Identity Politics: Different Issues and Perspectives

Identity politics is a multifaceted term that incorporates a variety of trajectories and dialectical relationships, cultural and socio-political arenas, intersubjective and assorted socio-spatial “positioning” and experiences manifesting all-embracing nature of the notion as an identity-based liberation strategy (Hall 237, Sachez 39). It is multifaceted in the sense that as a strategic engagement of identity formation and assertion, basic tenets of the notion are subjected to change depending on contexts or nature of subjugation, identity crisis along with individual or collective interest. The term, however, as a discourse of political engagement for questioning and generating established norms of socio-political, cultural or aesthetic domains and subversive ideologies against those realms respectively, too seems to be a means of reverberating insubordinate politics of identity, agency, location and belonging as critical spaces to address and resist all forms of dominations and hegemonic forces. It roams around the trajectories between inclusive to exclusive politics of identity aiming at dismantling existing hierarchies within the ambit of socio-cultural, political or international spheres, which are eventually considered as unjust and dominative. Hence, as tactical politicized maneuvers, identity politics calls in to question the basic nature and our understanding of collective or individual social “positioning” and identification vis-à-vis political, economic and socio-cultural or socio-spatial mutuality leading to identity formation and assertion as unbounded categories of
identity-makers (ibid). In this entire process of movement from subordination to insubordination, historical reality to political negotiation, shared or generalized identity to novel identities, identity politics is always empowering in the sense that it helps in transforming disabling fictions of being and belonging of group or individuals into enabling fictions or concrete images in present by creating a bridge between the past and present, root and route, identity crisis and novel identity.

Whatever the raw materials or the basic context of repudiation are, such as religion, caste, language, community, alienation or displacement, identity politics does not conceive identity as a static and singular entity lacking the power of reflexivity and transcendence. The trajectory between categorically pre-modern notions of identity to emphatically modern perceptions of identity politics, rather, incorporates a critical realist or postpositivist realistic approach towards identity indicating the dynamic and plural conceptions of identity. However, before focusing on such theoretical postulations of identity politics and its relation with diaspora identity construction, we need to put light on fundamental and established notions and views regarding identity in general. It is a well-acknowledged fact that as a dialectical or discursive process, identity and its definitions cannot be confined within stable categories. Identity is socio-spatially or culturally heterogeneous and internally destabilized with multifarious raw materials as causal factors of identity creations. Considering the inherent heterogeneity of causal factors, Rosaura Sanchez remarks that “identity formation is itself a process shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces that come together and mutually constitute one another in distinctive and dynamic ways” (33). The underlying dynamism in the process of identity formation
conjoined with inherent heterogeneity of raw materials restricts all-embracing generalized definitions and other notions of identity. It is the reason why David Harvey remarks that identity “cannot be understood outside of the forces that swirl around it and construct it” (16). Those swirling forces, as mentioned by Sanchez also, are always in a mutual relationship in producing identity. Such inherent dialogism and reciprocity are explicitly addressed by Dominick LaCapra while considering identity-formation “is a matter of recognizing and coming to terms with one’s subject positions, coordinating them, examining their compatibility or incompatibility, testing them . . . by a process of reproduction and renewal or transforming them through questioning and related works on the self and in society” (238). In most of theoretical and critical postulations, hence, the emphasis has been put not on what identity is but on those processes of identity formation along with its mediated assertion due to lack of clarity in its process of creation. The multidimensional carpentry in the process of identity formation does not allow identity to be a static unitary product lacking complexity. Considering such underlying fuzziness, Michael Dusche critically remarks that generally “understandable ways of representing a person in a discourse . . . rely on a limited number of patterns that are in turn connected with socially accepted roles and their ensuing expectations” (84). Hence a discourse regarding identity with all its mediated manifestations is not free from network of relations within which such discourse is formed and developed itself as a dynamic product of mutuality and reciprocity. As Dusche remarks, “there will never be any final agreement between the individual, on the one hand, who seeks to express his/her identity and the collective . . . on the other hand, that offers the symbolic tools to do so” (ibid). The internal commerce between the two needs constant negotiations
corresponding to all sorts of transformations and newly added causal factors within the larger framework of social existence.

Considering such inherent unpredictability, hence, in a generalized tone we can say that identity is a type of identification which is “ultimately grounded in social reality, that is, social structures and relations” and which cannot be reduced to some mere symbols of categorizations and distinguished products (Sanchez 33). Such processes of identification are operative in two distinct levels- personal and collective, as two distinct modes of identity formations. Irrespective to its inherent epistemic values and reflexivity, in this regard, identity can intrinsically be categorized into two distinct categories—objective and subjective or elsewhere sociological and psychological. Concerning various modes of formation and manifest foundational values, objective identity is unanimously draw upon that sort of identity-category which is objectively derived from external extensive categories like religion, language, culture, geography, race, caste, community and so on, and which in many cases, in turn, are found to be operating as context or discourse of fueling identity politics. The catalytic force of objective identity emerges out of its dominating nature, which Paula M.L. Moya discuses under the category of “Ascriptive identities” (“What Identity Got” 97). For Moya “Ascriptive identities”, as he conceives identity as essentially a plural category, “come to us from outside the self, from society, and are highly implicated in the way we are treated by others”, which can apparently be termed as “social categories” and “imposed identities” (ibid). For him, “ascriptive identities are highly correlated with the selective distribution of social goods and resources” (ibid). Depending on processes of production and distribution, in a
capitalist society the hierarchical class structures are constituted. In most of our critical discourses regarding identity, “ascriptive identity” is discussed under the head of collective or group identity as a broad system of codification of identity vis-à-vis previously mentioned raw materials in civil societies (ibid). In his research over identity politics, Michael Dusche sees collective identity as a binding force of “symbolic representation”, which, in turn, imposing collective identity over individuals and thereby binding them together, drapes and restricts individual freedom and liberty (85). One’s inability to conform to basic norms and expectations of the collective unboundedly creates sense of being uprooted, psychological displacement and identity crisis. That tension apparent in-between personal and collective identity is culminated with diasporic existence which at once constitutes spatial and psychological displacement for individuals. In this sense, created mainly out of shared believes and ideas of culture and tradition, collective identities on the one hand become more dominative and less dynamic then personal identity and as negative hindrances towards individual freedom, on the other hand, they are more generative and catalytic by nature.

