CHAPTER - IV

CITIZENS OF THE WORLD: MAPPING HUMANITY

Immigration plays a major part in the growth of population in the United States, along with it, the ever increasing diversity which has a background of different ethnic communities. The patterns of education, economic status, and mindsets vary and effects of disasters and consequences affect accordingly. A series of natural disasters that have struck the earth and its consequences that triggers another set of social, political and economic problems like poverty, unemployment, religious and racial conflicts and terrorism, have woken up the entire human community to suddenly acknowledge the presence of nature that surrounds, a fact that was taken for granted otherwise.

As literature deals with life and all its accompaniments, studying the connection between literature and environment becomes all the more important. Unlike scientific or more technical studies, literature can be understood by anyone, as texts are a co-ordination between life, its events and experiences. The aesthetic elements in literature make it all the more relevant in exploring the creative side which is fuelled by the beautiful nature around us. It is only when people enjoy praise of nature amidst stories, an awareness of the state of things at present where reality shows the ugly side of progress with the resultant destruction is created. The growing environmental consciousness among citizens has shed more light into breaking myths about nature. This knowledge has enabled people to know the pros and cons of use and abuse of resources. By adopting a new way of leading an eco friendly life which gives nature enough space to rejuvenate has given a new lease of hope with regard to the availability of resources to support future generations.

This is definitely a pointer to prove the intensity of human intervention that triggers disasters occurring worldwide. Divakaruni’s novel One Amazing Thing is an exploration of different experiences, different people, their secrets and their strengths, how they all come together and share their stories in the aftermath of a disaster, when, realization strikes that they are not too far from death, and the best way to redemption is to let out their secrets which perhaps they have never shared with anyone before.
Divakaruni confesses that the motivation to write this novel came from her real life experience by volunteering with victims of hurricane Katrina and her own personal experience of being caught in the fear and frenzy of hurricane Rita. Her imaginations of how people react to natural disasters and whether their differences have any influence in how they manage such a situation and whether such adversities have the possibility of rekindling the humanitarian attitude that thrives inside every individual but are unaware of, have been penned down to gain more appreciation on the wonder called life.

With the backdrop of an earthquake, nine lives get stuck in the basement of a visa consulate in America. The nine strangers coming from distinctly different backgrounds open up to each other only with the hope of taking their mind away from the impending doom which had emotionally and physically strained them of their strength, much needed to survive till they get some help. The novel’s central idea is to exhibit the kind of thick walls that has been erected in between people in the pretext of self protection. The irony is though technology has brought the world closer, people are still apart. Communications, no longer have the strength to convey messages, all that is done is mere exchange of words through languages.

Humans live in a make-believe world of unity. But this unity works under convenience, thus distorting the very idea of unity. Sometimes gender, religion and economic status becomes the norm for unity and other times nationality. Under these classifications what ultimately thrives is inequality. When battles are fought to make voices heard, the larger picture, where living remains the most important need is much forgotten. One of the main facets of unity remains nationality which brings people with many differences together but is given the benefit due to being in the confinements of a designated geographical location. Here nature in the form of land becomes the trope for togetherness and identity is decided by imparting “citizenship,” a political marker.

An ecoperspective reading of literature reveals many times the status of the environment and its many facets in contemporary fiction by exhibiting the way of life the characters lead with regard to their lifestyles. Moreover through immigrant literature the diasporics display the existing complexities of citizenship. Their status
helps to analyze and understand what exactly entitles individuals to claim citizenship? How can their displacement trauma equate the plight of nature? Can duties and responsibilities be realigned to include nature or environment in the dictums of existing citizenship norms? And what are the possible measures needed to bring out more ethical values into the concept of citizenship that at present mainly involves the protection of human interests to become more inclusive in order to safeguard everything in this world that binds life in its totality.

Citizenship at present is a political concept that demands individuals to adhere strictly to the laws laid out by governments resulting in legal implications if failed to do so. It mainly focuses on human societal interests. However an alternate concept of citizenship or modifying the existing norms of citizenship still remains much as an idea not yet practiced. Statistics prove the dangerous outcome of living on the edge scenario by humans to have caused tremendous depletion of resources at a fast pace. This is mainly due to environmental illiteracy, as citizenship being a main governing body of humans have failed to acknowledge the importance of nature and are largely responsible for breeding citizens with lack of etiquettes towards environment. An extended stay on earth for future generations is at stake and has triggered a demand for a change.

Environmental literacy is difficult to be measured as the concept of conservation varies from a first world country like America to that of India. If Americans propagate the conservation of wilderness as an act of protecting nature then for a third world country like India, it is about protecting the very culture as a majority of Indian population lead an agrarian life that is directly connected to water, soil, and air. Dean W. Curtain points out that: “...the critical environmental issue for the great majority of the world’s people is the struggle to maintain traditional relationships to particular places: their ecocommunities” (8). Thus when it comes to modifying citizenship to enable environmental justice, the variations in geo-political status is a matter of concern.

An uniform policy to regulate the specific environmental issues concerning a particular region, and a parent governing organization that in turn monitor and aid help wherever and whenever required with the active involvement from an individual
level to that of a nation needs to be setup. The reason being natural disasters are not isolated cases, but a chain of events that are often rendered invisible. To prove this from a scientific perspective, a close look at the report published by the committee on Disaster Research in the Social Sciences, National Research Council in the book *Facing Hazards and Disasters: Understanding Human Dimensions*, briefs about the causes for natural disaster pertaining to United States, nevertheless a cause that triggers similar disasters across the globe:

> Metropolitan areas throughout the country are increasing their vulnerability to disasters because development continues unabated in many hazard-prone areas. Most of the vulnerability is associated with sprawling low-density development patterns caused by the outward expansion of the suburban development on the urban fringe and commercial strip development along highways leading into and out of cities and suburbs. For example, between 1982, and 1997, the percentage increase in urban land dramatically outpaced the increase in population growth in all regions of the country. These land consumption rates place intense pressure on environmentally sensitive lands, including floodplains, earthquake fault zones, and unstable slopes. (57)

Since the human responsibility for disasters are proven beyond contemplation, the need to analyze in detail, how the race to attain global power by each nation, comprising individual will into a collective desires, need a diversion in order to alter the path to a greener one or the new hysteria of everything “eco-friendly” as a replacement for the industrial revolution which produced hazardous chemicals more than the products that humans claim to be a necessity.

> Literature is one area which idealizes the enchantment of natural beauty for the setting of stories. The readers are swiftly transported into avenues wherein the distinction between reality and fiction often becomes blurred. The mind is capable of transporting to any place at any time thus making it possible to connect to a non human world. This brings the immense joy of being in that particular place very real. Such a discovery enables to empathize and to be more compassionate towards nature, irrespective of the geographical locations.
The humdrum of thoughts in the mind generate ideas that transcend all sorts of borders uniting for a common cause. Be it any genre, the omnipotent presence of nature in literature signifies its immense outreach in today’s chaotic world. The artistic hues of language can paint a world so colorful so as to be seen by the inner vision of any soul. Stories have the power to heal but the skill to listen is needed, a dwindling element in today’s fast-paced world. By listening to stories, a sort of communication with the heart that harness understanding and respect for one another is generated. When asked in an interview of Oxford Journals conducted by Metka Zupančič about how her cultural and spiritual upbringing and her present role as an immigrant in the United States has influenced *One Amazing Thing*, Divakaruni explains:

In *One Amazing Thing*, as in many of my works, I’m trying to bring together things out of my heritage and actually going back deep into the ancient heritage of Indian literature, as well as the very global and multicultural society in which we live here in America and all over the world. The world has always been very global, but more so now, it has also become multicultural. In *One Amazing Thing*, the nine characters are all protagonists…I am going back to ancient storytelling forms, like the *Panchatantra*, the wise animal tales, where all of the animals are telling stories from which everyone in the company can learn…this perhaps comes out of my own personal background, where my grandfather was a great oral story teller…in the beginning there is much agitation in the minds of the characters, because they wonder who is better, who is in charge. But as the stories go on, they begin to realize that perhaps there can be another paradigm, where no one needs to take control of the group. We are each good at something, and we use it to help the community. This is very much a community based-ensemble novel, similar to tales within tales in ancient Indian culture and also in many other ancient cultures.

Vulnerability to natural disasters has highly increased owing to mismanagement of natural resources. When calamity strikes the core values of ethics are questioned as to the role and responsibility of humans in such disasters. Where religion and spirituality points to the sins of humans as causes for floods, earthquakes
and various other natural disasters, the truth is indeed the “ecological sins” committed in the form of over exploitation of resources to satiate the growing greed of human populace that results in ecological destruction on a large scale. The loss of lives is the first direct impact of such calamities, leaving the kin’s of the deceased mentally and emotionally scarred for life.

Along with huge losses incurred in the form of destruction and damage of domestic and commercial structures the economic and financial prospects of a region or a country is also affected. It is at the time of such disasters, human rights violation such as rape, murder, looting and human trafficking happen adding to the existing burden of increasing crime rate ratio across the globe. Warnings of possible future natural calamities are at frightening levels, taking into consideration the fast pace at which earth is exploited. Though warnings are used to minimize the risk of disasters, the psychological factors influence the response in times of such crisis both in a positive and negative way. As Burby opines:

A variety of psychological factors lead people to ignore immediate warnings of imminent disaster as well as cautions about using land that is hazardous. Some people are not able to accurately perceive probabilities of loss, even when they have been told a hazard exists. As a result, they tend to heavily discount any benefits from avoiding a hazard of taking action to reduce vulnerability. Even after they have been proven wrong and a disaster occurs, people tend to assume, it will never recur (a conclusion likely to be refuted by subsequent events). Dissonance theory (i.e., beliefs follow behavior) predicts that, once people have exposed themselves to a hazard by locating in an area at risk, they will assume any hazards that might exist are trivial. Also, some people become fatalistic when thinking about hazards when they can neither prevent them nor estimate (very accurately) when and where losses are likely to occur. Thus psychological difficulties in perceiving hazards lead most people to simply ignore or greatly discount the potential for disaster. (5)

Divakaruni’s nine characters shared a similar attitude prior to the earthquake that stranded them. They were engrossed in their own thoughts and lives, hardly did they ever acknowledge the others presence in the room, other than by just a glance
scrutinizing their physical appearances, in a disinterested way. This is symptomatic of the general attitude humans have. Any relation between people is based on benefit and hence many a times fail to acknowledge others in every sense. Such a behavior has a lot of implications and at present times what is commonly seen is, even helping someone in trouble becomes an isolated case taken up by few good Samaritans. Since this is on an individual basis, the difficulty in reaching across and developing relations when more barriers have to be transcended becomes all the more complex.

Since literature transcends boundaries, interaction with other societies is made a lot more possible through texts. The monopoly of English language has helped text from diverse language backgrounds to be read and understood by a majority of population; similarly translation of texts to native languages too has helped the spread of ideas exemplified through these texts. In general, advocacy of literacy should top the list in terms of development and progress as only through knowledge can humanity come out of darkness and a plethora of misconception that has plagued the world today.

As discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis negotiating space in a place through the experiences of diaspora sparks the widespread debate about the human responsibility towards nature. If civilization is marked by clearing lands in the interests of human populace, then disasters can be assumed as the way of nature’s marking of their civilization by clearing lives that is overburdening the ecosystem. People mainly live with a terrific selfishness, partly induced due to the capitalistic culture, and it is only when they face mortality, they wake up to the reality of being face to face with all their deeds committed so far. There is immense potential within every individual to either protect or inflict damage on the environment. This realization gives hope to utilize the power within to reform and to be more empathetic to the environment around by understanding that nature too is precious like human lives.

