and act.

The pain, trauma and suffering are a process of rediscovery for her women characters. Speaking to Karthik Ramaswamy (2004) Divakaruni said, "I think bits of me are in all my women characters." Her love for painting for instance gets reflected in the character of Rakhi in *Queen of Dreams*. In an interview to Soumi Basu in 2008 she said "I had a near-death experience, which I've tried to describe in *The Vine of Desire*." Her women though go through tough times but don't fail. The notion of 'optimistic possibilities' is inherent in each and every novel as the novelist herself believes, "And it is those possibilities of the human spirit that I find most intriguing."

In retrospect as we delve more into the themes of the novels, it becomes clear that the stories look personal as well as impersonal and it has gained a ground from the way it shaped. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's own conflicts helped her to confront the problems and present to the world the experiences which are universal and appealing. In an interview to Neila C. Seshadri (2001) she stated that she began to write:

About what was of importance in my life, and one of the big things was the act of immigration and the ways in which it had changed me, the ways in which it had really made me see the world differently and see my place as a woman in the world differently, the ways in which it had made me appreciate my own culture as well as question my own culture, and question my life in India, and all that was very important to me. (Divakaruni)

Speaking to Rob Neufeld (2010) after the publication of her novel *One Amazing Thing* she has admitted that she loves her own folk tales and stories which get reflected in her writings, "I grew up with a great love of story. And our tradition is full of tales within tales. There's a real sense in the country that the telling of story and the listening to story can transform people. I think that's a big theme in a lot of my books." *One Amazing Thing* and *The Vine of Desire* in particular exhibit her love for stories and the way it reflects the psychological state of the human beings. *The Palace of Illusions* recreates the epic Mahabharatha from a different perspective whereas *The Mistress of Spices* delve on the world of snakes and Fire of shampati which serve as a symbol of rebirth and rejuvenation.

*The Mistress of Spices*, the first novel of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni appeared on the scene way back in 1997. This novel basically delineates the life of the protagonist Tilo as she looks into the past with nostalgia i.e. her birth and the story which finally made

her the mistress of spices. Her present story revolves around a spice shop which she set a year ago and the setting is Oakland, a city by the Bay area in US. The story begins with the first person narrative. This novel is a perfect blend of the real and the surreal. She is born with a power to foresee the truth and because of it she is abducted by the pirates with whom she stays as their queen for almost three years and when a typhoon hits the sea, she is saved by the sea-serpents and brought to an island where the Old one – First Mother trains her to master the spices and takes an oath from her that she would never love anyone nor see the mirror. The Old one names her Tillotama. After her training, she has to dive into the fire of Shampati and select the place of her choice to practice her skills and she selects Oakland.

With the special power to heal people through spices, she runs the Spice store. She not just sells things but also heals people, listens to their problems and provides them solace. Her store is frequented by Lalita, Ahuja's wife who is a victim of domestic violence, Jagjit, a young boy, who comes with his mother from Jullunder and who misses his country, Haroun from Kashmir, a victim of terrorism, bougainvillea girls, Geeta's grandfather and even Raven with whom she falls in love which is forbidden to her. Most of the visitors are Indian immigrants but Raven is not an Indian. Still she helps him and gradually she starts falling for him. She comes to know of the past of Raven and the truth about his identity that he is not a white Native American as he is supposed to be. In the end the area is hit by an earthquake and Raven saves her and names her Maya. The novel ends with Tilo making a choice towards her love and thereby forsaking her power over spices.

Her second novel *Sister of My Heart* appeared in 1999. It centers around two Indian girls Anju and Sudha who are brought up by three widowed women - Aunt Pishi, Gouri Ma and Nalini and they live in Balinganj, Calcutta. Gouri Ma is Anju's mother and

Nalini is Sudha's mother. Though they are brought up as two sisters the truth is that Anju belongs to the Chatterjee family and Sudha is supposed to be the daughter of a man who cheated on Anju's father and this secret engulfs their life.

This novel is divided into two books: *The Princess in the Palace of Snakes* where in the journey of the girls from their birth till their marriage has been described. Both bond really nicely but when Sudha is told the truth by Abha Pishi, something between them changes. It is Sudha who falls in love at first sight with a boy named Ashok who is from a lower caste. When the mothers come to know, they punish the girls. Sudha is forced to stay at home and only Anju is allowed to go to college. They have a driver whose name is Singhji who is always seen to be sympathetic towards Sudha. When Gouri Ma falls ill, she decides to marry the two girls and Sudha does not oppose it. She thinks it her duty to sacrifice her love and feels that by doing that she would be able to redeem the loss of the family caused due to her father. This book ends with Anju marrying Sunil who is a computer scientist from USA and he also hails from a respectable family of Majumdars. On the other hand Sudha compromises and is wedded to Ramesh from the Sanyal family who works in Indian Railways. They get married on the same day but Anju notices that Sunil picks up the handkerchief dropped by Sudha and keeps it in his pocket.

The second book is titled *The Queen of Swords* and here the story of the girls after their marriage is retold through the voice of Sudha and Anju. Sudha's mother-in-law is quite dominating and Ramesh is unable to say anything to his mother whereas Sunil's father is extremely authoritarian but his mother is a doting lady. Sunil leaves for US and leaves Anju behind to complete the formalities of visa. Therefore in the meantime Anju visits Sudha's in-laws and is struck by the patience and forbearance which Sudha demonstrates.

However after getting the visa she moves to US and they keep writing letters to each other. Anju who had never done household chores starts driving, attend classes, cooks and manages as Sunil supports her in every way.

Then when Aunt Tarini visits Sudha's in-laws the pressure to bear a child mounts on Sudha and after enough of prayers, checkups, superstitious beliefs she does get pregnant. The news of Sudha's pregnancy excites Anju. However her mother-in-law only wants a boy and when she comes to know that she is carrying a girl child, she forces that Sudha should abort the child. Anju advises Sudha to leave her husband. Sudha leaves and comes to Calcutta. In the meantime Anju also conceives and the two girls are happy to share their moments of motherhood. Anju names the unborn children as Dayita and Prem. Ashok whom she had left behind comes to meet her and he becomes ready to accept her but he too wishes that she should abort the child. However Sudha takes the decision of staying alone and giving birth to her daughter.

In the meantime Anju starts working secretly in a college library. However her health suffers and one day she has a miscarriage. It is only then she informs that she had been working to save the money to buy the ticket for Sudha so that she can come to America. On the other side Sudha delivers a girl child and promises to come to America to help Anju recover from illness. On board, when she opens the packets and envelop given to her she discovers the ruby given by Gouri Ma and also that Singhji is her father and that Anju's father Bijoy was not murdered by her father but killed by Haldar-the man who had accompanied them. The story ends with Sudha landing in US, Anju welcoming her and noticing Sunil's discomfort against the image of rain dampened sun struggling with the clouds.

*The Vine of Desire* (2002) is a sequel to *Sister of my Heart*. The novel is divided into four parts: Prologue, Book One: Subterranean Truths, Book II: Remembrance and Forgetting and Epilogue. The voice keeps changing from third person narration to first person narration and this novel is replete with indirect forms of communication like letters, assignments and dramatic monologues. This is a novel of silence reverberating in the lives of characters.