Unlike “ascriptive identity” (Moya, “What Identity Got” 97), the subjective one “refers to our individual sense of self, our interior existence, our lived experience of being a more-or-less coherent self across time” (ibid 98). It is a kind of psychological maneuver within individual self that incorporates individual’s self-appreciation or self-identification vis-à-vis others corresponding to the context of living, surrounding environment, cultural and ancestral background. In case of subjective identity, difference as a creative framework of binary oppositions and a
“structured field of relations” are always considered instrumental in locating oneself within the ambit of socio-cultural experiences and social recognition (Appiah 64). Stressing on the role played by difference and experience in constituting identity, Dominick LaCapra remarks that “identity does involve modes of being with others that range from the actual to the imagined, virtual, sought-after, normatively affirmed, or utopian” (228). For LaCapra, “a complex, process-oriented notion of identity-formation does not exclude the importance of difference and differentiation with respect to experience” (229). In a “structured field of relations”, however, identities are not emerged in a conflicting mode; rather they emerge through a process of mutuality (Appiah 64). Within the ambit of identity formation, difference too incorporates both the sociological and psychological modes along with other qualifiers of identity creations. However, the reciprocal relation between the subjective and the objective identities will be discussed in detail later on; here mention should be made of the role of experience as a basic tool to make sense of self. Critics have considered, while categorizing and theorizing identities, experience as the main tool that works as a crucial scaffold in constituting both the kinds of identities. Keeping in view the role of experience, Moya too conceives that identities are “socially significant and context specific ideological constructs that nevertheless refer in non-arbitrary (if partial) ways to verifiable aspects of the social world” (Learning from Experience 86). In such reciprocity, whereas, as Satya Mahanty remark, identities themselves become “ways of making sense of our experiences”, identities are too ways of inculcating meaning to lives (216). If experience is a way of putting oneself into trial, it is also a way towards transformations creating differences between past and present identities. In an arena of cross-cultural ramification, which is a conspicuous element in a society trapped within forces of globalization and
migration, when individuals gather experiences and knowledge in due course, identity is too dialogized internally and in turn becomes self-critically introspective and self-reflexive. In literary terms such transformations can be said as transcendence, in constituting a bridge between past and present sorts of identities, memory seems to be a counter discourse towards transcendence.

Both the categories—the subjective and the objective identities can be located while studying within broad framework and discussed from various perspectives. As early indicated social location and identity are always inseparable, it should also be acknowledged that in the trajectory between social locations to identity, identity itself cannot be reduced to one’s spatial “positioning” or location (Hall 237, Sachez 39). Nonetheless subjective and the objective identities are categorized as internal and external respectively, still there needs an epistemic negotiation of the mutuality in-between the two. “The relational and contextual nature of all identities”, as Moya remarks, “reveals that the problem is not identity, per se, but the way in which particular identities are invoked in particular social context” (“What Identities are” 100; emphasis original). Within the ambit of social location and the dynamic context of living, identities are indexed to historical situation, time and location. As such social arrangements are subjected to change in due course, identities are also to be invoked with internal transformations. Hence in the process of identity formation, those raw materials and qualifiers which constitute identity within a narrow or broader context of civil society, identity contingencies are too inculcated along with the process of identity formation. Moya sees such identity contingencies as objects internally changeable with social change. Corresponding to the change of social
context and location, individual experiences his/her identity differently. In case of diaspora, identity contingency is culminated with extreme heterogeneity and fluidity. Hence in his sophisticated reading of identity as a process of negotiation rather than a product, Appiah conceives both the categories—the objective and subjective are always reciprocal and mutually reproductive.

On the other hand, depending on such mutual reproductive nature, identity can again be divided into three distinct categories: essentialist, idealist and realist. Essentialists always believe the fact that the relation and the consequence between the subjective and collective identities are always absolute and determined lacking the power of reflexivity and transcendence. They have the tendency to homogenize individual identities within the arena of specific group or racial category irrespective to internal dynamism and heterogeneity. Idealists, by contrast, believe that the relation and the outcome between the subjective and “ascriptive identities” (Moya, “What’ Identity Got” 97) are neither stable nor discoverable in any means within the social sphere. The best example of an idealist approach towards identity is the postmodernist one who believes that our socially and historically constituted identity can be disrupted through “individual acts of parody or refusal” (ibid 99). Whereas essentialists negate power of individuality while discussing identity, idealists undermine social and contextual nature of individual identity. For the idealists there is less viable relationship in-between subjective and collective identity. Unlike both these two categories, realists’ views about identity are based on, what we have discussed so far, the inherent dynamism and mutual productivity between “ascriptive” and subjective identity (Moya, “What’ Identity Got” 97). They believe, as Moya
remarks that individual identity is neither fully controlled by social categories nor is free from them. Realists consider the nature of social construction of individual identity and believe that depending on changeability of the context of belonging, individual identity too undergoes constant transformations.