Wisdom and compassion, the two traits of being human are vastly replaced by the titillating effects of technology and globalization, driving people in to frenzy of self indulgence. But amidst such chaos there are a fair percentage of people who admire and long to be in the presence of beautiful landscape. Human imaginations are
always woven around the beauty of nature which brings out the better side of human behaviour. In Divakaruni’s novel *One Amazing Thing*, people are totally perplexed when they are caught unaware in the destructive phase of nature. The investigation of human psyche in such a scenario brings out the hidden shades of innermost behavior. A close look into human minds would reveal a forever engagement with what is presumed as the “world” - a very private space where interplay of human emotions thrives, and beyond that there is no concern for the real physical world which is “nature.”

Humanity so far has represented many issues which have been in historical records and mainly these issues are aligned to the social, political and economic parameters. What has been ignored is the environmental problems, the complex relationship between man and nature which are indeed the root cause for all the other issues. Only by dwelling deep, the complexities of such a relationship can be deciphered. By implementing policies both at an individual as well as a governmental level, a hope to harness change can be seen in the distant future. If human relationship to the land is truth personified, as land extends beyond, and joins the entire world and does not have any visible boundaries other than variations in landscapes and climates, then cultural differences are a mirage of the corrupted minds.

The desperation to survive a disaster, evokes the naturalistic tendencies of human behaviour, and is the best scenario to do self introspection. The survival of the fittest, a concept of Charles Darwin can be applied to literature that dwells in real life like situations that can bring out the best or worst in humans.

Minutes before the second rumble, Uma felt a craving to see the sun. had the gossamer fog that draped the tops of the downtown buildings when she arrived that morning lifted by now? If so, the sky would be bright as a Niles lily; if not, it would glimmer like fish scales. Suddenly she needed to know which it was. Later she would wonder at the urgency that had pulled her out of her chair and to her feet. Was it an instinct like the one that made zoo animals moan and whine for hours before natural disasters struck? ... (7-8)
Place shapes human experience and experience become the touchstone for the attitudes that is carried along. The intense pride that is felt for the association with nature is a universal theory that can establish the link shared between nature and man. It’s an experience of a kind where your desire or happiness at seeing or the sight of anything natural comes without any prejudice or differences. For instance there is nothing called an American sun or an Indian moon. All natural elements invoke the same feeling irrespective of borders, nations, class, race or religion, and there is no claim of ownership and it belongs to everyone and cannot be bought. But, there are natural resources that have been brought under human ownership like land.

Colonialism records the official partition of lands, though the fact is that all the species born on the land has rights on the land by law of nature. Identity has come to be associated with land whether born, brought up or at present living and this positioning constantly evolves the personal traits of humans. As Rochelle Tobias reflects on this concept in the text *Discourse of Nature in the Poetry of Paul Selan: The Unnatural World*, “…Space is necessary for self-reflection insofar as reflection occurs in language and language is, if nothing else, a “space” for figures, for the representation of the self as something with contours” (2).

This definition of the self is admittedly vague but nonetheless sufficient to underscore that the self emerges through a process of differentiation in which it is cut from its environment. Distinct from its environment the self can assume contours. It can appear as something rather than nothing, which always a threat is facing it, given its history or origin. Tobias further suggests the opinion of Paul de Man’s opinion from a reading of the essay “Condillac’s *Essai Sur l’origine des connaissances humaines*”:

Entities, in themselves, are neither distinct nor defined...They are more flux. They first become fixed entities as the subject reflects on them and differentiates them from one another. In so doing the subject defines not only the world but also himself as the basis for a world that is comprehended, that is, a world abstracted from itself. (2)
Occupancy of a space physically or emotionally can bring meaning to the idea of the term called “place.” It is the overwhelming emotion of familiarity that restricts movements out of this so called space by framing it in the mental landscape forever. The concept of homeland derives its meaning from this sort of place where the aspiration to live forever or else the need to retain it if possible, for a return is sought after. This emotion defines environment as this kind of deep attachment has a language of its own.

The realistic nuances of narration that Divakaruni presents in One Amazing Thing is akin to naturalism, a genre which combines the elements of ecocriticism as it is very close to the realities of life which ironically does not have the supposed fairy tale endings which is woven into fiction many a times for reader satisfaction. Every story has an array of places that travels along with the characters and every place is as significant as the event or a moment that takes place in the story.

Uma’s suggestion to tell stories at a catastrophic time was inspired by Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, a text very familiar with literature students and the content of which is a collection of 24 stories told by the pilgrims on their way to the shrine of ST. Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral as a part of storytelling contest where the winner would be entitled to a free meal at the Tabard Inn at Southwark on their return. Uma was supposedly reading the book at the visa consulate while waiting for her turn in order to compensate the Medieval Literature class that she was missing at the university. Uma’s idea to share stories is also similar to Krishna’s conversation with Arjuna in the eponymous Indian classic epic Mahabaratha, a discourse at a very crucial time when Arjuna was lost in dilemma. The advice by Krishna helps Arjuna to overcome his doubts and confusions and to proceed with the war. The art of storytelling or sharing stories has been an integral part of life and is a very old tradition that mesmerizes even the newest generation.

By listening to each others’ life episodes of utmost significance which Uma terms as “one amazing thing”, the novel reflects the theme of amazing events that sums up the journey of life, along with it the knowledge that individual life stories are the inspiration that motivates the collective human society to move ahead at times of despair and disasters. By sharing the most special event of each one’s life, they get to
learn that happiness, sorrow, misery hope and despair and other innumerable emotions felt each second of the day is universal and there is something common among all, even amongst uniqueness.

The one similarity that all the nine characters share is being in the United States of America and they were all travelling to India for various reasons, which lands them at the visa consulate office at the same time. Some are natural citizens; while others are immigrants who had spend quite a few years in the country. They are people from different ethnic backgrounds with different cultures, behaviors and attitudes. Through them the readers get to learn different perceptions of the same country. The negative and positive side of being an immigrant is also explored, and also how individual destiny, shape their outlooks of belonging. In Divakaruni’s novel *One Amazing Thing*, the different dimension of citizenship is analyzed from different cultural views.

Who is called a real citizen and why do rules differ in different countries with relation to citizenship? Why is it mandatory to belong legally to a geographical confinement, whereas all have an identity of belonging to the very earth and how can such an universal concept of citizenship be actualized by including not just humans, but even nature with all its life forms of which humans are just one variant. Let’s begin with negotiating ideas of citizenship in the US as explained by Maxey Ruth:

As distinct from this British Asian insistence on the downbeat nature of immigrant living conditions, South Asian American writers veer from optimism at the brightness of American modernity, reinscribing the nation’s popular status as a ‘land of opportunity’, to a sense of greater ambivalence at the potential for loneliness and for cultural and political alienation embodied by this vast country. In its explorations of the ‘enigma of arrival’ (in Naipaul’s phrase), South Asian American writing therefore reveals, on the one hand, a palpable excitement at what the US has to offer. This exuberance can be read within the wider context of America’s national mythology as the *ne plus ultra* for immigrants, which may also explain why such attitudes are missing from British Asian narratives of arrival. The US is, for the most part, defined
positively within these ‘coming-to-America’ texts, especially by what it is not in relation to South Asian countries… (34)

Citizenship involves laying down of rules and regulations, responsibilities and ethics to be strictly followed while living in a particular country or nation, which are at present the determinants to prove the affinity towards that nation. This comradeship is primarily due to the shared historical past and more or less, the similar physical features of people and the familiar landscapes. But the basic structure is often the “place” which is the site of citizenship construction. Thus place is the major component which comprises “citizenship” as an official system that regulates the governance of its workings by dividing it into regions.

Robert Danisch says that Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* asserts that “All men are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit and brotherhood” (5). Now, in order to build on this ambitious project of world citizenship, the concept of ecological/ environmental/ green citizenship that has been much discussed earlier needs to be reintroduced here due to the very fact that its practical implications have not yet taken off in a full fledged way. The need to understand citizenship with reference to nature is important due to the rising nature/man conflict that has already been symptomatic in the form of serious climate changes across the world. The universal idea of citizenship can be realized by taking a stance in giving priority to nature and thus the concept of ecological citizenship could become a working model to realize the true spirit of citizenship where the world is conotated as a single entity. Though the terms ecological/ environmental/ green resonates the same meaning, the aim is to study the impact of social contingencies on nature and vice versa in order to redefine citizenship. As Dobson opines that, “environmental politics” is an articulation of a “post- cosmopolitan citizenship,” the connection between environmental politics and citizenship needs to be understood to draw the framework for “ecological citizenship.” For this, he puts forth the suggestion by Hartley Dean:

Green thinking has impacted on our understandings of citizenship in at least three different ways. First, environmental concerns have entered our
understanding of the rights we enjoy as citizens. Second, the enhanced level of
global awareness associated with ecological thinking has helped to broaden
our understanding of the potential scope of citizenship. Third, emergent
ecological concerns have added fuel to a complex debate about the
responsibilities that attach to citizenship. (84)

Keeping this in mind, there is a need to understand the significance of place in
the evolvement of citizenship. What space is to place, time is to nature and this factor
determines all the traits that define life. Events that happen in the so called span of
time are a very precious arrangement which slips out of hand even before one can
realize, leading to the formation of “past” which is retained only in memories. These
memories are what act as judgments in the future steps taken. But the irony is that
what is understood as judgments, cannot necessarily guide lives singlehandedly.
There is in fact more to this, what is planned ahead is thrown out of gear, when
unforeseen incidents happen to people. However, people are more shaken when faced
with loosing the physical environment, it is a moment of realization that the most
important thing required to exist is the physical environment which comprises of land,
air and water and it is the same everywhere and for everyone.

In Divakaruni’s novel One Amazing Thing, place is the main character, which
manipulates the destiny of the other human characters. All the nine protagonists’
journey is from and to the same place, a metaphor for life in general. All journeys
begin and end similarly. The mortality off all living things is a truth and it need not be
feared or condemned. But by leading a good life it becomes possible to celebrate
these two important events. But a major component is communication that needs to be
successfully established to have a better understanding of “self” and the workings of
the non-human agency around.

When Uma suggests the idea of telling stories, though at first hesitant, others
too begin to feel that it is the best way to relieve their burden by disclosing the most
important events of their lives as they are not sure about their chances of survival. In
Divakaruni’s earlier novels where her protagonists were Indians, especially women
cought in the cultural war between America and India. Their struggles about tuning
their minds into a new environ with a desperation to assimilate into the host country
and at the same time retain their Indianess was the main concern of these novels. Whereas, in *One Amazing Thing*, people of other nationalities are also the protagonists, as this time the story is about the uniqueness of being human with respect to their basic instinct to survive irrespective of geographical differences, or for that matter any such differences that are man-made. It is an insight into the many layers, under which humans are buried and the exploration of ways to surface from such a depth so as to break free of all constraints that is narrowing minds in order to create ideological clashes.

Landscape is often a symbol of permanence that is etched into the minds which is indeed a part, if not the whole in identifying self with a particular nation. These are rather emotional indications of a bonding through which “self” has evolved. It is indeed difficult to part with such familiar physical spots such as a structure like home, the land on which it is built, the flora and fauna around it and so on. The instinct to protect familiar surroundings is born thus. Articulation of identity is deeply embedded in the environment, asserting its importance and influence. Such sentiments are maligned when societal pressures inject culture as a priority above nature. The purity with which nature was perceived is lost, blurring senses to such an extent that an individual fails to see that nature is beyond boundaries and cannot be barricaded.