The prologue paints a picture of Anju writhing in pain and experiencing the shock of miscarriage and her hysteria at discovering this. In Book One through third person narrative voice, the novelist has hinted that though Anju wanted Sudha to be with her in US but just a day before her arrival she is tensed. The novel progresses with Anju making an effort to hide her fears while Sudha trying to adjust in her home by avoiding Sunil. In between these two ladies is Sunil who spends most of her time with Dayita, an infant child, and in her he discovers his confidante. With Sudha's care and love, Anju recovers and joins her classes again. In order to while away her time Sudha starts going for evening walks in the garden where she meets a girl named Sara, an exchange student, who informs her of Lupe who helps her to find a job.

One day Sunil receives an invitation of an anniversary party from the Chopras. Sudha meets Lalit, a doctor, in the party who likes her. They continue to meet even after that day. Sunil who had always been fascinated by Sudha is unable to control his passion and they in Anju's absence fall for each other. Sudha after that feels guilty, decides to leave Anju's house and contacts Lupe for a job and finally manages to get a job as a caretaker at Trideep and Myra Sen's home. Back in India Sunil's father dies, the mothers come to know of the impending trouble in Anju's marriage and Ashok comes to US to ask

for forgiveness and accept Sudha with her daughter. After this episode with Sudha, even Sunil takes a transfer to Houston and he talks about his wish to separate with Anju.

Both the women, Sudha and Anju now start living on their own but Sudha finally decides to go back to India with Mr Sen and live in Jalpaiguri as his caretaker. She refuses the offer of Ashok and decides to be on her own and as a final parting note she requests Anju to meet her. For one last time they meet at the station, then Anju drives her to the beach, their first picnic spot and Anju with the help of an instructor flies a glider. The novel ends with an Epilogue wherein Sudha opens her arms for Anju who is coming down.

*Queen of Dreams* was written in 2004 which captures the shock, trauma of the South Asians under the wake of terrorist attacks -9/11 which devastated the World Trade Centre. The story is set in Berkeley, California wherein Mrs Gupta, a dream teller lives with her family and her past story unfolds through the entries she has made in Dream Journals. These journals are discovered by Rakhi, her daughter, after her death and it is interpreted by her father. Though Rakhi always had felt that her mother never shared about her life in India but after reading the journals she is able to appreciate and understand her mother much better.

Rakhi, the protagonist, is a single mother to Jonaki who lives separately from her husband Sonny who is a DJ player. Rakhi has a best friend Belle (Balwant) with whom she runs a Chai House. In her free time she paints and even exhibits. It is after one of these exhibitions that Rakhi's mother meets with an accident. Sonny is close to Rakhi's mother and even after their separation he continues to meet Jona and Mrs Gupta. Rakhi faces a threat from the upcoming coffee chain *Java* who happens to open their franchise just opposite to their shop but her mother always advises her to be strong and not worry too

much about the competition. After her death, Mr Gupta takes over and though Rakhi has had a cold relation with him, he comes forward and suggests transforming the Chai shop into an Indian snack shop and names it *Kurma House* which later on becomes *Kurma House International*.

Mr Gupta who had been humming songs just to please himself is requested by the people to sing and then it becomes a trend which catches on and people start coming just to listen to songs and have snacks. In a short time *Kurma House* becomes a centre for people of South Asian origin to mingle and relive their past. Everything goes smooth till one day US is attacked by the terrorists. Everything changes and South Asians come under the siege of hatred. Their shop is pelted with stones, Jespal, friend of Belle is beaten and they live under constant shock and fear. In the meantime Sonny and Rakhi also come close as Sonny supports her in every way. Rakhi also discovers that it is her daughter who has received the gift of dreaming from her mother. The novel ends with Rakhi going to the DJ club party with Sonny and dancing back to the centre of the room which she had always disliked.

*The Palace of Illusions* published in 2008 takes the readers back to Dwapar Yug and narrates the epic of Mahabharatha from Panchaali's point of view. The episodes and the story line is of the epic which everyone is familiar with but the focus is on the inner feelings of Panchaali who was named Draupadi because she was the daughter of Drupad. This novel presents the story of Panchaali right from her birth from fire to the indifference meted out to her as a child; her rebellion streak to learn what her brother Dhri learnt; her dilemma at knowing the prophecy that she would marry five men and change the course of history; her strong passion for Karna; her equation with Krishna and her brother Dhri, her

strong ties with her Dhai Ma, Kunti ( mother-in-law) and wives of her husbands; her remorse and anger at being shamed in the game of dice; her stubbornness to make her husbands fight to restore her lost honour resulting in the Battle of Kurukshetra; her dream to have a palace of her own; her realization that war is futile; her pain at losing her loved ones; her efforts to bring all the women together to stand on their own feet after the war and finally departing for the other world as a mark of repentance and renunciation. This novel presents the feelings of Panchaali at every stage of her life and her unrequited love for Karna which she keeps a secret till the end. It culminates in her union with him beyond this world and with her acceptance that the palace of death is the only palace which is not an illusion.

*One Amazing Thing* written as recently as in 2010 catches the emotions of the people at its best. People from different origin happen to meet by chance at the visa office of the Indian consulate after a massive earthquake. There is Uma Sinha from India who has been brought up in US and has a boy friend Ramon, Caucasian couple –Mr and Mrs Pritchett who are suffering from their own pangs of unrequited love, an Afro –American, Cameron who in his fifties wants to go to India to adopt a girl child Seva and has worked in the US army during the Vietnam war and suffers from guilt because he forced his girl friend to abort the unborn child, Jiang, an old Chinese woman, who lived in India and during the Indo-China war of 1962 had to move to US because of her marriage to Curtis Chan and her grand-daughter Lily who owes a lot to her brother Mark, there is Tariq who has Indian features and has been a victim of racist attacks after the 9/11 incident of US and loves Farah from India who is her mother’s friend’s daughter, also there is Malathi who works at the Consulate office and has an adulterous affair with Mangalam . She is the one who aspired to be a beauty maker and ended up being in US to earn money. Mangalam is an officer at the

Consulate and because of his failed marriage he likes to flirt with every woman as a kind of revenge.

The novel begins with third person narration and Uma engrossed in reading *Chaucer* against the backdrop of an earthquake which kind of traps all the people present in the Indian consulate office. It is Cameron who manages everyone and it is Uma who comes up with an idea that each of them shares an important story of their lives to bury the stress. It is Jiang who shares her story first. She tells that she used to live in Calcutta, India and ran her father's shoe store and that she fell in love with Mohit Das, a manager, but then was forced to give up her love and marry Curtis Chan. It is on her brother Vincent's request that she was planning to go to India to meet him.

In case of Malathi, it is revealed that she failed twice in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and lived in Chennai. Her parents decided to marry her off but she started working in Miss Lola's Lovely Ladies Salon at Coimbatore which was frequented by Mrs Vani Balan, wife of a top government official. Mrs Balan always came to the Salon with her maid Nirmala and her son Ravi who after completing his studies abroad happened to start a school. Nirmala also started studying there and they fell in love with each other. However Mrs Balan could not tolerate this so she maneuvered a plan and took her to Chennai for the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday of her cousin Gopalan and shrewdly sent Nirmala to Gopalan's room and later accused her of immoral character. She got her son engaged to the daughter of a rich tycoon. After this incident when she came to the salon, Malathi in a fit of anger and revenge spoiled her hair and applied a lotion because of which only her scalp was visible. Mrs Lola understood and arranged a ticket for her to go to US to save her from disgrace.