In these categorizations, what is really vindicated is that the essentialist notion of identity is completely opposite to the realist one, which in theoretical terms can be named as typically anti-essentialist. The difference between the two is same with Stuart Hall’s differentiation of two types of cultural identities in his seminal essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (2006). The first type of cultural identity conceives identity as singular and collective identification which shares common ancestral and social-spatial history and which ultimately lies hidden within “superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’” (243). It is through this type of cultural identity, individuals share common “cultural codes” and “historical experiences” delineating the sense of “oneness” as experienced by the “Caribbean” or the “blacks” (ibid). Rediscovering the essence of this type of identity is a registered need in postcolonial societies as means of anti-colonial resistance towards Western cultural hegemony. Whereas this type of cultural identity vindicates unique homogeneity within the ambit of cultural communities, the second one registers extreme heterogeneity amid collective identity. For Hall the second one recognizes “critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’” (236, emphasis original). It is this second one which is needed to be vindicated to read the heterogeneity of “the colonial experience” in a previously colonized nation (ibid). What seems really interesting in
Hall’s categorization of this second one is that in it he decisively marks a demarcation in-between otherness and difference. The difference within individual identities brings and in turn shares a mutual re-productivity with dynamism. In consequence of that mutuality, identity itself becomes internally hybrid and transforming. Hall remarks about the inherent dynamism of this second type of cultural identity:

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. (ibid)

For Hall, against the backdrop of essentialised identity, cultural identity is neither fixed nor universal in the real sense of the term; rather it becomes a kind of “positioning” against social position (237, emphasis original). Such “positioning” is always marked with “unstable points of identification” out of which there always emerge “a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’” (ibid). This second type of identity always goes against essentialist notion of identity and conceives identity as a process rather than a product with an essence. Such type of identity incorporates not only one’s social “positioning” but also the rapidly changing nature of social reality.
along with one’s perspectives which are at once dynamic and multiple (ibid). In the essay namely “On a Critical Realist Theory of Identity”, Rosaura Sanchez reads this dichotomy of “positioning” (Hall 237, Sanchez 39) against one’s “positionality” which he (Sanchez) defines as “one’s location within a given social reality” (38). Considering the political edge of such “positioning” (Hall 237, Sanchez 39), Sanchez remarks in an affirmative tone that “the cognitive dissonance, asymmetry, or lack of sync between one’ positioning and one’s positionality can . . . be politically productive” (39). It is through this asymmetry, one can able to reach “the space of critical questioning” with the aim of questioning and debunking existing identitarian discourses (ibid). This critically productive space is the hallmark of identity politics incorporating all the required needs for subverting one’s social identification or “positioning” (Hall 237). In identity politics, hence, identity itself is addressed with this second type of categorization or a postpositivist realist approach.

That subversive nature of identity politics integrates multicultural and reductionist enterprises fostering new possibilities of creating and legitimizing novel agency and identities. In order to read identity incorporating both the enterprises as two distinct world views, what we need is the postpositivist realist approach towards identity. Paula Moya and Michael Hames-Garcia in their introduction to the edited volume namely Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism (2000) have termed this engaging method as “postpositivist realism” which situates identity in both the “radical universalist” and “multiculturalist” world views (qtd. in Saldivar 155). In this sense, it conceives identity not as a static product with a definite essence but a process moving from being to becoming. In reading diaspora, that “multiculturalist” world view positively incorporates transnational
enterprises which ultimately pave the way for multiculturalism for diasporic individuals (ibid). Before discussing whether this approach can justify identity politics vis-à-vis diasporic existence or not, we need a detail scrutiny of this postpositivist realist approach as an innovative tool to address issues of identity from different angles.

It is a well-known fact that the postpositivist does not conceive identity as an essentialist absolutist entity having definite or fixed essence. Whereas postmodernists negate all sorts of context specificity and claims of objectively drawn knowledge, postpositivists, as Moya remarks, like to “stake out a less absolutist and more theoretically productive position” (Learning from Experience 12). The approach, as a typical engaging method of evaluating identity politics, considers that identity is itself internally unbounded like the living context, along with human perspective and the objective knowledge claim which are too dynamic and multiple. It provides us a theoretical paradigm that does not search any totalitarian essence in identity, but conceive identity at once “real and constructed” (ibid). Moya remarks that the postpositivist realist theory of identity “can account for the causal influence that categories of identity like race, sex, and socioeconomic status have on the formation of identity, even it accounts for how identities can adapt to changing historical circumstances” (ibid 16-17). In its critical understanding of identity, the postpositivist realist does not go for restoring a legitimate past within the present but still they believe in causal factors of identity formation or the foundational value of such causal factors. Whatever may be those causal factors such as culture, religion, ancestry and so on, in the process of historical development of individual or collective identity,
such causal factors are always delegitimized in present by the nature of social construction and contextual engagement of identity itself.