The psychological construct has to be realigned drastically in order to accommodate this new view of emotionally identifying not just a particular spot as home but the entire earth, as globalization has dissolved boundaries and the need to leave home is a dire necessity. Such movements have restored human faith that boundaries are forever shifting owing to the large scale political unrest across the world and the need to be empathetic in advocating a liberal attitude of inclusion by laying down the claim of ownership of nations by merely demarcating them with the tool of shared similarities. Thus the idea of home is fluid as Ruth Maxey explains in South Asian Atlantic Literature:

Critics of South Asian diasporic writing certainly agree on the centrality of home within this body of work, and many of them examine questions of immigration, diaspora, transnationalism, identity, and biculturalism. Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling note that ‘home is a place, a site in which we live.
But, more than this, home is ... an idea ... imaginary... home is much more than house or household. Within these works, however, home is often experienced in down-to-earth fashion at the explicitly spatial level of physical environment and quotidian dwelling. As Sanjukta Dasgupta has put it, the desire for locating a home in the world and the home as domestic space [in Bengali American women’s writing] seem [s] to be intricately enmeshed as cultures, identities, heredity and environment are negotiated. Life ... and the US becomes a series of such material negotiations, whereby alien weather must be survived, and domestic territory claimed. Process of settlement, reverse colonization, and postcolonial critique are figured through climate, map-making, horticulture, home owning, and the rise of regional affiliations.... (31)

Diaspora’s obsession with their homelands mainly finds focus in the themes of South Asian writers which leads to an introspection as to why the glories of the countries they are at present residing are sidelined, rather a nostalgic take on their roots results in overemphasis of negative image of the country merely because of contradictory cultural practices. It is rather true that fondness for a place is deep rooted in the mind not just because of its aesthetics, but mainly because of the above said practices that have become habits and an integral part of “self.” As with Divakaruni as a writer, Maxey opines that among her other works “In Unknown Errors of Our Lives, many of ... newly arrived characters confound the stereotype of immigrants obsessed with the mother country. They have escaped India for a host of reasons, often related to familial or public trauma (especially communal violence), believing that America will offer greater opportunities for privacy, safety, and personal development....” (35).

The way diaspora changed the outlook on nations, with the opportunity of being in a new country altogether is similar to the way nature’s identity was distorted. Lekan proves this by saying that Stefan Zweig’s- a noted author has once said that “progress” had the power of religion, wherein people believed more on this “progress” than a Bible, as the proof was visible in the form of “steamships, streetcars” and many more things which could be measured as goods. This took people to places and staying in one’s birth place was no more a concern, and the birth
of a “modern individual” who no longer had any “organic connection to history or place” happened and these people in turn started perceiving nature in new ways. Lekan argues that though this was not new, the new man made environment began to have a character of its own which has resulted in a difficult situation wherein it is not easy to distinguish what is natural and what is man-made with respect to the environment (19-20).

The identity of a nation is based on both concepts of place “natural” and “man-made,” the real and the structures of progress which is distancing nature from its primitive grip with the force of civilization. This has its effect on every individual, moving away from the realities in the name of progress which has distanced them from being empathetic towards nature. Urbanization has led people to concentrate on a life all about profits, working hard day to day only to invest in material possessions. Life has become a vicious circle of buy, sell and buy more. All human efforts are calculated in monetary terms. The consequences of such a human attitude, is the destruction of natural resources. If protection of civilian rights is the motto of patriotism, then how can the protection of nature be included into a nation’s narrative?

The cultural alienation felt by immigrants in a new country is akin to the alienation that is felt by nature today. The moral inclination to protect the environment has been subdued by the many political, social and economic problems. It’s indeed very important to realize that nature’s collapse can strike humanity irrespective of all the differences that humans have given so much thought to. The concept and perception of nature differs in each culture, and so does its planning, reconstruction and preservation. As man had an upper hand with relation to the above said activities, his/ her interests were placed above the rest. Thus nation building was a sort of process which helped more in establishing a community for people. All human endeavors more or less ignored environment.

As mentioned earlier, one of the major factors could have been “environment illiteracy.” To camouflage the insensitivity towards nature, and to guard self gratification in order to hide technological destruction of nature, artificial construction of landscapes along with modern inventions became the norm of the day. For
instance, beautification of roadways with strips of plants and flowers, public and private gardens and so on.

This inclusion of nature in no way serves the purpose of conservation to tackle the problems of eco gradation. Retaining the authenticity of nature is in itself a beneficiary for a nation’s narrative, as the physical components of a nation is as important as the people and all other species that inhabit it. If nature represents tradition, then the newly constructed infrastructures by man represents modernity. Since tradition is overwhelmingly sought after in today’s chaotic world as it helps to connect and retain sanity and brings tranquility to existence. The necessity of each era varies. When consumption was direct, there was more focus on agriculture, but as times changed, the industrial innovations took charge and changed human ways of consumption and when the shift from basic needs to other social aspects were highlighted like nation, race, class, religion and economy, conservation of nature took a back seat.

Events such as conflicts, wars were a result of this imbalanced social phenomenon. When the harmonious relationship that was once shared between nature and human ancestors were replaced with highly selfish motivators of modernity, gradual degradation of nature began as indicators of stress thrust upon nature by humans. As the grip of nationality tightened around patriots, intolerance grew along with it, though the irony is that, as intense as it was between borders, it was inside too within the mind of each individual, blurring the vision of universal brotherhood. In such a scenario negotiating home within the context of a nation and the idea of a nation within the context of nature are closely interlinked, opening debates to introspect existing cultural and political norms.

Studying different aspects of immigrant experience in the writings of South Asian writers in particular is an eye opener about the bonding that everyone shares with their ancestral homeland. Though human minds are capable of emotionally mapping roots through memory, the physical shifting indeed inflicts trauma of psychological homelessness. Similarly the use and misuse of resources is leading to nature shifting its geographical contours which would doubly impact “homelessness” universally. The hostility faced in a new environment or a country impacts in such a
way, intensifying the longing for familiar surroundings which are more welcoming. Thus immigrant writing focuses much on prescribing a cultural concoction for the ailment of intolerance in the form of racism, a problem between nations.

The burden of having a colonial history adds to the strong urge for liberation to the South Asians. Their constant struggles in assimilating to a new world results in a hybridism of identity which puts them at a dilemma whether to return to their roots or to stay back in the new country. The material prospects of being in a country like United States often lures immigrants to forgo traditional concept of home. Nevertheless all immigrants do not share this attitude, as there are many who consider America as a temporary place to earn money and finally return home for good. This indicates the victory of ideology over material yearning, as some individuals firmly believe in retaining roots, where their tradition thrives and also remains a very important aspect of their life.

All the nine characters in the novel *One Amazing Thing*, who were caught up in the American consulate were heading towards India for various reasons. Their return and the happening of earthquake in America is a metaphor for the broken dreams promised by the affluent country, claiming to be the super power in terms of economy, technology, knowledge and so on. Divakaruni’s fictional account of the earthquake is a reminiscent of the impact of 9/11, in America though it was man-made and not a natural disaster, has given a jolt to the history of the country as the melting pot of culture, turning it into a nightmarish event sweeping the sand under the foot of immigrants. This has once again assured them that globalization was just a mirage and place is indeed somewhere you have to return or else you are forced to go back to. The idea of setting up home wherever you are physically present is a fairytale concept due to the many walls that humans themselves have erected. Thus all the energy is focused on protecting enclosures which are very fragile and any sort of misunderstanding have the possibility of erupting conflicts and violence in the world.

Homeland and nature rides in to two opposite directions making it difficult to work on protecting the environment project. Back to nature idea thrives only in few minds, and spreading awareness is not that easy, considering the obsession of people to their nation. Climate plays an important part in the making of a nation. According
to Maxey, “the meteorological facts” of United States which has hot and humid weather conditions which causes more weather-related destructions is one of the features that South Asians find similar and this gives them a feeling of acceptance. Sometimes the climate of a country can become hostile, making life difficult for its inhabitants and constantly reminding them to abandon and return to their preferred location.

Though ecocriticism is an extension of an aesthetic component in literature, similarly in real life its focus is on defining the physical environment. In the concerned novel, nature becomes the main antagonist in the form of an earthquake. The protagonists struggle becomes tough as the opposite force is powerful beyond imagination. Divakaruni tries to emulate the importance of environment at par in her narration and the impact of the earthquake comes to life through the characters. Similar to the characters plight, nature is equally devastated. Though the initial frenzy of readership would concentrate on the human stories, gradually it does shift thoughts to ponder about the aftermath of a natural disaster.

The reconstruction of nature began in order to adjust into a new environment, and this mode was established historically with the advent of colonialism. Bringing land and its occupants under authority was considered an important project to mould the “wild and untamed” into civilization. This was definitely an act of the minority where the liberty of the indigenous majority to hold onto their culture and tradition were suppressed by using force. As a matter of fact, every individual goes through transformation of identity, though colonialism played a major role in that, the passing of time does have an impact on people and everything else on earth. Stability is rather a fragile notion. The efforts like framing memories as history, practicing tradition and culture of the past and keeping it alive where ever destiny takes are all significant to finally locate the identity. Retention of identity has become an impossible task due to hybridism, the new global revolution that claims day by day more of geographical, political and cultural space.

The guidelines for citizenship practiced by Western countries ignored the unique identity of the colonized countries. The internal politics of belonging in every mind is subjected to the scrutiny by pinning geographical location to assume a
preconceived set of behavior and cultural patterns. Working hard to fit into such a frame was the task for diaspora, in order to survive in a new country. For instance Kelly Tolia and Divya P. explains the research methodology they used to give a renewed definition to “Asianness”:

This theoretical premise of ‘Asianness’ has resulted in the definition of ‘Asian’ within the research process as being counter to ethnic, cultural or biological fixing of Asian subjectivity and lived experience. The approach taken here is a part of a political act of fracturing methodologies which fix and define a static identity formed by a static culture, which, in turn is attached to a static biological type. It is a political break away from biological and cultural essentialism. Instead ‘ethnicity’, ‘identity’ and race become processes of engagement figured through cultural materials which signify geographical mobility and idealized ‘landscapes of home’. (70)

Can citizenship be considered ecological? Then biologically all of mankind is citizens of nature, but not officially recognized by authority. This concept of citizenship extends to the non human world too, as certain plant and animal species can thrive only in climatically designated area that suits their survival. In the present era of globalization, viewing citizenship from an ecological point, can address conflicts based on cultural, political and socio-economic issues. Divakaruni’s novel is a case study of nine individuals who is contemplating the issues of diasporic community at large in the United States. As Tolia and Divya explains the psychological connection between people and nature in determining their “feel at home” experience in whichever place they reside more from the attitude of women needs to be taken seriously as they represent home in more ways than men:

For many of the women, the effect of migration is evident in their attitudes and relationships with nature and climate; the heat of the sun, the dryness of the air and the brightness of the sky are vivid memories as migration has taken them out of this ecological context…Arrival and adjustments are just as much about adjustment to climate as they are about making a home in a new nation. The shift in physical environment influences them psychologically and physically; the weather is a feature of their isolation and a feature of the
obstacles they have to overcome to sustain day-to-day living. The women’s ecological engagements highlight an orientation to particular environmental textures. A set of ecological aesthetics can be traced through their connectedness. The women’s recollections include those intimate connections with kitchen-gardens and more formal national landscapes. Their narratives describe real, imaginary and symbolic relationships with natural textures.… (77)

Being caught in the earthquake, Uma’s spirit is half broken and her intense longing to get back to her normal everyday life is narrated by Divakaruni; “she wanted to escape to something outside this dreadful prison of a room- the Ocean, her parents, the pad Thai noodles that she had been planning to make for dinner, Ramon bringing her jasmine tea in bed- but she was unable to squeeze past the panic” (22). As environment forms the backdrop of everyday living, simple day to day activities which comprises of many factors such as the presence of loved ones, favorite food and the things that one likes combined with the physical environment forms a collaborative narrative of past and present termed as “experiences.”