As for the story of Managalam, they discover that he was born into a poor

family and was the first son after three daughters but was very sharp in studies and therefore managed to get the scholarship to study at Delhi University, thereafter he got a job at Film club where he met Naina, the only daughter of high level government official, and they married but she turned out to be a rich brat and did not support Mangalam in any way. It was in his office that he met Latika and fell in love with her. She was an orphan whose parents had died in a train accident. Mangalam had decided to take divorce but Naina's parents arrested Latika on grounds of mishandling accounts and he was forced to give up his love. However from then on he started flirting with all the women as a mark of revenge.

Tariq the young boy was brought up in US and his father ran a janitorial business but they suffered because of racist attacks and this resulted in Tariq's disappointment. He fell in love with Farah who had come to US as an exchange student and was going to India to meet her whereas we also come to know that Cameron also fell in love with Imani in his senior year of high school. He wanted to be a doctor and when Imani shared with him that she had conceived, he was upset and asked her to abort the child. Imani left him and he joined US army during the Vietnam War but always saw a nightmare of a child floating. As a mark of repentance he decided to adopt a girl child Seva and it was for the purpose of adoption that he wanted to go to India. On the other hand Lily told about her brother Mark who always excelled in studies and she always felt inferior but it was because of Mark that she learned to play flute and got a lot of respect and admiration but her brother Mark after moving to college fell into bad company and she could feel that he almost killed himself.

Mr Pritchett's story showed how he missed the love of his mother during his childhood. He was good at accounts and numbers but his friends always made fun of his

name Lancelot. It was because of his mother's boyfriend that the kitten that he loved the most also died and from then on he was always paranoid about keeping pets whereas Mrs Pritchett in her young days used to run a bakery with her friend Debbie. She was highly romantic and failed to see the truth. After marriage she always missed the tenderness which she had expected. She tried to commit suicide because she could never bear a child and it was a nurse in the hospital who made her realize that happiness is inside. She wanted to go to India to see Taj Mahal. In case of this couple their past affects the present.

Finally we have the story of Uma whose parents had moved to India. She had always thought that they loved each other but to her surprise her father one day informs that he wishes to take divorce from his mother. She gets upset and feels betrayed. In order to come to terms with the reality she with her friend Jeri drives till New York. They are accompanied by a young man Ripley. They see an amazing sight in the sky filled with red and green colour. Ripley calls it an aurora and both Jeri and Ripley fall asleep after getting heavily drunk. Later as Uma turns on the radio she discovers that there had been a major explosion in one of the chemical factories to the east of the city. The final thoughts of Uma are of her friend Jeri calling her and informing that she is dying and she tries to confirm that the scene which they had seen was an aurora and Uma replies in positive though it was not the truth and the novel ends with the sounds of clanking growing louder as the earthquake hits again.

*Oleander Girl* published in 2013 is about a girl Korobi who has been brought up by her grandparents Sarojini and Bimal Prasad Roy and lives in Kolkata but takes a journey to US in search of her father whom she had taken to be dead. The story starts on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2002 and is set against the backdrop of Godhra riots and 9/11. Her mother died at

the time of her birth, was sent to the hostel for studies, gets engaged to Rajat. It is after the death of her grandfather that she discovers that she had been kept in dark about her father who was not dead but alive. She decides to undertake a journey to USA to discover the truth. Her grandmother who had always been submissive supports her.

She hires a private detective, Desai and shares this truth with Rajat and his parents Mr & Mrs Bose. After initial hesitation, all of them agree but they decide that she would come back if she is not able to find her father within two months. Bose's have an art gallery in India & US and the caretaker in US is Mitra with whom she stays in US. Mitra's wife Seema is pregnant and she gives a good company to Korobi. In India she leaves behind her love and family. While she is away, Bose's also suffer from severe financial crisis, Hindu-Muslim differences affect even the labourers working in the warehouse and the workers threaten to go on a strike. Bose's driver Asif Ali who is a trusted servant and adores Pia-Missy, sister of Rajat, like his own sister also comes under severe suspicion. There is Sonia who had once liked Rajat and tries to trap him once again by offering him temptation of money and good fortune. We are also informed about Mr Bhattacharya, the politician, who shows interest in the heritage temple which is inside the precincts of Korobi's grandfather's old house which is now in shambles after his death.

On the other side in America, Korobi faces her own struggles. Firstly from Mitra who seems to be spying on her. He does not even co-operate to provide her with a cell phone. However she meets one young man Vic at Desai's office who is his nephew and works as a part time assistant who extends all his support. She likes his attitude and in order to raise the money for travelling in US she sells her long hair on the advice of Vic. Desai shortlists three names on the basis of his findings. Rob Evanston, an architect; Rob Mariner,

an estate lawyer in San Francisco; and Rob Davis, a writer, in the Santacruz club. She meets all three and discovers to her disappointment that they are not related to her. Infact one of them tries to physically abuse her and one thinks that she is out there for some kind of money. These experiences shatter her and she is about to give up when she receives a call from a lady named Meera Anand who admits of knowing her mother Anu Roy and having stayed with her. It is from the photo that she recognizes Anu which Desai had given in print.

Meera Anand meets Korobi and it is from her that korobi comes to know that her father is an Afro-American and that her parents never married and that they had met for the first time at the International House where Anu went to learn folk dancing. She goes and meets Rob and finds that he is married with three children and also discovers that he had visited India but was informed that both Anu and her child was dead. Korobi is shaken by the truth and she thinks that may be even her marriage could get affected after they come to know that she is an illegitimate child. Still she decides to go back to India and tell each one the truth.

However, Mitra tries to blackmail her. He sends the pics of Vic and Korobi to Rajat as he is simmering under a kind of revenge because he thinks that his wife Seema left him because of Korobi. In India Rajat and Pia-Missy are attacked but because of Asif Ali they are saved. Mrs Bose also realizes her mistake and calls Asif back to service. The pics and the truth reach the Bose's before Korobi and when she reaches India, nobody welcomes her. She tries to explain the situation but is forced to leave her engagement ring with Rajat. Later Rajat realizes that he is wrong and convinces his parents. Because of Sarojini Roy, Mr Bhattacharya offers to provide financial support to the Bose's and also agrees to renovate the temple. The novel ends with Korobi and Rajat getting married and

Pia-Missy clicking a family photograph and Korobi discovering two small ovals of light above their heads but she chooses to believe that it is the presence of her parents. She decides to read the poem written by her mother to Rajat.

In an attempt to reflect on the quality and range of Divakaruni's novels, I got hooked to her novels, because they are rooted in the tradition of Indian mythology and she moves towards the realm of magic realism to comprehend the timeless women. In her novels humanism flows with a keen eye on social issues. In her essay on "*Dissolving Boundaries*" (1997) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni while fighting the pangs of death and recuperating after a tragic accident has written that she realized,

That the art of dissolving boundaries is what living is all about. I ached to give this discovery a voice and a form. But I didn't know how until Tilo, my heroine, the Mistress of Spices, came to me (...) Tilo became the quintessential dissolver of boundaries, moving between different ages and worlds and the communities that people them, passing through a trial by water, then a trial by fire, and finally the trial of earth-burial to emerge transformed, each time with a new name and a new identity. (Divakaruni)

*The Mistress of Spices* was her way of trying to understand the importance of fighting the barriers of boundaries and overcoming the pangs of separation as an outsider in America. In her words she 'visited that emptiness, at once vast and minute.'