In search of a theory mediated paradigm of identity, however, a realist approach towards identity often negates all sorts of idealism and goes for searching a material basis of identity formation vis-à-vis social structure, contextual subordination and surrounding environment. In doing so, they conceive identity as “agentially formed, and for this reason generating a critical and self reflexive critique of identity in relation to non-identity, contradiction, absence, negation, and change is especially important” (Sanchez 32). A relational study of these factors is always crucial in the sense that the inherent dynamism in the process of identity formation responds to all those elements which come in to the context in due course. Such study of identity in relation to social structure and contextual elements manifest a striking parallel with Foucault’s genealogical study of history and identity. As Foucault believes that genealogy seeks to “record the singularity of events outside of any monstrous finality” and for the same its ultimate goal is to “isolate the different scenes where they engage in different roles (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 76) and in this regard, it “opposes itself to the search for origin” (ibid 77). A search for origin such as root, which Foucault terms as “Ursprung”, means “to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities” which should be in an essentialised, static form (ibid 78). But a genealogist finds that “there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in piecemeal fashion from alien forms” (ibid). In the process of searching the origin of things, a metaphysical approach always seems falsifying that it negates the material basis and
the foundational heterogeneity behind creation and sustenance of things. Genealogy, by contrast, believes in “Herkunft” (ibid 80) which is an effort not to “restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things”, but to “follow the complex course of descent” (ibid 81). In studying the descent, however, genealogy or “effective history” does not discard the notion of foundation, but it discards which was previously conceived as unified, static and homogenous (ibid 88). Eventually, of historical development of things what is found is not the essentialised identity, but its dissention. The approach is intrinsically situated within the dichotomy “body and history” where body is considered as the “domain of the Herkunft . . . the stigmata of past experiences” (ibid 83). Vindicating the dialectical nature of history, Foucault believes that history does not have any inherent teleology, but “is based on a constant struggle or warfare between different power blocs which attempt to impose their own system of domination” (McNay 89). The varied ‘system of domination’ is apparent in the historical development of humanity, where body is at the locus of struggle between various power formations. It is the reason why body cannot be explained from a “totalizing historical perspective” (ibid). In due course, body is shaped and reshaped by different forces actively come into contact with it.

Through such anti-foundational and anti-essential perspectives, genealogy conceives the fact that history itself deals with mutability rather than constancy, discontinuity rather than continuity. By uprooting traditional foundations of self and introducing "discontinuity into our very being”, ‘effective history’ itself multiplies our body, emotions and perspectives (ibid 88). Hence, genealogical study privileges descent over the origin and tries to be engaged with various “technologies of power” which directly come into tension with individuals (Foucault, “Technologies of the”
The changing or multiplicities of our identities, which are themselves caught under “a mask”, are often unrealized “through the excessive choice of identities” (Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 94). The genealogist does not seek to “rediscover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation” and concentrates mainly on inherent discontinuities and multiplicity of identity (ibid 95). The entire process, thus, considering various discontinuities, “gives rise to questions concerning our native land, native language” with the hope to “reveal the heterogeneous systems which, marked by the self, inhabit the formation of any form of identity” (ibid). As an engaging method with historical development of things, the approach, in turn, is transformed into a kind of paradigm within which individual finds him/her with different origin and thereby liberates the self from the dominating nature of those notions like cultural identity, root and so on.

On the other hand, while discussing various forms of domination and one’s resistance to those forms, we need to concentrate on Foucault’s notion of “technologies of domination and power” through which he studies processes of constitution of self by incorporating the dialogical relationship between “technologies of domination” and “technologies of the self” (“Technologies of the” 19). However, Foucault brought the concept ‘technology’ from Heidegger’s *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (trans. 1997), still Foucault uses the term to mean “a way of revealing truth” as well as paradigms of power practices and subject’s relation with self (Besley 78). Foucault believes that such “technologies of power” (Foucault, “Technologies of the” 19) “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivising of the subject” (ibid 18). “Technologies of the self” (Foucault, “Technologies of the” 19), by contrast, mean all
those operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being” with the hope to arrive at a “state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection . . .” (ibid 18). Both the technologies as distinct types of power blocs are working in tension with separate goals- one strives for making docile bodies, the other active agent; one seeks to form object, other subject. Going against “technologies of power” (Foucault, “Technologies of the” 19) or domination, one always strives for constituting oneself as “ethical subjects” and goes on in this process as a never-ending one and which, in turn, brings an individual with close contact with the practice of freedom (Besley 79).

Such efforts arise because as Foucault conceived individuals “as self-determining agents capable of challenging and resisting the structures of domination in modern society” (McNay 4). Irrespective to social pattern and structure, such self-expression as means of self-fashioning is apparent in all conscious individuals who wish to constitute him/her as subject. In due course, all sorts of conditions and circumstances for self-fashioning are directed by one’s desire for identity formation. Varied courses of exercise and actions undertaken by individuals amid different forms of power relations transform an individual into a subject for others and thereby constitute unique identities. However, reinterring the concept of self-formation and resistance, Foucault conceives subject not as an entity, but a form which is changed depending on the historical context, surrounding of living, socio-cultural constraints and the resources available to him/her. Hence Foucault believes that subjects who “act upon themselves” (“Technologies of the” 18) are neither natural nor completely free but capable of engaging with technologies depending on “technologies of power” and resources available to him/her (ibid 19). Depending on context of living and social structure, “technologies of power” or domination may vary and work in different lines of action (ibid). Incorporating the trajectory between “technologies of power” to
“technologies of the self”, individuals are transformed into subjects and in due course different identities are discovered (ibid). In Foucauldian notion of power and subjectivity, subjects are always in constant struggle with “technologies of power” and they cannot live beyond context. In the process of constant struggle and individuals’ transformation into subjects, the prevailing notion of unified subject is lost in his notion (ibid). In another words, in these struggles, individuals are meticulously transformed into certain discursively constituted subject positions.