This has been summed up by Tolia and Divya as follows; “this relationship between past lived environments, imagined and idealized ones, and present lived landscapes has been termed a triadic relationship, pertinent to a post-colonial positioning theorized by Brah (1996) and Safran(1991) … these materials of connection represents nodal points in a biographical journey, which, in turn, are symbolic of the political dynamic of making a home ‘elsewhere…” (80). Even as assimilation takes place into a new nation, the identification is subject to natural elements. This in turn creates a longing in the mind for seeing similar landscapes as it can reduce the trauma of displacement to a great extant.

A visual identification of everyday objects is where the connection of location to the so called “home” becomes valid. By bringing in past elements in the form of materials, artifacts, familiar garden plants and so on, the relocating of roots by transforming emotions of belonging into a new space happens. The individual and collective memory helps retain and take forward the heritage or history of a group which is complete with individual experiences shared with one another. Though likes
and dislikes make it difficult in negotiating a uniform methodology of identification, it is also true that nothing is ever static. By taking into consideration new and changing attitudes towards conserving the past, some are slowly erased from history.

The process of evolution runs on change, clearing obstacles that can thwart progress and this has both positive and negative effects. In the case of diaspora’s mobility gives access to analyze memories in the context of different culture from far and near. They are in a better position to judge pros and cons of migration and since migration is similar to evolution and it cannot be curtailed even if the nations achieve perfect conditions for its citizens to live.

By mentioning the comforts of revisiting sites such as the ocean and her home, Uma does not become conclusive that the final refuge in times of distress is home. The significance of something natural as the open spaces, for relaxing a disturbed mind being caught in a room as a result of the devastating earthquake, without being able to escape is exhibited through her desire of being in communion with nature. Thus the material or non material things that she identifies, which constitute her favorite space is an amalgamation of memory and experience that were companions of her mobility. Uma’s own story where at a point her belief is totally shaken with regard to her parent’s relationship that she thought was perfect puts her through a dangerous experience, something that could have ruined her life, but it ultimately works in her favour so as to find out that her life is hers own completely and she has to take complete charge of it, no matter what role others have to play in it.

Uma was not able to understand how her parents had made the decision to move back to India all of a sudden despite living in America for so many years. She wondered how they would adjust to the chaotic life in India, where as everything in US was so well organized making life much more easy. “But all these years you complained about how terrible Kolkata was,’ Uma had cried, aghast, when they called to inform her of their decision. Apart from her concern for their well-being, she was vexed at not having been consulted. “The heat, the dirt, the noise, the crowded buses, the beggars, the bribes, the diarrhea, the bootlicking, the streets littered with garbage that never got picked up. How are you going to handle it?” (5).
Uma believed that unlike relationships in America where “couples losing interest in each other, living in wooden togetherness or even breaking up?” (6), were common, her parents seemed to be very much in love which made her feel very secure, but one day when her father announces his decision to divorce her mother, Uma is startled and just could not figure out what could have happened. This hurt her a lot and she lost trust in her own relationship with Ramon. There are many different facets to a country’s culture and for Uma it becomes a benchmark to judge and invariably connects it to the behavior of a person living there. Her perceptions about India and America are based on these. But with what happens to her, she realizes that every individual’s journey is different and all external factors just support the journey, however every individual has this immense power to decide what is best for them.

The real notion of belonging becomes a debate between Uma and her parents in every sense. Being the first generation of immigrants whose emotional affinity partially remains in the place of birth, in the case of Uma’s parents it is India and their decision to return for good is justified. Whereas for Uma who was born and brought up in US, she has no urge to get back to India as it is only a place she has heard but not experienced. Thus more than the legal aspect of citizenship, belonging is mainly contemplated through memories, mainly of the growing up years. She has no memories attached to it. When citizenship is contemplated, culture dominates and the sense of belonging is akin to childhood memories of images and symbols enveloped by a familiar environment whether pleasant or unpleasant. Humans develop a liking towards such familiarity, thus legal citizenship can be merely in papers but the real citizenship is in the mind. The real meaning of citizenship is summed up by Tollia and Divya as, “What is required in this post-colonial era of citizenry is a geographical understanding of identity politics. Not geographical citizenship as stated in treaties and governance but an understanding of an environmental citizenship” (149).

Being born in the US, Uma’s affinity was totally towards this country and her only connection to her roots was through the stories that her parents told her about India. Her parents decision to move to India did eventually change her decision too about getting back to India, if not permanently, at least as a tourist as she had to admit to herself about missing her parents. She was happy for them too. Uma could not relate to India like her parents as she was brought up in America, but at a crucial point
of time, she realizes that the cultural upbringing of hers was in many ways Indian and there is some sort of attachment that she feels towards India, which she feels is her parents. She finally decides to go to India to visit her parents and thus lands in the visa office.

The discourse of “return” is a prominent theme in South Asian Atlantic Literature. The uncertainty of life in a foreign land despite being legally admitted in to it is the core reason for sustaining relations with the country of origin for many immigrants. The different ways that one retains their roots are by travelling frequently to visit relations and taking part in religious or family functions, by investing money in property to assert their physical belonging in that country and so on. Moreover, for many the sole purpose of being abroad is to save enough and more money to facilitate a decent return where they can spend their older years in comfort.

The double standards of Indians, as portrayed in many fictional works as being proud of having a family member abroad and being critical about that country at the same time is quite notable and indeed is the reality, so is the South Asian Writers who have left the country for better prospects, Maxey Ruth quotes Makarand Paranjape who argues that these writers often gives a negative image:

an India of poverty, violence, urban chaos, rural exploitation, caste conflict, political instability and insurmountable corruption. India automatically becomes a ‘problem’ the solution to which… is… emigration….Considering that most of the contemporary writers …left India largely to better their material prospects, such writing becomes self-validating … the dirty job of India bashing need no longer be performed by a white man; non-resident Indians will do it equally well, if not better…from being…insecure, marginalized, denationalized and faceless, such diasporics have suddenly begun to loom large over us [non-diasporic Indians], clouding our own independent access to the world and the world’s unhampered assessment of our lives…this coup on the part of diasporic writers might be something worth celebrating if there were an accompanying humility, an acknowledgement of the limitations of diasporic representations of the home land.(107-8)
The heterogeneity of India is a source of inspiration for these writers as well as the advantage of being an immigrant enables them to have far and near view of their ancestral country as well as the host country. Moreover they are financially secure to afford a travel as and when required. They are also at a liberty to get back. In the case of privileged immigrants, they did not go through the hardships of migrating unlike their predecessors, and their woes are limited to issues like racism, language, weather etc. For the second generation, it was much easier, as being born in the country was similar to belonging there for them. This explains the different levels of immigrant experience between Uma and her parents.

When, even after a year, Uma is bewildered to find out that her parents have no regret about settling down in India for good, her mother convinces her by saying that it is not the same India that she left years before ‘… It’s a different India now, India Shining!’(5). After being able to disconnect their relation with America, Uma’s parents loyalty to their nation have been proved as they felt much more relaxed in India and her mom hoped that Uma too would follow their footsteps and settle down happily in India.

For children of immigrants born in that country, the quest for identity is not that complex as it is for their parents, as they have begun their life in that environment. As culture denotes mainly the institutions, public structures, religious affairs, history etc the impact caused due to familiarity is less in the children as for them it is only the imaginations of their roots as told by their parents and thus their longing to return is considered a very difficult task. Being a formal citizen of a country requires a minimal effort to live within the political and cultural framework of that country. If the government is pro active and open in terms of tolerance and consider individual happiness as the building blocks of a strong and healthy nation which promotes unity and peace, then it becomes all the more easy to consider a long term stay without having the emotional hindrance of a planned return by its immigrant citizens back to their ancestral home.

In a world, where majority of the population are rigid and conservative and would go any far to retain the purity of their so called race of which varied distinctions are made. Starting from the caste, religion, clan, region and then nation
any sort of intermingling which would threaten in erasing their unique identity is often fought with fervor. In the case of marriage where this purity gets diluted forming new identities is definitely a matter of concern. The high percentage rate of caste and religious violence and honor killings reported from rural as well as urban India stands testimony to this attitude. It is extremely paradoxical to learn that the pride of man-kind in having conquered all sorts of wisdom through scientific, technological, and spiritual knowledge through its vast reach owing to an internet revolution stands null and void as it has vengefully pushed lives to confine more into holding onto baseless differences.

The right to be different and yet at the same time living in harmony, without any sort of differences that affect any social interactions between people in executing their rights is a basic civilian right. This is where the constitutional rights protect its citizens in all times of adversities that can affect a country and its population. More or less, most nations follow the basic human rights such as liberty, equality and fraternity which look into the matters of freedom of speech and religion, educational and cultural rights and so on. But the question is how many people are rightly informed about these rights and lives a free life. There is an overdose of social stigma which keeps the public wrongly informed about such rights, mainly due to political interests by thrusting the notion of preserving ancient traditions by taking advantage of the religious sentiments of common man which has a great fear for “change.”

In the case of immigrants, for majority of them, they fear the prospects of their children getting married to someone from a different country altogether. They feel the differences widen much more than caste, creed and religion to that of belonging to a different nation. Though they do not have much say in such matters, it is their insecurity which pushes them to bring up their children by making them follow traditions strictly. Most of the times, they can only succeed by instilling a sense of fear, that moving away from ones tradition will only complicate life further.

Though culture, tradition can manipulate life on the outer layers, the basic biological factors influence your choice of life partner. Moreover when a strong emotion like “love” strikes, differences are never visible. Maxey echoes the view point of Ashley Dawson on the hypocrisy of the entire human race as thus:
Dawson’s argument raises the important question of whether, in white-dominated societies such as the United States and Britain, interracial relationships have signaled assimilation into the mainstream—a rejection of ancestry, even a form of ‘selling out’, on the part of the person of colour— or radicalism through the crossing of sometimes rigidly policed racial lines. Although ‘race’ is often recognized as a social construction, it is clear that human beings rely on such racialised physical markers as skin, hair, and eyes in order to categorise each other and thus to negotiate the world. Such material classifications can be questioned and confused by the biological result of interracial partnerships: the racially mixed subject. In many ways, then, nothing exposes the continuing ideological power of ‘race’ - as well as the latent, persistent anxieties which underpin it as a concept- more than miscegenation. Does racial mixing therefore signal conservatism by reinscribing the whole premise of racial categories or does it remain a subversive, oppositional move? (120)

To support this argument Maxey states that the US census of 2000 proves that out of a total of 2,195,518 South Asian Americans, 293,754 are racially mixed (120). This is a reaffirmation that interracial marriages are on the rise in the United States. The volatile nature of culture is established through this, demanding a new inclusive policy at other levels too. The perception that the culture of United States is more rooted in cosmopolitanism as the country was formed by not one but many immigrants and thus cannot claim any particular cultural history as the nation’s touchstone. In the advent of globalization and the support of free speech and the immense presence of press and the media, there is an increased level of awareness that motivates, if not fully, a section of the society to voice their critical concerns against each and everything freely. This has enabled modern societies to gather in public to discuss and foster new ideas and theories that can promote “self” and the world around.

All these open dialogues can make the rigid platform of cultural anarchy practiced by nations to become more flexible to accommodate new cultural views and discard practices that can cause discomfort to any other group. Mixing of cultures through interracial marriage has to be studied from different perspectives as it cannot
be curbed in an era of globalization. Marriage being one of the social functions that takes place in an individual’s life makes it fall under the framework of citizenship.

Being a citizen, the main responsibility is to respect and understand the personal interests of other citizens provided it does not interfere with activities that disrupt the overall well being of people and the environment. After discussing the perception of mixed marriages as not something positive and not welcomed by the older generation, the concept of marriage across the world has both negative and positive aspects to it. Family which among humans, starts with the legal bondage of marriage is the smallest unit in a society, where future citizens are born. It is a strong institution which imparts values to the new entrants to the society as well as to this world. Thus relationship begins here and only successful marriages can contribute to the overall well being of the society. The story of Mangalam, Naina and Malathi in this novel is a fine example of the intricacies of marriage in general.