The autobiographical element seeps in the way Divakaruni treats her characters and especially the women. History, myth, society, racial issues, magical realism, diversity all get blended together. Since the writer belongs to Bengal, most of her women protagonists are also shown to be hailing from Bengal. There are a lot of references to the

food being cooked in Bengal and characters are seen to be humming songs and folk music. Her close association with her grandfather and his passing away when she was in America made her realize of the people and things she was missing. In order to not let her past slip away, it was her conscious decision to write and bring back memories to keep her associated with the country of her birth. She felt she could not afford to forget her motherland. For her writing is a way of reconnecting. The difference in the life style and values made her rethink and to some extent immigration made her into a writer. The writer moved to US and she has stated, "I briefly lived in Illinois and Ohio, but mostly in Northern California, which I often write about." The journey of the characters generally takes place from Bengal to Sanfransisco, California, New York and Houston. In her blog written with a retrospective view in 2013 "How America made me into a Writer" she writes,

I appreciated the freedom and anonymity of being in a city where only a handful of people knew who I was ( ... ) I missed my family and their sheltering arms so much that it was like having a hole in my heart. I thought about India more than I had ever before. I realized what I appreciated about it--the warmth, the closeness of extended family, the way spirituality pervades the culture. But I also recognized problems about how women are often treated, and a rigid class system because of which many doors are closed to all but the most fortunate and most well-connected people.

(Divakaruni)

So on one side is the individual space which she values but on the other side is the public self which according to her gets transformed. One can through her thoughts understand that deep inside she still lurks for the past though she understands the numerous opportunities

which her immigrated status has offered her. Her characters also seem to be caught in the web of memory and possibilities.

This research presents the analysis of her works within the array of broader social, historical, political, literary and cultural frame and also shows the way Divakaruni in her novel after novel has managed to depict the changing society but still has synthesized tradition and modernity. Though her novels capture the Indian tradition but it also blends well with the American culture. She has presented the culture with which she is best familiar with and India in her novels has become a metaphor for culture. In her own words conveyed to Madhuri Banerjee in 2013, “I am most interested in writing about Indians or Indian Americans. My deepest knowledge is of the Indian psyche. My stories are often set in America, so they often depict Indians in an American landscape.” (Divakaruni)

Along with this she has charted the story of women empowerment, courage and resilience. In giving voice to the dilemma of the diaspora, she has also not lost sight of the creative, imaginative process. The poetic verse structures in her novels come across as a critique of narrow conventionalism and become a harbinger of togetherness and need for peace. Divakaruni’s fiction zooms between the cross-currents of storytelling and mythology. They are narratives of *bildungsroman* which tell the tales of women grit, courage and determination. She almost subscribes to the notion of continuous evolution like her characters, interrogates the social vices but tries to create awareness for the same.

In an interview to Girija Sankar (2010) she mentioned, “For me, grace under pressure is when everyone comes together as a community; everyone is a protagonist and antagonist.” The characters come out as individuals who tend to universalize the context which they inhabit. Though most of her novels are set in US however the local colour of her

country, smell, spices and sounds manage to provide in her fiction a microcosm of the world she inhabited before moving to the adopted land. The pain of change has been chronicled with an undying sense of conviction and it tends to reflect her desire and outlook towards social concern. The “Can-do” attitude is clearly displayed in all her novels. The titles of her novels carry a load of affluent, wealthy cultural meaning like *Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *The Palace of Illusions*, *Oleander Girl* et al. and it acquires a degree of power. She in her own way has tried to reassert the spirit of survival and the strength of human endurance. In an interview to Atiya Hasan (2013) she has quoted, “Tragedy is the opportunity to open conversation.”

In many of her novels one finds that memory functions as the basic cohesive agent and projects a kind of reaction against the worst historical events not in the form of suppression but as a dialogue between recollecting and accepting wherein past and present combine. Individual in her novels becomes a kind of traveller carrying the weight of collective memories and her novels become a site of transmutation between the rich archives of history and present charters of change. Her belief in the theory of Karma manifests in her writings and in her expressions as told to Terry Hong (2010), “My own belief is that what we put out into the world does come back to us, but not necessarily when we expect it to, and not necessarily in the form we assume it will take. The reach of karma is long-it can stretch across years or generations or even lifetimes.”(Divakaruni)

In an era of globalization, the worst threat facing the world is of man-made disaster imposed by the terrorist attacks and the impact it has on the immigrant community and the way their loyalties are put under a scanner for trial which leads to a sense of pain and confusion. As an immigrant herself, Divakaruni experienced the same trauma. In an

interview to Karthik Ramaswamy (2004) she has mentioned, “it helped me express the terrible pain I felt after 9/11 because, in addition to suffering the effects of this national tragedy, my community (and other communities like mine that “looked like terrorists”) had to suffer from hate crimes that erupted in so many parts of America.” She has often used her own life experiences as inspiration to write her novels but it later also transforms into something realistic but also fictional and imaginative. For her, the personal experiences allow her to “use whatever was in my life as a bridge to enter the world of imagination, then a book can take off and do whatever it needs to do.” (Gaines 2013) Her death nerving experience with hurricane in 2005 also translated into her writings.

The novels of Chitra Banerjee have therefore strongly found a parallel in the themes with the contemporary women writers. Much of research has been done on Chitra Banerjee’s novels and she has been judged, analysed and researched in comparison to other contemporary women writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Monica Ali, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Rao Badami, and Anjana Appachana and also with Anita Desai and Kiran Desai. For instance, Susana Vega-González (2003) in her article, "Negotiating Boundaries in Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* and Naylor's *Mama Day*" has looked at an Indo-American writer and another an African-American writer who have both used magical realism “to synthesize divergent conceptions of the world and to advocate eclectic positions.” Their study according to the researcher try to present the past and the present and it advocates transcending and negotiating the boundaries. She has concluded her article with Brenda Cooper’s words which is reflected in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni:

Magical realism attempts to capture reality by way of a depiction of life's many dimensions, seen and unseen, visible and invisible, rational and

mysterious. In the process, such writers walk a political tight rope between capturing this reality and providing precisely the exotic escape from reality desired by some of their Western readership. (qtd. in Gonzalez 32)

Titus Ardian (2006) for his Bachelor's thesis *A Study of cultural displacement of Anju and Sudha as seen in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Vine of Desire* has made a study of the cultural displacement of two characters Anju and Sudha in Divakaruni's novel *The Vine of Desire*. The cultural displacement according to her becomes more troublesome because of their dissatisfaction with their own cultural values. However they succeed in combining both the cultures which the researcher has described as an 'ambivalence identity'. So in this research work the focus is on the way displacement affects the immigrants.

Tamara Ayesha Bhalla (2008) in her research work *Between History and Identity: Reading the Authentic in South Asian Diasporic Literature and Community* tried to look at the various aspects of South Asian literature and in chapter 4 she has discussed the problem of placement and the discourse of choice with reference to Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. She has used dialogic reading practice to study the reception of the two novels. This research has more to do with the reception of the text rather than the text itself.

Aparajita De (2009) in her thesis entitled *Mapping Subjectivities: The Cultural Poetics of Mobility and Identity in South Asian Diasporic Literature* has examined and tried to map the subjectivities underlying the women characters in Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Shauna Singh Baldwin, and Meena Alexander. She has focussed on the strategies adopted by the characters for survival. Her research focusses on the assimilation techniques which the people in diaspora adopt for survival. Displacement

isolates and alienates but the characters try to integrate as well depending on their attitude in confluence with the inherited values and traditional legacy thus reshaping their identity.