The political edge of identity formation and assertion in all the approaches starting with postpositivist realist approach to Foucault’s genealogical analysis of subjectivity and identity along with “technologies of the self” focuses more on processes of negotiation and resistance as means of liberation and occupying novel identities (ibid). These processes of resistance and negotiation, as two chief enterprises of identity politics are always developed in dialectical relationship and while engaging with identity politics, are preoccupied with individual’s basic urge for transgression and transformation. The negotiation part in the dialectic, hence, can also be read as revisionary strategy of individual internally motivated by identity politics. That revision may occur in terms of material or psychological basis depending on the need of the individual. Even when needs for participation in new social environment and renovating shared or imposed identities vis-à-vis group or individual are articulated in social movements, both the enterprises have come into context as trajectories linking the notion of novel identity. In all those cases where individuals are strategically replaced by collective interests, still the discourse of individuality is not thereby disrupted. For individuals, “it involves entry into already established social processes, in which each person participates in her or his manner” (Rosaldo
The conscious engagement of individuals in such movements, which is in Foucauldian term motivated by “technologies of the self”, is though curtained within collectivity, still in personal narratives, such discourse of individuality is always vindicated (Foucault, “Technologies of the” 19). Even in such personal narratives incorporating poetic voices, the dialectical and inter-subjective processes of identity politics are always manifested with great care. If we consider identity not as a form but a dynamic essence and those narratives as stories that we tell ourselves and are told by others about us, then it is assuredly indicative that our sense of the self and belonging are nonetheless constituted by those narratives. In due course, all sorts of sociological processes are caught within complex psychological discourses of individuality and both are developed in dialectical manner. The practicality of Rosaldo’s comment regarding the complex knot between individual and collective interest in identity politics fastidiously draws our attention to the point that within the arena of discourse of individuality, the collective interest can never be ceased; even within a very personal identitarian narrative, the collective part emerges out of the metonymic part of the narrative. It is the reason why consciousness raising is seen to be a chief enterprise of identity politics as a motivating factor as well as a consequence of engagement.

On the other hand, in all such processes of identity politics, the dialectical relationship between identifications and identities of individuals cannot be overpowered by collective or group identity. Corresponding to previously mentioned mutuality between the “ascriptive” (Moya, “What’ Identity Got” 97) and subjective identity, in identitarian politics, there again seems “a willing connection to a collectivity” in respect to reflexivity and non-identity (Sanchez 41). Whereas
reflexivity here implies a kind of “recognition of being bound to a group”, non-identity implies the antithesis of that bond (ibid). The metaphysical dimension of identity politics is emerged out of this non-identity which was thoroughly espoused by Ramanujan in his last poetry. In the sociological sphere, whereas, that non-identity daintily signals to the mode of difference, in the metaphysical sphere the same notion brings the connotation of the intermediate state of being and non-being. Regarding that mode of difference or non-being, both the processes namely identification and identity evolve around notions of contradiction and negation as well irrespective to the context of repudiation. That intermediate state equally indicates the dynamic nature of human identity irrespective to contextual and cultural negotiation.

Hence, if individuals are considered as parts of a whole and as the parts are identified many times with the tag of the whole, the identity of the whole too then are subjected to change depending on maneuvers of the parts. The tag of a group identity does not necessarily mean a droning labeling of individual identity. As Michael Sandel bluntly remarks in this regard:

. . . the members of a society are bound by a sense of community is not simply to say that a great many of them profess communitarian sentiments and pursue communitarian aims, but rather that they conceive their identity- the subject and not just the object of their feelings and aspirations- as defined to some extent by the community of which they are a part. (150)
It is the reason why within the ambit of one’s own community those processes of contradiction and negation occur as individuation from group identity. The characteristic specificity and uniqueness in personal narratives proliferated by individual freedom to collaborate in various processes of social stratification and revision ultimately bring into fore the notion of camouflaged heterogeneity within apparent homogeneity in such processes. Such narratives are connected with one another by some sorts of fundamental features but inherently differ with inherent uniqueness. The best example in this regard is the diaspora identity politics itself where one’s engagement as a diaspora with unique personal narratives binds every diasporic individual with specific socio-spatial “positioning” and common identification tags irrespective to their inherited social and cultural belonging (Hall 237, Sachez 39). Diaspora in this way becomes a kind of metonymic metaphor signaling some apparent ontological peculiarities, which are characteristically fundamental to all diasporas at large. For those foundational similarities, all diasporas are described as “composite communities” having some shared believes, problems and questions irrespective to their unique personal qualities, poetic/narrative voices, types of dispersion, alienation and modes of retrieving efforts (Mcleod 207, emphasis original). That emphasis on community feelings and collectivity is also found in the sophisticated introduction to *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (1997) where the writer Robin Cohen remarks that in the host country, the diasporas while constituting communities assert strong longing for “the old country” (ix). In the *Cartography of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1997), Avtar Brah reveals the fact that such diaspora communities are created out of “confluence of narratives” dealing with the journey from root to route and which, in turn, indicate the sense of shared history in diaspora (183). Corresponding to the unique heterogeneity in diaspora communities, Brah
remarks that “all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even as they are implicated in the construction of a common “we”” (184). In alien and displaced locations, personal diasporic narratives are so tactically motivated by questions of identity and “positionality”, trajectories between uprooting to re-rooting tendencies, the use of personal and cultural memories in ways that diaspora politics itself becomes the highest rung of the ladder namely identity politics (Sanchez 38). Such questions and inherent heterogeneity, hence, always convert diaspora as a contingent mixed spatial existence demanding new theoretical paradigm and repeated epistemic analysis.