Malathi, an Indian who worked at the visa office and after being hit by the earthquake is shocked that in all her imaginations about America, an earthquake was never in the picture. Even her friends and relatives who had warned her about the black men as they were supposed to be dangerous, the white men and also the Indian-American men who were defined as “lecherous” and “sly” never mentioned about any other dangers. “No one, however, had thought to caution her about earthquakes. Where she came from, when people said America, many images flashed in their heads. But an earthquake was not one of them” (14-5). There are umpteen numbers of issues that occupies a human mind and they come under the broad terms such as cultural, political, economical and all these does affect on an individual level also. Precautions, debates, solutions are often contemplated to confront such issues. But the focus and awareness about “nature” and how it too can affect lives personally has not received much acclaim.

The dream of America for a common man is filled with opportunities, wealth and prosperity and for Malathi it was no different. After getting a job at the consulate she had hopes of saving enough money to setup her own beauty shop back in India, while her other two room-mates had other plans. They put aside a major portion of their salary for dowry so they can be wedded to decent men back in India. These
women did not have intention of indulging themselves in the material comforts of America as for them it was just a stopgap destination to achieve their aim of leading a good life ultimately in their country of origin.

This is the way of life for many common men who land in America. So a common doubt that arises is whether people with such an attitude, fit into the patriotic sentiments that America expects from its many outsiders. Though America is a country with not much of a colonial past and also a nation comprising of people from all over the world, it is a matter of concern with respect to the factors that are required for a strong nation building exercise. Thus the question of loyalty arises only in the creamy layer of society which is basically intellectuals and politicians and also people who is devoted to ideologies of nation building. In the case of a common man all that is of concern, is the basic needs of food, clothes and shelter. But the narrative of every nation is based on the aspects that have been discussed throughout. As America is projected as a nation rich in material comforts, whereas India is known more for its richness in terms of cultural and traditional heritage. Among such fixations, where does the idea of identifying a nation through its landscapes be considered?

The collective assumption of Indians that America is a land of fortune is mirrored through Malathi who holds the same belief. An earthquake was something that she never expected. Her emotional outburst at the time of crisis exposes her traditional views. She blames herself for having caused the disaster due to her immoral behavior, such as being involved in an affair with a married man. Like many among us, her knowledge about the architecture of nature is limited. Though physically present in America, Malathi’s thoughts are tied to India, and at the wake of a disaster she regrets her decision of having come to America. She identifies herself with India. The affinity towards one’s nation explains that imaginings of landscape are at first cultural and is indeed difficult to detach it from the pure “nature” in the minds of common men. This invokes the question whether a catastrophe is a signal that brings in a sudden realization about the need to protect the place called home, which at present can be just the site you are trapped in, redefining the universal concept of home as nature?
Ecocriticism as a theory is indeed a revolutionary step which can help redefine the concept of world through nature. It is time to change historical perceptions of mankind deep rooted in cultural nuances to give way for the new concept where in the anatomy of life will have nature as a key organ. To establish the link between people and nature, the link between national identity and how landscape can define certain unique features through literature has to be analyzed. For instance Thomas Lekan in his book *Imagining the Nation in Nature* describes how Spender’s commentary on the visual impact of a landscape can be associated to nationality:

As varied as that of any country, yet much of it has in common as mental quality, less sensuous and luminous than France, less earthy than England. It is possible to think of it abstractly and it is possible to imagine it as full of intentions, moods. It doesn’t suggest the gods and nymphs of Greece, nor is it haunted with the sense of individuals like England or France, but it is full of impulses, some warm and friendly, some sinister. It has been shaped and thought of and thought into, rather than civilized. (1)

Malathi’s liberal attitude was not something that she credits upon her arrival in the United States. Even in India, she had a strong urge to rebel against the patriarchal system of which her sisters have been victims, as they were ordered around by their husbands. Her mother’s aim to get her settled in a good family at any cost was thwarted by Malathi’s intense desire to lead an independent life. She was inspired by Lola, the lady who ran the beauty shop to join her as an apprentice to learn the trade which fascinated her. While working in the parlor, she is disappointed to know how one of her affluent customer Mrs Balan, a nasty, obnoxious lady weaves a mean plan to get rid of the servant girl with whom her son had hopelessly fallen in love. She cannot bear the thought of having a girl from a low station becoming the daughter-in-law of her household. She cunningly hands over the girl to her flamboyant brother, what happens after that remains a mystery, but the girl is rumored to have settled along with his luxurious life.

Malathi’s empathy towards her kind is expressed through the rage which makes her mix more chemical in the hair pack for Mrs. Balan to cause harm with intention, so as to take revenge. Lola’s invisible support is felt by Malathi as she helps
her escape the consequences of what she did to Mrs Balan by helping her get a job in
the US through her acquaintance. Malathi has always been a bold women, who took
her own decisions and her venture into America was not to get any kind of freedom
which usually Indian women dream of, but was only to make herself financially well
off so as to start a beauty shop back home.

In a contemporary society, all are in search of stability in terms of wealth,
income and prosperity. To maintain this, a constant source of benefit is required.
Whereas in olden times this was received from nature as raw resources, but in new
age these raw resources have taken the place of commodities produced by small and
big industries, to attain which you need money. To keep such industries running the
capitalists stretch the line of “quality of life” more and more, thus pushing the
common man’s potential to grow beyond his/ her desires. By manipulating individual
minds, a society is indeed brought under the hypnosis of consumerism.

The dominos effect of one industry over the other is very fascinating. For
instance the invention of transport industry which includes air, road, sea and rail has
brought increased demands on fuel. Similarly travel industry has boomed along with
recreation industry and so on. Human behavior influences the extracting of resource
above permissible levels. Moreover observing individual attitude towards nature is
very important as it can reform society at large. Like Malathi, many Indians cherish
this dream of gaining prosperity by going abroad, thus a majority of Indian population
are not satisfied with their present life status. As mentioned earlier, the parameters of
“good life” is stretched. Along with this, human intention of gaining prosperity in life,
the ruin of nature goes unnoticed. In order to bring about a behaviour change in the
case of individual attitude towards the real meaning of a fully satisfied life, the thrust
needs to be on ethics and values, compassion and empathy for your fellow beings and
environment, rather than on satisfying material needs, which do not add any meaning
to life. This can be argued as sheer philosophy, but values are much needed to reform
the society to enhance an organic lifestyle.

Mangalam, the visa consulat officer too leads an unsatisfied life due to his
pursuit for a life where he thought money can mend happiness. Growing up in a
middle class family, his parents struggled to get him educated, at the cost of denying
education to his sisters. Upon finishing his college, he meets Naina, daughter of a rich man with the expectation of climbing up the social ladder. The marriage eventually happens, as Naina is adamant and forces her father to give permission for the marriage. But soon after, Naina’s behaviour changes, and she begins to order Mangalam around as if he had been bought. In no way did she allow Mangalam’s parents to visit them. Disheartened by Naina’s arrogance, he gets emotionally attached to a woman named Latika in his office.

He imagines leading a happy life with her and her brother and his parents. When Mangalam informs Naina that he wants a divorce from her, she is startled. Little did he know that she was powerful enough to ruin his plan. The very next day Latika gets arrested on false allegations. The very thought of Mangalam leading a happy life in another woman’s arms by ditching her was unbearable. All that Mangalam could do after losing the woman whom he loved was to go on a spree of flirting with each and every woman in Naina’s social circle in order to humiliate her. Finally fed up, Naina and her father send him to America.

He confesses that all that happened in his life was not Naina’s mistake as it was him, who out of greed began to chase fortune by using Naina. So losing what mattered to him because of Naina was inevitable. Moreover he was unable to stop his philandering ways even after all that happened. Finally being caught in the earthquake, his past runs through him like a flash and he repents all the wrong things that he had done so far. By sharing his story to others he feels at ease and gets an opportunity to seek forgiveness from Malathi.

Mangalam attributes all his problems to karma according to which, for each and every action, there will be a reaction. His wrongdoings became a boomerang. His greed for fortune was a result of being born in a poor family. The difficulty of making both ends meet, by his parents was witnessed by Mangalam, who thought only of good education and a high profile job to get him out of his poverty. But he did not know where to draw the limits for his needs. The life of Mangalam is an example of a man who was the cause for his disastrous fate, as his minds laws ruled over him diligently. Here lie the mysteries of being a human as rightly explained by Emerson:
... He works on the world with his understanding alone. He lives in it and masters it by a penny-wisdom; and he that works most in it but a half-man, and whilst his arms are strong and his digestion good, his mind is imbruted, and he is a selfish savage....Man and woman and their social life, poverty, labor, sleep, fear, fortune, are known to you. Learn that none of these things is superficial, but that each phenomenon has its roots in the faculties and affections of the mind. Whilst the abstract question occupies your intellect, nature brings it in the concrete to be solved by your hands. It were a wise inquiry for the closet, to compare, point by point, especially at remarkable crises in life, our daily history with the rise and progress of ideas in the mind. (54-5)

Earlier times, identity was marked with the rural heritage be it of an individual or a nation. The rural life thrived with culture, heritage and antiquities which were an anecdote to the rising anxieties caused due to modernity where only focus was economy and progress. This began to impact human behaviour. Though the fact that urban development was the output, highly contributed and build upon rural resources. As Kate Murphy opines in his book *Fears and Fantasies: Modernity and Gender, and the Rural-Urban Divide* that:

The idea of rurality reconceptualizes the rural as dynamic discursive construction rather than simply a bounded space characterized by particular social, economic, and political arrangements. It recognizes that rurality is constituted and constructed through language and discourse by people living both within and outside rural areas. (13)

The very different traits of Mangalam and Naina’s characters are a metaphor for the rural-urban divide. The gender power play, where Mangalam’s conservative family considers his education more important than his two siblings who were girls is a reaffirmation of the traditional Indian attitude that still thrives. The role of a bread winner is still assumed to be on the shoulders of men rather than women. In an urban scenario, rapid progress and generation of more employment opportunities have somewhat eased such a traditional concept. Gender discrimination has its roots in
cultural construct and the seed of it was sown much before urbanization, rather it was present in the earlier social system that existed as rural.

Naina, a city bred young woman was showered with utmost importance and care by her father. This had definitely boosted her confidence and she was free from the usual societal constraints which alarmed women to be submissive and act according to the interests of her male counterparts. Though at first attracted by the financial prospects of marrying Naina, Mangalam regrets his decision as he discovers Naina as extremely different from the women he was accustomed to like his mother and sisters who had dedicated their life to the service of men in their household. The change of roles was that of the social change in the lives of people in rural and urban spaces. Similarly Naina’s lack of respect towards Mangalam’s parents and even the very thought of their presence in her home as unbearable is that of the reverse psychological construct of the present era of rural associated with lack of culture and intellect and modernity as the sign of progress and civilization.

The shift of a Nation’s narrative from traditional to modern is an indicator of human hegemony over nature. The inferiority that breeds in rural minds is slowly making modernity permissible without any hindrance which would result in losing the pulse of life which remains in the little or less country life in today’s world. The myth of gender disparity associated with rural life has camouflaged in a more aggressive form in urban space where women are objectified along with products that rules a consumerist society. Later on, when Mangalam takes out his frustration of a failed relationship with Naina, he continues to target women as he enjoys a kind of satisfaction in breaking their hearts or morals. He is unable to break the nuptials as Naina is too powerful and he remains confined for life similar to the trap that every individual falls when thrown into the alley of urbanization.