Harpreet Kaur Sahi (2009) in her doctoral work *Negotiating with the past and contemporary life of Indian woman: a study of the works of Shashi Deshpande and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni* has attempted to bring out the comparisons and contrasts between Shashi Deshpande and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and the main issue discussed is the way the past influences the present. Both the writers according to the researcher oscillate between nostalgia and reality. The researcher has also tried to evaluate the way the conflict between the traditional values and modern outlook shape the identity. Her main conclusion is that in both the writers, the characters try to strike a balance between the two divergent trends. Sahi concludes that, “Migrants and diasporics encounter new epistemologies and new ways of living.”(204) and she looks at nation “as a series of negotiations in which plurality of ideologies are at issue, the dominant one being ‘marginalization of women’.”(215)

Dhanalakshmi (2009) in her thesis *Diasporic Experience in Select Novels of Chitra Divakaruni* has evaluated the immigrant conflict in the select novels of Divakaruni. Her finding is that her women characters oscillate between the contradictory conceptions of race and culture, time and space. The view of an individual has been looked at from a different point of view by the researcher who feels that there is a multiplicity of selves as they tend to ‘embrace the paradoxes of perception’. The researcher has also tried to explore the ways the women characters try to strike a balance in new culture. The cultural borderland of India and America has been deconstructed by the researcher and has affirmed that culture itself is plural just as the ‘self’. From cultures to selves, the research is an insight

into the changing and evolving nature of diaspora. The researcher has also concluded by pointing the diaspora experience is a struggle not just of one group of people but the struggle of human being as a whole.

Dushyant B.Nimavat (2011) in his thesis *The Cassandras in Exile: A Study of the Diasporic Sensibility in the Poetry of Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean Arasanayagam* has examined the women poets and their diasporic streak which turn them into 'cassandras' narrating the prophetic voices which according to the researcher goes unheeded. The researcher has highlighted that the five women poets of diaspora-Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Moniza Alvi and Jean Arasanayagam who have touched on the social issues like the influence of patriarchy, colonization, ethnic violence, racial discrimination and intolerance in South Asian countries. Though the genre chosen by the researcher is that of a poem but the elements of diasporic consciousness is the subject matter. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's poems are women-centered and bring out the strength of the third generation women according to the researcher. It studies the impact of the diasporic sensibilities on their writings. Through his research on the poems of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni he found that she has discussed the emotional trauma and also highlighted the matrilineal past in which the daughter's identity takes birth and looks at India neutrally-at times with nostalgia and at times as symbols of patriarchy.

Nandini Bhadra (2011) in her thesis entitled *A Comparative Study of the Representation of Expatriate Experience in Selected Chinese-American and Indian American Women Writers* has tried to share the expatriate experience of two major Diasporas in America. She has studied Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni of the

Indian diaspora and Amy Tan and Samantha Chang of the Chinese diaspora. Her attempt is to trace the point of convergence despite differences. Her research points that there is the emergence of 'New Woman' who comes to term with herself and society. It gives a peek into the memory, history and her ethnic identity. She has analyzed the novels as significant agents exploring the 'polyphony' or 'multivoicedness' which according to her is at the core of diaspora fiction. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni according to her propagates Tagore's notion of nation where the 'world has not been divided into narrow domestic walls.' (Tagore 26)

Vibha Sirsa (2012) in her thesis entitled *Narrative proliferations in the fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni: A Critical Study* has critically laid down the way the novelist has adopted various narrative techniques to achieve her objective of unfolding the life of the people in diaspora. Malaysian researcher Marzita Binti Mohd. Noor (2012) in the research work entitled *Immigrant Voices in Indo-American Literature: The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri* tried to make a comparative study of the fiction of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri and has laid open the predicament, position and quest for identity in an alien environment .

Deepika Gandhi (2013) in her doctoral work *In-Between Cultures: An Exploration through the Works of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri* also like Marzita Binti Mohd. Noor has made a comparative study but her focus is on the way the characters are caught in-between cultures and the way it impacts them both in a positive as well as in a negative manner.

The development of a creative artist-writer's consciousness and how the creative life is entangled with emotional existence form the focus of many a work of fiction.

Migrant writers of India mostly have chosen materials from contemporary Indian socio-cultural situations. However for every freedom won, a tradition is definitely lost. For every second generation assimilated, first generation in one way or another gets rejected and spurned. The beauty of Indian diasporic writings lie in the way the paradoxes of life have been dealt with and it underlines the dilemmas of community as it undertakes the exploration of the relationship between the East and the West. Along with the East-West encounter is the conflict between spirituality and materialism which is a recurring strand in many of these novels.

Indian diasporic writings are about this entire predicament related to the questioning of one's own identity. Diasporic literature is a journey into the quest for self-realization, self-recognition, self-knowledge and self-definition. The fictitious works are like a genre trying to find new angles to enter reality. The distance both geographical and cultural enables the writer to have insiders' well as an outsiders' perspective. Most relevant aspect of Indian diasporic writing is that it, "forces, interrogates and challenges the authoritative voices of time." (Aizaz 126)

At the core of Indian diasporic writing is the common resonances engendered by historical connections, spiritual affinities and memories. The unexplained sense of attachment generates into aesthetics which reworlds, rewords and unifies this body of literature. The complex experience of migrancy, encompassing cultural hybridization and assimilation on one hand and nostalgia and cultural alienation on the other form a rich ground for exploration and investigation.

This process of change presents fertile ground for literary energy and expression. The 'chutnification' of culture and globalization of national economies have

greatly influenced the diasporic writings. Diasporic Indian writing in English in comparison to Indian writing in English to a great extent appeals to a large non-Indian reading public. Dr Sanjiv Kumar has said that there are scores of Indian Diasporic writers whose works:

Capture the essential diasporic complexities by reflecting upon Jacques Lacan's concept of mimicry which reveals something in so far as it is distinct from might be called in itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage ( ... ) it is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled-exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare. (2)

The multilayered nature of India stands tall in the works of present generation diasporic writers. These writers use novel as a tool for empowerment, a resource for social innovation and agency and an important dimension of social capital. They try to feature the inner transformation of the human subject along with the remaking and renewal of culture and socio-political spaces of existence. In the literature of the Indian diaspora one can see a dynamic concept for the production of history, identity and spaces of belonging.

In the Indian diaspora writings, space is often but a metaphor and they express issues such as marginalization, social disparity, cultural influx and ethnicity. Oscillating between two nations where on one side are the myths and traditions and on the other are the contemporary ideas, freedom and independence, the writers explore the world with a dual-edged sword where they not just comment but also experience a kind of catharsis. Most of the novels reflect the writer's vision of life in retrospect. It leads to an introspection of the plight of the migrants and their situation. Diasporic Indian writings are rich and meaningful documents transcribing the social and psychological conflicts.

### III

In order to analyze the novels with a deeper perspective one needs to understand the theory of diaspora, its growth and its characteristic features in depth to be able to chart the same in the novels of the writer. Movement, migration and mobilization which are the hallmarks of the modern world and in the era of digital communication where glocalization is becoming the order of the day, still due to numerous reasons and enormous opportunities, the people are on the move, shift bases and leave home country for prospective futuristic prospects impacting the society, culture and tradition to a great extent. In the earlier times the migration was generally forced and it was mostly of the less privileged sections and subaltern classes. "Migration becomes the most obvious path to a better life and greater prosperity." (Arnold 196) However, in the last decade or so, the migration is largely due to man's choice and inclination towards material gains and professional and business interests.