However, diasporas are said as the “consequence of transnational migration”, still there exist some fundamental differences between both the terms (Esman 3). Ingrained within the notion of mobility, migration is marked with more existential dynamism than diaspora. Denoting the notion of travelling from one geographical location to another, these terms like ‘migration’ and ‘immigrant’, as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin have remarked “focus on movement, disruption and displacement rather than the perpetuation of complex patterns of symbolic and cultural connection that come to characterize the diasporic society” (425). The mentioned ‘complex patterns of symbolic and cultural connection’ are marked with kinds of characteristics like ontological duality leading to hybridity, cross-cultural dislocation, homelessness, moving identity and so on which are typically related with post-colonial discourse in general. And understandably, all these features are centered on the notion of identity in all possible ways. Although it should be worth mentioning that discourses related to diaspora always call into question the notion of identity corresponding to socio-spatial and socio-cultural dislocation emerged through the
process of movement. And it is the movement which was very typical to the process of colonialism. Even when we describe diaspora as “the displacement of a community/culture into another geographical and cultural region” (Nayar 187) or “scattering” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 425) or elsewhere “dispersion from” (Brah 443), it too signals mainly to movement- an unbounded tension between being and becoming. Such movement related with diaspora is geographically and psychologically trapped within the trajectories between homeland to exile, root to route or elsewhere primordial identity to novel identities. To speak the truth, all types of diasporic writings irrespective to personal or cultural topicality fall within these trajectories.

In his sophisticated analysis to postcolonial literature in general, Pramod K. Nayar (2008) gives an introspective remark on various consequences of such movements. For him, movements in diaspora are of two types- spatial and temporal. Spatial move means “de-territorialization” and it is both “geographical and cultural” (189). But here mentioned should be made of another dimension of such geographical dislocation that loss of territory is always accompanied by the gain of new territory and that new territorial location engenders the notion of re-location of diasporic individual. On the other hand, the cultural dislocation vis-à-vis diaspora problematises the notion of cultural identity and as early indicated with reference to Stuart Hall’s notion of cultural identity, it fosters new possibilities of creating and legitimizing novel agency and identities. So Rosaura Sanchez’s notion of “positionality” (38) corresponding to identity politics here remains the hallmark of diaspora identity politics where chief concern is to arrive at “new points of becoming” by discarding various processes of identifications in dislocation (Singh 10). The effort of arriving at
‘new points of becoming’ in spatio-cultural dislocation is undoubtedly marked with Foucault’s Genealogical notions like “Henkunft” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 80) and “technologies of the self” (Foucault, “Technologies of the” 19).

However, in the diasporic context, the temporal move is marked with more ambivalence than the spatio-cultural move. Nayar gives an adequate insight on this temporal move; for him:

The temporal move is looking back at the past (analepsis) and looking forward at the future (prolepsis). Analepsis involves a negotiation with a retreating history, past, traditions, and customs. It produces nostalgia, memory, and reclamation as literary themes. Prolepsis involves a different treatment of time, where the writer looks forward at the future, seeking new vistas, new chances… The proleptic narrative is agenda driven, as the characters seek to survive hostility, adapt to new circumstances, and gaze upon the future. (188-189)

In this comment, all the inherent features of diasporic narratives or poetic voices as well are explicitly presented to us with all the requisite detail. All implicit vulnerabilities along with the strategic edge of identitarian politics of all diasporic narratives/poetic voices are manifested through this ontological duality which ultimately makes the diasporic space internally fertile and prolific. “The long distance romance between the home and homelessness” (Raina 19) is manifested through the use of excessive memory and nostalgic yearning to the lost home in diasporic writings which not only bear the testimony to an individual’s dislocation or “de-
territorialisation” (Nayar 189) but also a poetics of return indicating home as a “mythic place of desire” (Brah 192). These two remedial literary (poetic) devices, documented in diasporic poetic or fictional narratives, are always empowering in the sense that they help in transforming disabling ideas of being and belonging of an individual or a community into enabling notions or concrete images in present by creating a bridge between the past and present, root and route. Although, as Svetlana Boym remarks, within the locus of diasporic writings, the use of memory and nostalgia becomes extremely tactical that creates only “diasporic intimacy” (251); it is a consequential preoccupation of both the mentioned therapeutic devices that “does not promise a comforting recovery of identity . . . Just one learns to live with alienation and reconciles oneself to the uncanniness of the surrounding world and to the strangeness of the human touch . . . .” (251-252). As the immediate consequence of “diasporic intimacy”, the entire situation demands a forward looking vision in case of a diasporic individual fostering scopes for better assimilation and novel identities (Boym 251). It is at this stage, as Milton Esman opines that “individuals evolve hybrid identities, membership and participation in both the diaspora and host society culture and society” (103). In case of entrepreneurial diaspora like Ramanujan, this stage really matters in problematising the notion of identity or enhancing identity politics on the one hand and on the other hand, it too fosters greater possibilities for creative minds making the diasporic space extremely fertile.

The clash between the two worlds or homes mentioned by Nayar and other critics is also never ceased into a compromising invention of specific novel identity; as “two facets of a cultural fate revealing uncommon relationships between creativity and bondage, art and compromise, poetic practice and physical and intellectual
survival”, the clash or the struggle in the form of new search for identity and belonging continues in a more contingent way (Raina 25). The search becomes more and more conditional and depends on the dynamic context of living as a diasporic, displaced individual goes for either self-preservation or self-fashioning as means of “ analepsis” or “prolepsis” respectively (Nayar 188). Through this unbounded negotiation between the two ‘homes’, as Homi Bhabha remarks, the diasporic individual enters into a liminal in-between space where “positioning” (Hall 237, Sanchez 39) and “positionality” always collide with greater politics of identity (Sanchez 38). Bhabha says this space as the “third space”: “for me the importance of Hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather Hybridity to me is the ‘third space’, which enables other positions to emerge” (“The Third Space” 211). Those ‘other positions’ indicate contingency mixed “new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation . . .” (Bhabha, The Location of 1-2). For those ‘new signs of identity’, the diasporic location is always marked with multiplicity of identities and thereby identity is converted into a process of negotiation.