Relationships among humans itself is often complicated, compromised and not fully content. Then there is no doubt that the human relationship with nature is doubly problematic. To quote Jacques Derrida “there is no natural violence, an earthquake is not violent, it is only violent insofar as it damages human interests” (92). He adds the violence began long back when language and nature was distorted using the very language. It’s often the self centeredness that destroys relationships. Human minds,
where different conscience with regard to belief assume the possibility of another world, which scientifically denotes other planets and a spiritual interpretation of “heaven” and “afterlife” justifies the over exploitation of nature. But the truth is there is only this world, where the need to co-exist and make ethics work in the direction of a fair participation in anything that concerns not only humans, but the environment also.

The very cycle of birth and death explains the need for preserving for future generations. The reason to do this is due to the belief that an organism or species lives on, in the form of an off spring, thus reducing the impact of death. Due to negligence, few of them have become extinct in large numbers unreasonably before their stipulated life expectancy, so the possibilities of such a fate for humans are not very far. Being gifted with the intellect of making choices, it is very much important to lead a life by caring for fellow beings and environment. Sometimes arduous efforts are put in for protecting immediate family due to the emotional attachment. But by considering these sentiments are beyond the immediate relations a feeling of compassion for everything under the sun can be possibly accommodated.

Stories of disaster are redemptive saga of mainly humans. As a matter of fact no matter what is shared with anyone, the sympathies do not last long and people tend to return to their good old ways. Every experience is unique so when the protagonists share their stories, deep inside they are only able to feel a part of what others have gone through, and not fully. However the awareness that human saga is similar irrespective of the many differences that bind is realized through sharing experiences.

The narrative of One Amazing Thing moves on to the story of the Chinese grandmother Jiang. Her story reveals the historical account of the two countries China and India. She discloses her past memories of India, her love affair with a young and smart Bengali man, her stint at carrying forward her father’s leather business singlehandedly on her shoulders. However when the war breaks out between India and China her life is shattered, forcing all the Chinese to flee the country. Jiang’s father manages to get her on board a ship on the condition of marrying a Chinese middle aged dentist. She becomes pregnant and gradually she begins to love her husband.
Upon their arrival in the United States they open a small departmental store, and gradually with Jiang’s business skills, it grows into a supermarket with many more branches in different parts of the city. She has settled down to a new life and her past is buried deep in her memories. But a recent visit by her brother from Australia rekindles her desire to visit Kolkata where she had spent the most beautiful years of her life. This was the reason for Jiang to land up at the visa office. When she finishes her story her granddaughter is shocked to know that her grandmother knew English well and had kept it a secret from them. Her story is quite an inspiration as it teaches how a woman never gives up and rises up to every adverse situation that she comes across. She is bold and emotionally matured and juggled many roles, of a loving wife, mother and a business woman with utmost ease.

Jiang’s story set against the backdrop of Indo-China war is the eponymous stance on the futility of human life where events like a war is illogical for a common man who does not play any part in triggering it. Moreover for individuals like Jiang, their life is simple and surrounded by the innocent human activities of love, longing and desires that are basic human instincts. From a literary and cultural or political stand wars are often celebrated as acts of nationalistic heroism with no concern for individual sorrow. Wars and battles are present ever since the evolution of humans, what began as an act for survival did not cease even after the commemoration of civilization claiming to have changed humans with high intellect, ethics and morals. In fact the present time is witnessing more of the brutal activities of conflicts. The literary tradition of the past too proves that war began with life and till date has never ended. To quote Andrew Bennett:

…literature begins with war, with the rage of war. Menis: wrath, fury, rage. The first word of the first great poem in the Western literary tradition, Homers Iliad (c.700 BC), declares its topic: menis, the rage of Achilles. The western tradition, in other words, starts up in rage and blood, the rage of war, the rage for rage- godlike, swift-footed, murderous Achilles’ rage…What is striking about such a beginning, and about Homer’s poem as a whole, is its keen enthusiasm for war, a celebration of war that is joined with loud regret for its murderous, bloody losses…. (303)
A story adds to history, by reflecting a time which the text narrates. It does not mean it’s recorded then and there. Life is a journey through ages, and all life stories are stored in the memory and come to light when opportunity strikes. Thus history can be recorded at a time of convenience. Literary fiction is not always taken too seriously and is subordinate to history as its main purpose is to provide a good read rather than facts. Moreover it is written from the individual perspective of the author but at times it does recount certain events and enables a close look at the facts from an emotional angle of the person concerned. Every story carries along with it a unique identity of a shared repertoire of societal culture and ideologies of a time at which the story happens. Thus Jiang’s story brings vivid imaginations of an era which one can see, feel, and sense, though they never happened to be there at that point of time. Humans have the talent to transport their minds back and forth in time, which helps them pick up snippets from the past to utilize these sentiments to understand the happenings of life. This knowledge can help in attaining wisdom for the betterment of human society.

Along with the aggression for progress through wars and violence, mankind equally had to face many setbacks that time and again are a reminder that humans cannot manipulate the power to control the happenings of this world. The optimistic attitude of humans in exploring new possibilities was unending so the term modernism cannot be confined to any age as ideas were shifting and reinvented each time. But man’s progress was thwarted by the unpredictability of nature. For instance Black Death which broke out in the year 1348-49 wiped out one third of the population in Europe, and a many more natural calamities have put catastrophic implications on earth. Moreover till date, the fate of human populace primarily hangs on the failure and success of harvest which ensures sufficient supply of food. Technology has thrice removed the traditional ways of procuring food and their distribution in many new forms, but the raw material for each and everything is found only in nature. By establishing monopoly over this basic rights from nature by investing power by few individuals or establishments have resulted in fluctuating economical prospects, pushing a majority into utter despair and poverty where quality of life has to be compromised drastically.
Biological patterns of life was co-related to the natural workings of the environment, i.e; the idea of working during daylight as it had the normal supply of light and energy from the sun, going to bed when darkness spreads and so on. But many scientific revolutions replaced and slowly modified such concepts by challenging nature. Over the years, onset of many life style diseases have spread across the world, gradually decreasing human potential in the long run. Thus along with many other burdens economy and health were added to the list, putting the quality of life at stake.

One of the major revolutions that changed the world was the invention of printing technology. It helped ideas and knowledge to be shared and imparted far and wide, which otherwise was confined to oral and handwritten pamphlets. This initiated a mass social movement with reformation as the major aim in order to change the age old practices of kings, feudal lords and authoritarians paving way for democracy. In America the rise of print culture was the direct result of the civil war. But all of these have resulted in the contemporary world with a bombardment of information, contesting identity from different perspectives.

The rise of intolerance in today’s world is one of the pitfalls of media which was supposed to have made the mass aware about the differences between people, their cultures, their lifestyles and so on in different geographical locations, but unethical and dishonest journalism has had a negative impact on such a mission. Thus modernity contested a sense of falling apart in terms of belief, as new revelations and knowledge came into foray. For instance Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, a scientific literature published in the year 1859 proved with evidence that evolution is caused due to natural selection over the course of generations. This challenged the religious version of evolution as divine hierarchy which highlighted man’s uniqueness and thus justified his superiority over nature and its other creatures. This event could be thought of as the first step in developing the concept of “ecological citizenship.”

In Jiang’s case it was her national identity of being a Chinese that forced her to give up her love for an Indian man as their union would have brought a whole lot of trouble to both their families as well as the two countries. Jiang’s skill for survival ultimately rescues her in the form of a matured and stable mind that learns to put her
past behind and accept life as it is. The prominence of national sentiments over individuals is a hindrance in realizing the dream for the inclusion of nature into the broader spectrum of citizenship.

Unlike Jiang, Mr. Pritchett had to go through a very sad childhood, feeling the pain of loneliness every moment since his mother was at work most of the time, as she had to support herself and the child. The little attention and love that he received from his mother also stopped once Marvin entered their lives. As the boy does not understand this new turn of events, he finally speaks up:

“...why do we have to do what he says? This isn’t his place. Why does he even have to live with us?... He pays part of the rent…He watches you in the afternoon in case there’s a problem or something…This way I don’t have to get a babysitter. Plus-’ She shakes her head. ‘Oh, you won’t understand’. (96)

To bring an end to all this complications which apparently a child never understood, he was sent to live with foster parents, an elderly childless couple, who were generous enough to provide him a good, hygienic home, nutritious meal, a room of his own and even took him to art museums and musical concerts and encouraged and motivated him in bringing out all his talents at numbers which eventually helped him to feel good about himself. But somewhere deep in his heart, there was a wound which never healed and a painful truth that he loved his mother dearly. The state of homelessness both physically and emotionally was the main reason for Mr. Pritchett’s agonies forever.

An architectural history of various structures built by man over time has given many facets to the idea of home. The concept of sheltering began with the need to seek protection from heat and rain, and from predators for all species alike. Unlike birds and animals, humans do not follow a uniform pattern, but the designs of homes kept evolving with time, as the meaning of home kept getting more intense. More than a structure made out of materials, these projects are an extension of man’s intelligent and emotional faculty. It’s a site of existence. A statement by anthropologist Clifford Geertz as quoted by Jerry D Moore in his book Prehistory of Home as “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, and those webs thickly
drape our homes” (3). Thus the influence of home is what shapes our personality as explained by Moore:

...our houses allow us to physically adapt to the environment and to conceptually order the cosmos. Human dwellings enclose social groups of diverse forms—from nuclear families to entire clans, from hundreds of people to solitary hermits. Our houses solve problems of social life—for example, serving as architectural templates for appropriate behaviors—and our dwellings create social problems when we create environments of “social irritation”. Our houses stand as symbols of equality or proclaim the social divides between people. We seek safety in our homes, not only from the elements, but increasingly from inchoate fear, or we may invite the supernatural into our homes, for dangerous encounters. Much of what we humans do occurs at home. (222-3)

For Mr. Pritchett, being brought up by a single parent, his childhood was confined to the limited time of love, affection and care from his mother as she could not afford to be with him always. But still she did her best. Even after having a place called home, he felt lonely and insecure. Just how the social, political and economic climate of a nation can affect its people, home being the basic model of a society, it influences an individual inside out. A person will not be able to do justice to anything beyond, if the mind is preoccupied with grief. Unstable homes and environment creates a new breed of “lost generation.” Mr. Pritchett was a classic example of the new breed that was the making of a new America. The progress of America was not without any falls. The words of President Herbert Hoover recorded in the year 1928, before the great depression praising America’s success in eradicating poverty proved contradictory as Catherine Morley observes:

...for some 40 million Americans, a third of the population which included single-parent families, the rural poor, the forgotten elderly and disfranchised African Americans, the buoyant promise of laissez-faire capitalism often seemed a hollow sham. And for the tens of millions of Americans marooned at the bottom, daily life was less a whirlwind of jazz music and mass
consumerism than a struggle against destitution, damp, dirt and disease …. (152)

The continuation of such harsh realities remained, moulding new generation with the same historical and domestic unease. A country’s strength is its population and their mental and physical health is a marker of the true progress and in no way can a nation hide its shortcomings by projecting the high economic prospects of few rich and powerful men. Mr Pritchett’s troubled childhood was an extension of the social realities of that time. Negotiating the complexities of identity of a person with respect to the environment that nurtured him in every sense calls for an introspection of the myriad factors that contribute to the upbringing of each and every individual as a nation’s responsibility. Things would have been different if Mr. Pritchett was fortunate to be part of a financially sound and at the same time brought up under joint parentage of father and mother. But he was destined to lead an insecure life as he could not get both love and stability at the same time from home.

Despite his achievements, he continued to lead a mechanical life and was not able to express his love and concern to his beloved wife, who apparently contemplates suicide owing to his detached approach in their relationship. Nevertheless his love for his wife is genuine as an accident discovery of a magazine bought by her long ago that had pictures of India gives him hope that a visit to India would rekindle their relationship. The sparkle of joy that he found in her eyes was suggestive of her approval.