Terms like 'Global village' and 'Gateway city' are often used to analyze the connections between their people and the migrant population. Local is now something which people carry with them. This term seems to have been deterritorialized and the distinction of global and local has almost faded into oblivion in the age of virtual networking. Diaspora has ambiguities of its own and it carries with it not just a person but the whole sense of being. It has the dialectics of both "belonging and longing". The yearning to return and the desire to accommodate keep on influencing the people who travel to new countries. The dynamics of migration are complex and multifaceted which encompass a wide range of emotions, sensations, passions and even sometimes resentments in diaspora. "Migration is a highly dynamic process, involving a variety of transitions; not simply between physical

spaces, but legal, cultural, social, political and economic ones too – and sometimes at several points over the life course.” (Stalford 241)

People by moving and trans-locating, in general, have enriched the society and given rise to assimilation, absorption and incorporation. There is a shift in the value system but at the same time the old traditional values gain a momentum. “Migration entails a discrete, dichotomous, or polychotomous choice.” (Schiff 25) The sense of adjustment and trying to fine tune to the norms of society characterize the struggle where in the old views and inherent codes of ethics and ideals seem to take dominance. The change in the environment and new social settings with a different cultural situation pose a challenge. There is a constant need and a desire to confront the given set of situation to rework the chapter of life in a new light. Ananya J.Kabir has remarked in the book edited by Kim Knott, “Both the moment of departure and the moment of arrival have immense emotional significance and commemorative potential as nodes when histories of individuals and families intersect with larger historical processes.” (qtd. in Knott 146)

The entire gamut of change probably is reflected in the cycle of moving and shifting to reposition oneself in the large sphere of traditions, customs, civilization, thus influencing the way of life. The ethos and philosophy, sophistication and refinement, discernment and discrimination all seem to blend in the psyche thereby creating a consciousness which was never before of one’s own identity, individuality, distinctiveness. “Instead of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings.”(Massey 155) This would lead to the acceptance of similitude and semblance in terms of being a human.

Various terms which encompass the umbrella term of “Migration” have been

indexed in a tabular form in Ted C. Lewellen's book *The Anthropology of Globalization: Cultural Anthropology enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and the terms discussed are: *Internal Migrant* who travel, usually within one's own country for employment often from rural to urban areas, *International Migrant* who leaves his country of citizenship, many times and visits many countries but does not contribute substantially to any long-term social investment. *Immigrant* who leaves his country of citizenship to live permanently, or for a long term, in another country, *Transnational Immigrant* who maintains multiple contacts— social, cultural, political, economic— with both the country of origin and the host country which might involve the constant construction and reconstruction of a “nation” or *diaspora* community that transcends borders. *Diaspora Dispersal* from a homeland to multiple countries implies forced dispersal like the African diaspora. Then there are *Refugees* who are forcibly dispersed through war or political repression, and, by extension, famine, earthquake, etc. (Lewellen 130)

The diasporic production of cultural meanings occurs in many areas ( ... ) but writing is one of the most interesting and strategic ways in which diaspora might disrupt the binary of local and global and problematize national, racial and ethnic formulations of identity. (Ashcroft 218)

In the light of the words by Ashcroft it can be said that the study of migration and diaspora offers multitudes of scope for the evaluation of cultural cosmopolitization and multi- ethnic international amalgamation. The process, dynamics and experience of mobility characterize migration and the outcome of migration can be seen in assimilation, segregation, inclusion or exclusion and diasporas result from the tradition of endurance and success of subsistence. It carries with it seeds of endurance and survival instincts to match with society. The

challenge to fight, withstand and endure the growing conflict with one's own inner self and face, confront and accept the outer self with a penchant for improvement and expansion marks the diasporic sensibility.

Hall has presented his views on diaspora by stating that,

It is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through, transformation and difference. (226)

As far as diaspora is concerned, there are various aspects which are at the centre of study in relation to it. First are the home, nostalgia and memory. Along with it, nation, ethnicity and community also gain importance. Multiculturalism and citizenship in this context becomes the subject of concern. Hybridity and cosmopolitanism characterize diaspora which results in a different social identity and space along with movement get transformed. Home and memory intertwine but according to Brah home is actually the 'mythic place of desire' (192) in the diasporic imagination. The 'place of origin' may be the focus of a sustained 'ideology of return' (Brah 180); it can still figure as a home in the present or be seen as belonging entirely to the past. (Knott24) The 'sense of belongingness' and 'feeling at home' are probably the notions by which diasporas try to make their identity accepted and acknowledge the change with a positive outlook. Foucault in respect to the subject of diaspora has written that they are, "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge." (qtd. in Bullock 56) Globalization is a reality and diaspora to a certain extent is the consequence of

it which brings people from varied cultures together. Monika Fludernik has stated, “Assimilation is allowed to remain on the horizon as a frame within which multiculturalism operates, hybridity opens a way out of ethnic reification by proposing a ‘both-and’ solution ( ... ) the salad-bowl idea.” (xxiii)

Etymologically, the word “diaspora” is derived from the Greek word *diaspeiro* where ‘speiro’ means “to sow or scatter seeds” and the preposition dia, “over or across”. The word itself contains two sets of meanings that of scattering and regrouping into new points of becoming. This word which first denoted the scattering of the religious groups was then used to suggest a “dislocation from the nation-state or geographical location of origin and relocation in one or more nation –states, territories, or countries.” (Brazier 1)

Diaspora has been used as a ‘catch-all’ phrase to speak of and for all movements. Diaspora as a concept first emerged from the Septuagint and midrashic rabbinical writings to describe the Jewish diaspora. The word which gained importance in 1970 reached its pinnacle in the 1990s. The modern usage of the word has stemmed from the Hebrew translation of the Bible from Greek. It also referred to the historic dispersion of the Jews who were taken as captives to Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 b.c. (Brazier 1) The term also had a religious connotation in the sense that the Hebrews faced the threat of dispersion if they failed to obey God’s will. The first theory of diaspora however appeared, according to Gabriel Sheffer, with the work of Armstrong in his paper: “*Mobilized and proletarian diasporas*”(1976) published in the American Political Sciences Review in 1976.

However, by 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term came to be applied to the descendants of Africans living on other lands (owing to slave-trade in 16<sup>th</sup> century) and also on account of

civil war, famine, economic failure and political instability giving rise to Black Diaspora. The early transatlantic African / Black Diaspora resulted in numerous ‘fractured diasporas’ in the later centuries. It was Robert Park in 1939 who applied the use of “diaspora” to Asians. The journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* released in 1991 significantly led to the serious debate on the ‘theorizations and problematizations’ of diaspora and nation.

The theory of diaspora and the generalizations defining the diasporic community led to a growing interest in the discourse of rootedness, changing identities and the relation between the local and the global. Sheffer (1986) defined diaspora as, “ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin— their homelands.” (39) In his definition the emphasis was on the link with the place of origin. It is also clear that for Sheffer, the groups who migrate are not able to separate themselves emotionally and have a feeling of isolation and alienation. They are not able to forget the country of birth and remain sentimentally attached though they continue to professionally flourish in the country to which they have moved.

Then in 1991 American political scientist namely William Safran outlined six main characteristics of Diaspora wherein the paradigmatic case of the Jewish Diaspora also comes to the surface:

Their or their ancestors’ dispersion from a “center” to at least two peripheral foreign regions; persistence of a collective memory concerning the homeland; certainty that their acceptance by the host society is impossible; maintenance of an often idealized homeland as a goal of return; belief in a collective duty

to engage in the perpetuation, restoration, or security of the country of origin; and maintenance of individual or collective relations with the country of origin. (Dufoix 45)

The definition of Safran gave a 'social scientific contour' to the diasporic studies as he unfolded the situation and experience of various ethnic groups who were placed in difficult circumstances surrounding their departure.

Robin Cohen (1997) in his *Global Diaspora* for the first time attempted a general study on the diaspora. He added four more criteria to those given by Safran. "Voluntary migration (for business, work, or colonization); an enduring ethnic awareness; the emergence of new creativity; and a feeling of empathy and solidarity with "fellow ethnics" in other countries." (Dufoix 46) It was Cohen who differentiated diasporas based on their primary identity: victim (Jews, Africans, Armenians, and Palestinians), labor (Indians), trade (Chinese), cultural (the Caribbean), and imperial (British, French, Spanish, and Portuguese).

He also outlined nine common features of diaspora namely dispersal from an original homeland; the expansion from a homeland in search of work, trade or other colonial ambitions; collective memory and myth about the homeland; an idealization of the supposed ancestral homeland a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety & prosperity and even to its creation; a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation; a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness; a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance; a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and the

possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism (Cohen 17)

In 1980s, three main expressions gained momentum namely post modernism, globalization and transnationalism because of which the focus shifted more on the maintenance of an identity in spite of dispersion and gave pride of place to paradoxical identity, the non center, and hybridity. Individuality in the context of generality, self in the realm of outer projections, distinctiveness in the view of familiarity gained more importance. In relation to Indian diaspora these features repetitively gained expression in the fiction of diasporic writers from Bharati Mukherjee to Jhumpa Lahiri or from V.S. Naipaul to Rohinton Mistry. They have expressed through their writings the dilemma and confusion resulting from displacement, cultural difference and inherent notions of religion, tradition and society.

The trilogy of Stuart Hall, James Clifford, and Paul Gilroy were instrumental in bringing a change. They see diaspora as a process not just as a historical migration. Stuart Hall in 1994 talked about cultural identity and diaspora and his contention was that identity is always in 'production' and should always be seen as a process and difference is bound to persist alongside continuity. Paul Gilroy used the term 'diaspora' metaphorically and referred to the old definition as "imperialising, hegemonizing form of 'ethnicity.'" He wrote,

The diaspora experience as I intend ( ... ) is defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. (Gilroy 44)

An American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1990) tried to set a link of the five dimensions of global cultural flow—ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, financescapes & ideascapes. He defined “ethnoscape” as the “landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and persons [who] constitute an essential feature of the world...” For him ‘mediascape’ referred to “ the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information” and ‘technoscape’ meant “the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology, and of the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries”. Arjun analyzed ‘financescapes’ as “a more mysterious, rapid, and difficult landscape to follow than ever before, as currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations move mega-mones through national turnstiles at blinding speed”. He explained ‘ideoscapes’ as “the elements of the Enlightenment world view, which consists of a concatenation of ideas, terms, images, including “freedom,” “welfare”, “rights”, “sovereignty”, “ representation” and the master- term “ democracy”. ” (qtd. in Blazier 34)

The study of Arjun Appadurai further strengthened the semantic and pragmatic nature of diaspora. He associated “synchronic warehouse” as a term to describe the ‘politics of memory’. It for him reflects a place which allows for recasting, redirecting and editing of memories. His study infact helped in covering the broad spectrum of modern society which is characterized by the onslaught of modern inventions, technological innovations and ideological ramifications.

Later the French sociologist Alain Médam in 1993 coined the term go-between for the diasporians because of the onslaught of globalization. Basch, Glick-Schiller

and Szanton Blanc appeared in 1994 and quoted that the contemporary diasporas are “nation unbound” who “reinscribe” space in a new way. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, diaspora has escaped from its ‘conceptual cage’. Steven Vertovec in 2000 proposed three meanings of diaspora. One as *diaspora as a social form* which refers to the scattering of the groups and in the contemporary sense meaning globally dispersed but organized group. Second was *diaspora as a type of consciousness* which refers to the experience of belonging ‘ here’ and ‘ there’, the awareness of mutli-locality and the third was the *diaspora as a mode of cultural production* emphasizing the flow of cultural objects, images and meanings back and forth. Sandra Ponzanesi (2004) calls diaspora as “both a material condition of dislocation and a post-modern intellectual notion that expresses existential dispersion.” (Ponzanesi xv)

William Safran (2007) noted that ‘diaspora’, while once ‘an object of suspicion, has [now] become one of fascination’, moving from being a ‘historically and politically loaded concept’ to a neutral and ‘catchall’ one. Cohen in 2008 talked about ‘reflective consolidation’. Robin Cohen in the second édition of *Global Diaspora: An Introduction* in 2008 tried to put the diasporic studies within a dimension of four phases. According to him the first phase was the Classical phase which was mainly restricted to the Jewish experience and the dispersion of Africans, Armenians and the Irish in the 1960s and 1970s. For him the second phase was of 1980s wherein Safran had deployed diaspora as ‘a metaphoric designation’. It described different categories of people which migrated either voluntarily or involuntarily. The third phase for him was of the mid 1990s which was marked by social constructionists and influenced by post –modernism where the emphasis was on deterritorialization of identities. The current phase according to him started by the turn of the century and he calls it as the Consolidation Phase which is marked by a modified

reaffirmation of the core elements of diasporic idea, elements, features and types. As per Cohen also, space itself has become reinscribed by cyberspace. There, “diaspora can be cemented or recreated through the mind, through artefacts and popular culture, and through a shared imagination.” (Cohen 8). Along with Robin Cohen, sociologists Paul Kennedy and Victor Roudometof, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century attempted to chart the transnational phenomena

In the last couple of decades the plural form of diaspora has become common. For Yasemin Soysal (1994), the term diaspora is ‘venerated’, for Floya Anthias (1998) it is a ‘Mantra’, for Martin Sokefeld (2000) the term is ‘hip’ and ‘in’, David Chariandy (2007), a Canadian writer, made diaspora ‘fashionable’ through his debut novel *Soucouyant: A Novel of Forgetting*. Vanessa K. Valdes (2012) in her book *Let Spirit Speak* looks at diaspora as ‘multiple sites of origin’. Infact diasporic writers vary in their approach towards diasporic status. Some take it as a journey, others as a route to discover roots, for some it is a discovery process and for a few it is the search for quest for one’s identity. The themes and the subject matter revolve around movement and change but it is the emotional conflict, cultural baggage and the deep-rooted memories which get re-casted in various forms of writing. Aatish Taseer, a product of diaspora, through his novel *Stranger to History* (2009) unfolds the complexities surrounding the diaspora and Ketu Katrak in her book *Contemporary Indian Dance: New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora* (2011) analyses the contemporary social issues.

Against the backdrop of the stages of the growth of diaspora it can be traced that there has been a paradigm shift. From forced migration to voluntary migration, from unskilled set of human transfer to skilled man power employment, from the concept of home as a memory to home as a memoir, from the sense of loss to the sense of gain, from

confused perceptions to confronted ideologies, from unforgotten past to reclaimed present and progressive future, from nostalgic mode to proximity mode. In a way diaspora is a way of life, experience, understanding, familiarity and creating know-how of the land of occurrence and happenings. It is more about association rather than displacement, connection rather than dislocation. It is not only a 'mode of identity' but also a 'mode of dwelling'. Diaspora is like 'God Janus with two faces' as per the researchers which look to the past and the future.