In the story of this elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Pritchett, their sense of being lost, unlike the immigrant positions due to displacement which renders them to feel lost in a different country, their displacement was internal, more to do with their emotions. Even being in a country where they are natural citizens, their agony of insecurity stems from the assumption of feeling neglected by their loved ones. When finally Mr Pritchett tells his story, his wife is surprised to know his past and begins to understand why he behaved this way all while. Her sympathies for his inability to trust anyone to share his sorrows, not even her due to his traumatic past was justified.
For humans, emotions play a major role in locating their space, and it’s beyond any walls, structures or nations. The love, respect and kinship that are experienced make the secure boundaries for people to live irrespective of the geographical location they are destined to be. Though it is assumed that by certain protocols belonging to a nation is legitimatized. Primarily the legality of rules and regulations decides the particularities of citizenship, and thus norms for becoming an ecological citizen are sidelined. Being a responsible citizen, the one who respects the life and property of everything around is the first requisite and this act should not be out of fear, punishment or any sort of rewards, but rather due to the virtuous nature that every living being is imbibed with.

The idea of citizenship is celebrated for benefits of a nation’s political project and is considered something public. But the impact of individual decisions in everyday living can, not just affect a state or a country but an entire ecosystem. All aspects of humanity ranging from, behaviours, attitudes, emotions, health and economic status, political, spiritual concepts to name a few, and also every other thing that can add to the meaning of being human manipulates day to day activities in life. As democracy is a total people participation political project of a nation, people have to be aware of the benefits of living a sustainable life.

The cause and effect method can be applicable to human behavior also. The general assumption of rich being literate, more knowledgeable and of high etiquettes and refined manners need not be a practice in reality. In the text *Critical Theory Today* Louis Tyson exemplifies the advice of Austin Bierbower:

…poor boys have an advantage over rich boys…, because they are introduced to hard work at a young age and motivated by financial need to apply themselves. In contrast many wealthy youth, the author points out, avoid hard work and focus instead on insubstantial goals like fashion and etiquette, thereby sometimes failing to increase or even maintain the fortunes they inherited. The virtues extolled in similar publications include, in addition, the importance of saving money and of avoiding such slothful behaviors as smoking, using slang, and keeping bad company. In short, rising young men
were advised to avoid any behavior that wasted time, cost money, or was injurious to health or reputation. (302)

Thus a pious attitude towards life with respect to minimum indulgence of ecological resources and giving space to fellow citizens and being responsible towards environment were all signs of a good human being. Statistical records have proven that the rural life was more contingent atmosphere for learning such simple ways of living without overburdening the ecosystem when compared to city life. Overall the power play is negotiated through relationships. The term “relationship” can be defined in simple manner as an act of interdependence, bringing harmony to all inequalities that exist to live together in peace and order. It does not pertain to humans alone, but is the law of nature that binds everything together in this universe.

Globalization has brought in a wider meaning to the term relationship and has given a new dimension to understanding citizenship which is built on relationships. Globalization indeed refers to a world-wide interconnectedness where time and space do not exist. But how far this has helped in erasing conflicts that occurs in local as well as global platform? Does every individual or nation get its fair share of recognition? Or is there an invisible domination, of the more powerful ones? Is globalization a privilege for only those who can afford mobility? The answers to these questions would give clarity to the random usage of the term globalization that has got hold of the entire world promising new avenues where free movement of ideas, knowledge, and materials gives hope to strengthen universal brotherhood.

Writers of diaspora fiction focuses on the grass root effects of globalization that has influenced people not just in the metropolitan society of America, but also someone who resides in the remotest village of any other nation. There are two directions of movement, one comes with the luxury of a tourist, where as the second is for survival. What is mostly seen, the movement of people is more towards the developed nations, whereas the flow decreases towards the developing nations. Thus the reach of the skill and talent of a developing nation fails to make its mark when compared to the prospects of a rich nation. This disparity further pushes the said nation into doubting its quality and standards on a benchmark manipulated by using economic power to capture the lone interests of the powerful nations.
What is right cannot be so for another group, be it in matters of religion, culture or politics. This is where the global reach exhibits its negative impact. When ideas even though not acceptable to a majority or a minority, can be circulated far and wide to make it popular and give a false assumption of its acceptance, sparking controversy and unrest to those who could be adversely affected by the new developments. The fate of Muslims post 9/11 in America as well as across the world is a reminder about the utmost importance of giving every section of a society, be it the minorities, the marginalized or the dispossessed a chance to voice their concerns from their perspective. Only by promoting healthy debates and open talks, can the friction experienced by these people be understood so as to stop it from elevating to another level of conflicts which could inflict harm not only them, but also reduce the trust factor that nations and individuals share on a global platform.

While other protagonists of Divakaruni in One Amazing Thing had to battle problems which resulted from their personal dilemmas, for Tariq, it was the political turn of events in the post 9/11 America, which resulted in a growing distrust towards the Muslim population. He too belonged to that community, and had to face the brunt for the wrong doings of a few antisocial elements who misinterpreted their religion to support their unjustified demonic activities.

To my mother, he said, ‘sister, I tell you this not as a lawyer but as a fellow Muslim. What use is it to say, we are in the right and they are in the wrong? I could take your money and start a case, like I’ve done for several families. But all the cases are dragging on, with no end in sight. Better, if you have friends and family in India, to take Jalal-Miah- and your son, if he is wise- and retire there. The dollar still goes a long way back home, and you can get servants to help with Miah’s problems. Best of all, among thousands who look like you, you’ll draw no attention. Here, you are on their radar. For all you know’- he looked pointedly at my beard- they’re watching your son right now’. He shook his head in a way that frightened Ammi. (130)

Tariq’s father was taken by the police for interrogation. The incident leaves him traumatized and he suffers a stroke thereafter with his left arm and leg paralyzed. His Ammi was shaken and was considering leaving America for good as they could
not afford the expenses since they had to close down the stores, as their regular clients began to disassociate with them. Moreover, their religious identity had made their life insecure in America, a fate similar to many other Muslims who had no part to play in the 9/11 massacre. Finally for the sake of his parents and his longing to be with Farah, persuades him to approve his Ammi’s decision for good. His pain and anguish at the thought of leaving America, are expressed when he says:

The uncles and aunties were not sure what I should do. They felt I wouldn’t fit in India after having been raised here. I had the same doubts. Apart from lifestyle differences, there was another issue: this was my country. I was an American. The thought of being driven from my home filled me with rage. Then again, if I stayed in India, it would be great support for my parents. Already Ammi looked at me with longing. Farah would like that, too. Conflicting loyalties warred in my head, keeping me awake at night. (131)

For a young man like Tariq, who does not understand the politics of citizenship, his sense of affinity stems from the fact that America is the place he was born, he has lived for so long with his loved ones, the new relationships he has made in that country and moreover the familiarity of the place that has gifted him fond memories of growing up there. Having to part with all that has been responsible in shaping an individual, for reason that has no logic for an ordinary man makes one question the authority. So who exactly decides the depth of one’s loyalty, the government or the people of that country? If then what about the rights of a citizen who also belongs to that country and is being ousted for the very reason of belonging to a different community. Isn’t America supposedly a “melting pot of culture” of people from different backgrounds? Is a criminal identified with his motive or the religion he belongs to? If then for each crime committed, why chase the community before understanding the nature and the background that prompted the crime?

To answer these questions, there is a need to study the context that differentiates between humans and that of citizens. The former is based on moral obligation; the latter depends on the patriotic sense. Conflicts, though at first sight seems as issues of border disputes are more based on conflicting ideas and the lack of common sense to understand the true meaning and purpose of tolerance to lead a
peaceful life on earth. To understand this an individual has to step out of the political realm and act more like human, who knows what is pain, and how it feels when you are hurt physically or emotionally or that death has always been a source for sorrow and only an insane mind can think otherwise.

By incorporating humanity into citizenship and by providing justice and not charity, the beginning of the concept of “ecological citizenship” can be realized though not swiftly, but gradually. Because amongst all differences, the uniqueness of being human has endowed mankind not with a superior intellect with regard to knowledge, but that little extra efficiency to act, communicate and reform themselves as well as things around. If the world could be changed so far in a good as well as a bad way with historical discoveries and inventions, there is still hope that efforts could be made to reverse the negative impacts by exploring more of the human factor in each one.

The power of an individual, if closely observed stands above the state, region, nation or even the world. By reversing the sense of authority, that involves day to day activities and the extent to which it can impact another extreme end of the world needs to be understood so that mistakes made already can be rectified and seek possible intervention to avoid them in future. How responsible each one is in causing even the worst case of conflicts that’s happening across the world today? How personal habits like religion, prayers and scriptures often become the source for violence? And finally how does a person keep his private and public life separate so as to avoid even a minute degree of discomfort to his fellow citizens? Andrew Dobson points out Judith Litchenberg’s view in the book *Citizenship and the Environment* that “history involved the gradual transformation of the earth from many relatively open worlds to one closed one which is evident in the environmental context also” (30). Andrew quotes Litchenberg “some of the relationships in virtue of which the earth now constitutes one world are so pervasive and far-reaching that they are difficult to pinpoint or to measure. There are also actions that may have harmful consequences without any direct involvement between agents and those affected. For these reasons it is easy to ignore them as sources of obligation” (30).
Dobson puts forth a very interesting fact that people always assume natural disasters has got nothing to do with them, and at times of its occurrence, there is a praise for the funds provided by other nations as a humanitarian gesture, but the truth is the misuse of resources by these developed nations which causes global warming eventually increasing the chances of natural disasters and strange changes in the environment and thus should consider any sort of help not as charity but what he terms as “compensatory justice” (31), as the distinction between developed countries and developing countries are based mainly on the economic progression, but the negative side to this is the failure to understand at what cost this status is achieved. As there are no guidelines or agencies that regulate or monitor the use of natural resources as national boundaries are uneven with variation in population, the claim for usage depends on internal factors of a nation.

Citizenship involves assertion of rights, which focuses on political and social norms of a state. Environment is treated as a separate entity so it is just confined to a few virtuous citizens who are up for the cause for a sustainable living. Though this does make a difference, getting the entire population into this direction needs a motivator. By including environment or nature into the rules and regulations that state the eligibility for a good citizenship, there can be a major revolution which could apparently address issues related to environment. The benefit of this phenomenon is articulated through the words of Harley Dean by Dobson as follows:

Green thinking has impacted on our understandings of citizenship in at least three different ways. First environmental concerns have entered our understanding of the rights we enjoy as citizens. Second, the enhanced level of global awareness associated with ecological thinking has helped to broaden our understanding of the potential scope of citizenship. Third, emergent ecological concerns have added fuel to a complex debate about the responsibilities that attach to citizenship. (83-4)

This can be an important step in addressing the issues of diaspora. Often the circumstances that makes one an immigrant in another country is not deliberate, though fluctuations in the political, social and economic scenario of a nation to be precise adds to the reasons for such movements, but the mobility of species across the
world is a natural phenomenon as part of survival tactics. As nation is a myth or as termed by Benedict Anderson as an “imagined community,” it is the identity politics that has structured this myth and it can only stretch till the claims of similarities that is receptive by the mental faculty of people exists.

Are environmental problems unique to any nation in particular? Well to answer this question people have to admit that those who have experienced the aftereffects of disasters are likely to be more sensitive to matters concerning environment than the ones who are only aware of such situation from a see and hear mode. So, it is just a human tendency to be empathetic towards any sort of trauma. Thus in such situations nations play the role of agencies that offer assistance in aid and relief works to those in distress. Then how is it possible to assess the individual knowledge with regard to ecological sustainability?