The nature of diaspora is dynamic, flexible and at times compliant. It is marked by hybridity, heterogeneity and multiplicity. Nestor Garcia Canclini (2000) says that hybridity is the, "point of departure from which to break from fundamentalist tendencies and from the fatalism of the doctrines of civilizing wars." (48) For him hybridity is "a field of energy and socio-cultural innovation." (Canclini 49) It is all about holding on and letting go. It is something close to long distance nationalism and transnationalism.

'Diaspora' from being an ancient word has acquired contemporariness. Diaspora is inseparable from the process of maintaining and negotiating and also to a certain extent reinventing cultural identities. Along with culture, basic factors such as gender, age, race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, civil status, musical styles, food and dress codes also to a certain extent provide powerful connections which redefines identification and recognition. In the modern times diaspora has evolved as a concept of identity that celebrates and accepts the difference. Diasporic communities are 'paragons of the transnationalist movement'. Therefore there are a lot many problems in arriving at a particular theory of diaspora.

Diaspora is not just physical relocation of people but due to the onslaught of

technological flow it is a means for the affirmation of an identity and also a site for losing that identity. It is indeed a human phenomenon which is lived, shaped, transformed and nurtured by many forms. It is multidirectional and opens to various forms of interaction, negotiation, acculturation, assimilation and even struggles. With regards to diaspora, imagination has now become an “organised field of social practices, a form of work and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) globally defined fields of possibility.” (Brazier 30) Media has succeeded in creating communities with “no sense of place” according to Meyrowitz. Joel Kotkin in contrast has expressed that there are strong diasporas who are economically successful which are likely to possess a strong identity, an advantageous occupational profile and a passion for knowledge. He writes, “Rather than being a relic of a regressive past ( ... ) commercial opportunism overwhelms the narrower economic nationalism of the past as the cosmopolitan global city-state takes precedence and even supplants the nation.” (Kotkin 16)

In an age of diaspora, ethnicity is always in a state of flux. A by-product of diasporic consciousness is the emergence of hyphenated identities. R. Radhakrishnan in his essay on *Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora* has mentioned that “feeling deracinated in the diaspora can be painful, but the politics of origins cannot be the remedy.” (qtd. in Brazier 128) He also has quoted that,

Diaspora is an excellent opportunity to think through some of these vexed questions: solidarity and criticism, belonging and distance, insider spaces and outsider spaces, identity as invention and identity as natural, location-subject positionality and the politics of representation, rootedness and rootlessness. (qtd. in Brazier 129)

Wittenstein brought in the image of a rope to explain how main features of diasporas are knitted together and he considered diaspora as agents of development. Another aspect related to diaspora in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is related to the man-made disasters which exhaustively find an expression in the literary world. 9/11 in the words of H.M. Naqvi, as reported by Sulagana Ghosh, generally creeps like a ‘silent character’ in the novels. He even has gone to the extent of saying, “there’s always been Pakistani writing”, but did admit "I wouldn’t have written *Home Boy* had it not been for 9/11.” It is his debut novel written in 2009. The great terror attack which hit US on September 11, 2001 negatively impacted a great deal the diasporic communities across the globe. The atmosphere marked with scepticism, doubt, anger, resentment also surfaced on the scene with people beginning to doubt the presence of diasporic communities and their loyalty towards the country to which they had migrated. *Anil’s Ghost* (2000) a novel by Michael Ondaatje for instance publishes the psychological scars of violence which was rampant in Srilanka.

Yet another by-product of twenty first century which took shape according to James C. Scott is *diaspora activism* which includes, “ international lobbying efforts, massive letter writing campaigns, cross national petition drives, national and transnational mobilization, collaboration with grassroots and non-governmental organizations at home, and organizing (often multi-ethnic ) protests in metropolitan centres.” (Braziel 159) To this he has used the term the “arts of resistance” and the “weapons of the weak”.

In this context of socio-cultural transformation and the theorizing of diaspora my aim is to analyse the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in the light of how the sensibilities and the sensitivity of a person evolves with a shift from motherland and the way it became a medium towards maintaining a connectivity with it.

My aim is to add to the existing knowledge by also trying to focus on the process. The humanitarian approach of the writer I felt is yet to be explored and I also find that her novels are not just about women characters but one can see a paradigm shift even in the role of man. My attempt would be to study this change with respect to her novels. In the present times, diasporic literature has reached its pinnacle of glory as the world is turning more towards the “literatures of lesser diffusion” as it helps in understanding the empty spaces of a person’s life in a broader context of cultural identity and collective memories. My attempt would be to study Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and how she has tried to relive the past, culture, and tradition of her country through her novels.

The major problem facing the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the disasters which are both man-made and natural. On one side Divakaruni seems to act upon the negative aspect of violence which scars the diaspora in the form of discrimination meted out to them. On the other side she feels that natural disasters bring humanity closer and the distinction drawn based on caste, class, religion, country seem to fade as people tend to unite for the sake of their life. My aim would also be to analyze the contradictory nature of disasters affecting the diaspora-one leading to discrimination and another to unification. I would also like to explore the complicated identities of diasporic communities but with an aim of ‘dissolving boundaries’ which ultimately is the writer’s own concern.

Tropes of food, religion and mythology have not been much explored in the novels of Divakaruni. I would try to study the novels with the tool of diaspora theory and look at the various elements related to diaspora like memory, nostalgia, assimilation, and acculturation. The past research has provided me with a framework and I wish to take it further by supplementing my views and also by looking at the way Divakaruni shapes

relationships in her novels and the way it undergoes a change because of the shift from motherland to adopted land. The research would undertake a journey into the inner realm of the characters to understand the outer world and complexity of human relations in the context of universalization, globalization and the changing scenario of the world where terrorism, materialism, racism are still the hallmarks. My concern would be to analyze the intricacies and the question of individuality immersed in a multicultural society and the way an individual strikes a chord with it to sustain the pressures. Finally this research wishes to explore the novels as signifiers and texts as context of the past which in my view would become a metaphor for the present and a representation of the change which leads to acceptance, acknowledgement and agreement.

In retrospect as I delve more into the themes of the novels, my motive would be to unfold the processes that make her narratives look personal as well as impersonal. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's own conflicts helped her to confront the problems and present to the world the experiences which are universal and appealing. It is through her writings that she has not just tried to love her culture but also question it. The present research aims to study her novels in detail in the light of varied elements and conceptual theories framing diaspora and issues forming the diasporic consciousness and experience.

After analyzing the research work done in the last decade, it is clear that most of the researchers have tried to compare and contrast Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni with her contemporary writers and also tried to delve into the expatriate experience, analyzing the way the past haunts the present, studying the development of women characters and also bringing to the fore the conflict of women in general. Much of the work has been done based on her first three novels and I find that there is a scope to look at the three novels with a

fresh perspective again and also to provide an in-depth analysis of her later novels which bring in issues central to the contemporary world and the way it impacts the people in diaspora. Very few scholars have tried to chart the entire growth and evolution of a particular writer living in a diaspora and the chapters which follow evaluates and critically reviews the works in the light of above mentioned elements.

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