Lack of awareness is proved through the ongoing mismanagement and insensitive behavior towards nature. Teaching about the importance of environmental ethics from school level can ensure that the new generation will contribute more to this cause than what the older generation, have done so far. At present, only scholars, intellectuals, ecologists, nature lovers, trained forces like the Army and few other groups that could be called saviours, have plunged into the mission of protecting land and its inhabitants from various dangers, some by informing the requisite knowledge while others by physical presence and actions. An individual’s efforts that could set an example for others to follow could become a great step towards ecological revolution.

Cameron, an African-American and also a war veteran puts his life saving skills that he has learned from the academy to save the others who are trapped along with him. Being retired from the army, he has a thorough knowledge of disaster management. It is indeed very clear that if not for Cameron’s guidance the entire group of people would have panicked, and brought the final collapse of the building much before. In the process, he even neglects his asthma which was worsening as he was progressing with his rescue plans.
...the passing scenery was painfully familiar, so like the landscape of his childhood, the ugly streets he had labored to escape: storefronts with grills over the doors and windows, piles of garbage, men passed out in doorways. Dealers hung out on street corners, keeping an eye out for customers, or for cops. Even without opening the window, Cameron knew what it would smell like: rotting food, sour armpits, piss, marijuana, and the desperate hilarity of young men who waited for night…. (179-80)

Cameron’s past life is a typical example of ghetto existence which majority of the poor Africans were subjected to in America. “Impoverished, orphaned, first generation college applicant…” (180). But Cameron was determined to get out of this, and the only way was through education, which he surely knew and aspired for. He had to put through a lot of humiliation to fulfill his ambition to become a doctor. But the biggest hurt that would haunt him throughout his life was yet to come and that was Imani, a girl whom Cameron met at one of the high school parties. The relationship flourished beyond the short dates and ended up by Imani getting pregnant. This was an absolute shocker for Cameron, who thought that proceeding with Imani could hamper his ambitions, so he advises her to get an abortion done. He feels terribly guilty and starts to believe that his failure to do well in college was due to Imani’s curse. Finally he decides to quit his studies owning to health issues and joins the army keeping his past a secret.

On Jeff’s instruction, Cameron decides to adopt a child from an orphanage in India which Jeff thought would heal Cameron and thus he decides to go to India to see the little girl Seva. His hopes are cut short when the earthquake strikes. In a way its Cameron’s intense desire to see Seva that gives him the strength to never give up and find ways to survive the disaster.

Cameron’s story reflects the injustice meted out to a few oppressed groups everywhere in the world, due to prejudices that still prevails in a modern society. Race is a biological construct of nature within a particular region having uniform climatic conditions, which renders similarities in physical features. The complexities of history and culture have redefined them in such a way that it has become more of a social construct which comes under the scrutiny for citizenship. More over the identification
of race patterns are different everywhere. Thus in order to broaden such conservative attitudes, inclusion of environment or nature into the alignment of citizenship will enable human populace to shed the prejudice facet of nationhood that is narrowed down with an overdose of anthropocentrism. To support his argument, Dobson quotes the question and answer of Hayward, “why adopt a constitutional approach to environmentalism?”

One major reason is that environmental problems today are such that adequate solutions to them will require large-scale cooperation within and between polities: to secure such cooperation it is necessary that there be widely agreed general principles about its basis; for such principles to be binding and legitimate within a polity they need to be set above the vicissitudes of everyday political expediency…

An advantage of pursuing environmental ends by means of constitutional rights is that in doing so one can draw normative and practical support from an established discourse of fundamental human rights…rights mark the seriousness, ‘the trumping’ status, of environmental concerns. (92)

Dobson endorses Reid and Taylor’s view that every living thing is entitled to surroundings that can help to lead a good quality life with regard to health and it is natural for anyone to agitate when these rights are being denied. So in a way every life on earth is an ecological citizen naturally. For Cameron, as a forgotten African American citizen, all his life he struggled to get out of his shabby existence, a true representation of the ghetto life that still exists for many poor people like him. A violation of basic human rights should be voiced as it entitles every individual “the fundamental right to an environment adequate for their health and well being” (93).

Cameron is a victim of the most shameful atrocities of human history, which began years back when humans stooped to holding fellow humans too as property which was known as slavery. As William MacKee Evans in his book Open Wound says that the African Americans has the tradition “of viewing society from the bottom” since a very long time (247). Poverty deepened the already existing racial crisis, pushing the African Americans into more misery. A general belief that Blacks are not efficient and intelligent than the whites, only helped them to get works of the
lower strata of employment which was basically services that involved more of physical exertion. Armed forces, was one of the first places which denounced any kind of racial inequality, as part of foreign policy. This enabled majority of the unemployed black youths to join. This gradually earned them their livelihood with which they could slowly move out of their lowly bottom status in the society. This change was followed by inter racial marriages, which added to “racial blending” as pointed out by Evans. But for those who still remained poor, race was an additional burden. Technological revolution brought drastic changes into the labor industry, with only the skilled workers able to grab good jobs, whereas the others were left in the lurch. Thus the economic gap widened. The life of the privileged came at the cost of more energy consumption which in the long run could cause environmental crisis. To quote Evans:

…but they take issue with those who ask how the world can find new sources of energy. This they say is asking the wrong question. The growing consumption of energy is pouring ever more pollutants into the atmosphere, the landfills, the water tables, and the oceans than the planet can absorb. The impending crisis results less from running out of energy than from running out of environment. According to Jared Diamond, the depletion of cheap energy is only part of the problem: “The prosperity that the First World enjoys at present is based on spending down the environmental capital in the bank (its capital of non renewable energy resources, fish stocks, top soils, forests, etc.) …. [I] t is clear that we are on a non-sustainable course.” And global warming is leading to climate catastrophe. The earth itself has imposed limits on economic growth. The management of the crisis requires not only the consumption of less energy but also more efficient and renewable types of energy. Salvation requires restrictions on the economic expansion that laissez-faire capitalism must have. Many citizens, of all persuasions, fear the more immediate future, having heard the rumblings in the financial system. (247-8)

Racism has thus contributed to the newly found economic class distinctions that is manipulating the many facets that sustains life on earth which proves that till date it was only wealth and power that determined the workings of a society and not morality. When all the efforts in eradicating different sorts of prejudices among
humans have not been that successful, then inclusion of nature is indeed a herculean task. But there is hope that the reverse way of focusing on environment in order to alter human attitude about man-made distinctions as silly and illogical, would help bring in much attention needed to rectify the damages done to nature so far. A snippet from Cameron’s memory elucidates that among all the painful events that happened to him in the past, the one time he felt healed was his memory of having spend time amidst nature, something that he loved to recollect.

What he remembered was the rain coming down in silver sheets on the barn roof, the oaks draped in grey-green moss, the red mud in which you could sink up to your ankles if you weren’t careful, the expanse of endless washed sky from the porch that made a strange hurt in your chest. He would stand on the porch for hours at a time. His cousins laughed at him, called him that daft city boy. He didn’t care. It was the first time in his life that he was aware of nature as a seductive force. (46)

The ability for self introspection in order to develop a sense of direction in life is indeed the blessing of nature. If this is true, then what makes people ignore such a magnificent force around them? How can the importance of nature be highlighted? Inculcating environmental values should begin at school levels, so as to bring forth a generation who are environmentally responsible, and also understand in depth the role nature plays in sustaining life on earth and the immediacy to protect it, before the ill effects of industrialization can grow beyond redemption. In the year 1974, an early initiation by The School Councils Project Environment, set down intimation towards the cause for environment. Dobson quotes from the passage as follows:

Most of our teaching about the world around us has been concerned with the collection of factual information. The present emergence of environmental education has come out largely through the need to develop a society which not only understands something about the environment, is aware of the importance of a healthy environment and of the threats to it of irresponsible actions, but which feels a responsibility towards it. As far as schools are concerned the early interest in learning from environment and studies about environment must lead on to a responsibility for environment. (177)
The striking consequences of an earthquake, which could happen anywhere, though at first is overshadowed by the protagonists stories in Divakaruni’s novel OneAmazingThing, gradually makes the readers sit up and think that fate as what humans call it can come in the form of nature’s devastation, putting an end to hopes and aspirations. If humans do not understand that the underlying cause of nature’s fury is the irresponsible and ignorant attitude towards environment then it would be too late to protect this haven where life thrives. As fictions are reader friendly and cater to a larger audience, its contents can motivate, inspire and make one think as it mainly contains everyday experiences of people, which can be identified with self. Sumathy echoes Seaman’s words that give a candid view to substantiate the above lines:

Fiction, a far more popular form (of writing) than nature writing, may be the ideal conduit for introducing ecological thinking to the common reader. In my own reading, I’ve noticed intriguing correlation between what nonfiction writers report from the field and how nature is depicted in contemporary novels and short stories. Many works of fiction either deliberately or intuitively explore our conflicted feelings about the wild in an age in which the profound consequences of our burgeoning population and insatiable appetites are becoming visible to even the most reluctant eyes. (50)

Thus, the novel One Amazing Thing is an insight into how nature can get life stranded or permanently deplete existence as a repercussion of all the exploitation inflicted on nature by humans. In this novel nature becomes the antagonist who speaks in its own language. Similar to the protagonists lives of trials and tribulations; nature too crumbles in the background. The pain and suffering is not something unique to humans, but even the environment is affected by these emotions, probably something that is ignored at large.

The valuable lessons imparted at such times of distress could awaken the moral authority of co-habitation with all levels of creation. A rearrangement of human position on earth can realize the possibility of an “ecological citizenship” that could put an end to the petty differences that is harnessed in the minds with regard to race,
religion, class and so on. The eternal bonding that binds nature and its occupants is reemphasized through Uma’s philosophical take on life on earth:

There are more things in heaven and earth than are writ of in our geographies. We watched the aurora. Maybe for minutes, maybe for hours….The aurora gave a little shiver, then continued displaying its splendours. I walked into the field. The stalks of bearded bardley were hard against my back. The hairy ends tickled my cheek. I rolled around, flattening stalks as I went until I had cleared enough space to see the aurora clearly. All around me was a musty, muddy odour, moles or raccoons or something more secretive. I had never before lain down on the bare ground at night. I pressed my palms against it. How foolish humans were to travel the world in search of history. Under my shoulder blades and over my head were the oldest histories of all: earth and sky. Strands of light- not the reds and greens I had thought earlier, but hues I had no name for- enacted their mystery…. Something had happened as I lay in the field, watching the sky, an understanding that I couldn’t control the lives of others- but neither could they control mine. (204)

The above passage proves V. S Naipaul’s words as quoted by Priyamvada Gopalan that “…history is built around achievement and creation” (29), needs to be understood from a different perspective as immigration and mobility is not limited to humans alone, and only mankind’s ability to realize the vision of universal unity without thrusting the importance of nations as it has always been, can recreate history which records the past of nature also. Divakaruni essays her role of a contemporary Indian English writer, representing the Indian diaspora to perfection by depicting the struggle of not just geographical displacement, but what it means to be detached from values and ethics of compassion and the true meaning of home in a globalised world.

Being surrounded by people from all walks of life, the true essence of humanity is cultivated in their everyday experiences. Like how nostalgia helps immigrants to retain their past, one must not forget that nature or environment too has its past, a past where, it enjoyed more serenity and tranquility. By including nature into the framework of citizenship, its protection can be assured as a moral responsibility. By successfully seeping into the new multicultural traditions, the
diaspora drives back home the message that co-habitation is the new spirit which makes humans realize that it is just not their lives alone that are important. They are just one among the many other variants of life on earth. This sums up the concept of “ecological citizenship” explored in this chapter as a concept more understood by diaspora which reemphasizes the fact that the contours of any physical map cannot confine the mobility of life which is omnipresent.