In an era of globalization and increasing transnational movements, identity formation itself becomes of tactical practice for individuals even in glocal context where s/he becomes migrant in some form or other. Such tactical practices become more strategic and manipulative when the strategy has to be applied in case of a displaced individual in a diasporic context. With split consciousness as product of liminal in-between existence, a diasporic individual has to participate in multiple cultures and locations where the sense of the self is always manifested as fluid and is emerged through a dynamic process of cultural negotiation. In that dynamic process,
however, the regression-resistance dialectic or the tactic of looking backward-forward vision for constructing identity becomes a kind of consciousness-raising practice itself which is also internally vulnerable with hybrid and liminal existence. The most vital elements of identity politics that is the “the cognitive dissonance, asymmetry, or lack of sync between one’s positioning and one’s positionality” along with the trauma or uprooting and nostalgic yearning for the same here find new expressions and meanings in that tactical practice (Sachez 38). Within the ambit of globalization, a diasporic individual has to face the cultural challenges of global cosmopolitanism vis-à-vis the issue of assimilation, re-rooting tendencies and creation of novel identities as well. On the one hand, whereas globalization and cosmopolitanism appear as decentralized forces of creating liminal, hybrid characters in a rapidly changing world, the same forces, on the other hand, co-existing with diasporic existence become catalytic forces of identity politics converting the processes of identity formation a kind of unbounded game between “positioning” (Hall 237, Sachez 39) and “positionality” (Sanchez 38), one’s social identification and personal identity, homing desire and “diasporic intimacy” (Boym 251).

Hence, whatever the context of negotiation, repudiation or challenge concerning the hindrances of identity formation, as retaining primordial identities is always a difficult task for a diasporic individual, so is creating and maintaining a novel one also. Maintaining the novel one, in real sense is more problematic than restoring the earlier one corresponding to its hyphenated, liminal existence and divisive nature of identity itself. This unbounded game often induces a sense of anxiety and bleak thoughts in diasporic individuals irrespective to any sociological solutions of the same. In many cases, the tension between past and present, root and
route, acceptance and resistance, retrieving and attaining continues with new productive outcomes and in some cases, the anxiety ridden situation is found to be searching metaphysical solutions of questions raised by identitarian politics in diasporic situation. Like their liminal and hybrid existence, their thoughts are too oscillating in-between two worlds- sociological and metaphysical in search of a home in a homeless situation, meaning in a meaningless situation, identity in a rootless situation crossing all the boundaries and borders of epistemology and philosophical inquiries. Representing their complex image as an insider and outsider or a citizen and stranger at the same time, their thoughts are often found in perpetual motion pursuing unpredictable routes and dimensions. In such situation, identity politics becomes explicitly multifaceted and equivocal incorporating and manifesting all the facets of identity, existence and movements.

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Chapter- 1, Part-II

Idea of Identity Politics in Indian English Poetry

Identity crisis, identity politics and identity formation, reformation and elsewhere deformations are some tactical terms which have shown drastic interrelations with Indian English Poetry throughout the ages. During both the eras of Indian English poetry, namely the pre-independence and the post-independence periods, these terms have confined the body of poetry into such diversified provocative paradigms, in which the tradition and individual talent of Indian English poetry and poets respectively are perpetually being gazed with suspicious eyes corresponding to varied inter-literary and trans-literary phenomena. Starting with the trajectory between texts to context, such discourses of suspicion incorporates wide-ranging socio-political, psychological and epistemic issues as focal points of critical consideration. As Hari Mohan Prasad remarks considering all Commonwealth literatures in general, that “the duality of cultures is a common factor, the crisis of identity . . . fundamental”, the crisis of identity and its strategic counter reply, in turn, have consequently always become a hindrance to the credibility and authenticity of the poets and their creations (3). As a curious term, the notion of authenticity assumes that there can be some sorts of specific sensibilities, thoughts and expressions which can be consciously motivated and stimulated by a poet in order to give typical Indian colour and identity. Indian English poetry is not an exception of this considering the domains of the mentioned duality of culture and identity crisis. When a sound critical response towards such discourse of suspicion is needed, critics are found to be negating identity politics of the poets of both the eras lying hidden in
this body of poetry and are seemed to be negotiating with other socio-cultural orientations and stages of historical developments.

The striking feature of Indian English poetry which may strike any reader in his/her first reading is that the basic foundation of identity politics in it is created by the language and the context of emergence of the genre itself. The growth and development of Indian Poetry in English is the result of many experimentations and struggles for a tradition, imitations and innovations with imitations. It has a long history of more than one hundred and fifty years, although there was never a historical past of poetry in Indian Writing in English. Like in many national and vernacular literatures, as we see that poetry is the root of all literary activities following which all other branches of literatures have come into existence today, in Indian Writing in English, poetry did not provide that source of background from which all other branches could have emerged. In this sense, when the main body of literature itself has not a specific historical beginning or background, the sense of uprooting or an imitative beginning of a particular branch of that body of literature, i.e. poetry, should not be the question of incongruity or critical argument. Here the concept like usable past that we often use in the specific context of a writer’s debt to the past becomes anomalous or redundant. Within the ambit of such derivativeness, deliberate political involvement with own creations and creative ability to achieve a preferred poetic identity is an inevitable product of process of creation. The task that looms large and needs to be explored is not to avow a discourse of suspicion vis-à-vis a poet’s credibility but to critique that strategic involvement in order to vindicate whether it is a negative or a positive dimension of a poet’s creative ability.
Though it seems different, it is true to say that, issues of language and context are accumulated in a dialectical and reciprocal relation in Indian English Poetry. This, in turn, brings a range of other notions like decolonization, postcolonialism, discourse of power, “technologies of domination”, “technologies of the self”, national interest, question of identity, atavistic regression, mimicry, appropriation, hybridity, and notion of liminality and so on in postcolonial situation (Foucault, “Technologies of the” 19). The general consensus regarding a language of dominance is that to write in it is to intercede in the discourse of the dominative. Discussing the ideological debates among the Marxist critics from Marx to Althusser, and judging various perspectives of the structuralist theoreticians, Ania Loomba explicitly remarks on the role of language in subject formation:

Language emerges not as the creation of the speaking subject; rather the subject becomes so only by schooling his speech to a socially determined system of linguistic prescriptions. The primacy of language over subjectivity was also confirmed by Lacanian psychoanalysis according to which the child learns to see itself as distinct from the rest of the world by regarding its own mirror image, but becomes a full subject only when it enters the world of language. Thus from a variety of different intersecting perspectives, language is seen to construct the subject . . . . Any set of words could be analysed to reveal not just an individual but a historical consciousness at work. Words and images thus become fundamental for an analysis of historical processes such as colonialism. (36-37)
Within the ambit of colonialism and postcolonialism, when the language of artistic documentation will be the language of the colonizers’ and the same will be associated with the notions of “hegemony”, then the intersection between language and subject formation will certainly be resonated as two reciprocal categories (Gramsci 137). In her epoch making creation namely *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1998), Gauri Viswanathan bluntly shows how English literary studies become a “mask for economic exploitation, so successfully camouflaging the material activities of the colonizer” (20). That ‘mask of conquest’ together with power politics constituted some sorts of ideologies which decisively played the hegemonic role in constituting subjectivities of the oppressed as a class willingly accepting the dominance of the oppressors. In his sophisticated analysis of orientalism, Edward Said explicitly shows how language and literature played a intricate role in creating the binary opposition between the European self and non-European other, and thereby helped in perpetuating colonial authority. For Said, it is the dominant role of language that “brings opposites together as “natural,” it presents human types in scholarly idioms and methodologies, it ascribes reality and reference to objects . . . of its own making” (321, emphasis original). If language reflects reality, it can also able to distort the same; such distortion helps in inculcating “hegemony” for the sake of the dominant sides (Gramsci 137). In this sense, Gramsci remarks in his *Prison Notebook* (1971) that this “hegemony” (ibid) is achieved not through unswerving manipulation of the colonized but by playing upon their “common sense” which is historically formed with sets of believes (333). As he remarks that it is a kind of view which is “inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed”, and, which inculcates “moral and political passivity” (ibid). In Gramsci’s reading of the role of ideologies against traditional Marxian perspective, ideology not only reflects material reality, but also
constitutes all the aspects of individuals incorporating consciousness and collective existence. For him the hegemonic network of power itself becomes a locus of contestation between the elites and the “subaltern” groups (21). It is this contestation that always restricts any totalizing, unified system of ideological domination. For him within that locus, “hegemony” and counter hegemony always exist in a state of tension (137). What makes Gramsci different from those traditional Marxist theorists is that he considers ideology not only a locus of domination but also a site capable of engendering multidimensional social struggle and resistance. For him the oppressed subjects have the capacity to develop various strategies of resistance behind willingly accepting dominance of the colonizer. “Hegemony” does not exist above the economic structure; rather it has a material dimension (ibid). For him ideologies “organize human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.” (324). Within the ambit of philosophies of decolonization and postcolonialism in India and in Indian Writing in English, identity politics is not at all separated from colonial ideology, “hegemony” and consequent dominance (ibid). The notions of colonial ideology and “hegemony” (ibid) “stress the incorporation and transformation of ideas and practices belonging to those who are dominated” in the domain of colonialism (Loomba 32). In Indian English poetry, strategic effort for emancipation from that inclusion and resistance to transformation is the specific domain of identity politics.

Any poet writing in the language of power has to succumb to the dominant ideology or Gramscian “hegemony” as well, and likewise has to be endowed with various strategic maneuvers of resistance against transformation to save him/her from
the discourse of suspicion (137). Firdaus Azim rightly remarks in this context that “the relation between identity and language rests on a notion of possession – do I possess the language? is it mine? can I make it mine? and should I make it mine?” (35). These questions are certainly the consequences of the internal clash between the dominance of colonial “hegemony” and scopes for resistance within (Gramscian 137). That scope was already discussed while discussing “hegemony” as a locus of contestation between the elites and the subaltern proletariat (ibid). It is the basic domain of decolonization and postcolonialism which facilitate sturdy penchant towards colonial discourse analysis. And as it is already mentioned that the colonial ideology and “hegemony” is not separable from subjectivity and cultural terrain, identity politics in this regard will certainly be the indispensable outcome of that struggle (ibid). During the pre-independence period of Indian English poetry, the basic scaffold of resistance was constituted with atavistic regression towards the golden past of the nation and incorporation of all those thematic prototypes which were typically Indian.

However, in this specific context, one particular point is needed to be specified that the same dichotomy between dominance and resistance can also be discussed with Foucauldian notion of discourse and power. The basic hindrance in critiquing that trajectory between dominance to resistance by assimilating both the paradigms i.e. Marxian ideology or Gramscian “hegemony” and Foucault’s notions of power and subject formation is itself Foucault’s rejection of the notion of ideology within the ambit of all sorts of power relations and social practices including colonialism and postcolonialism (ibid). For Foucault, ideas and material existence cannot be clubbed
together; rather, as he believes in his *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (1970), all sorts of ideas and knowledge are structured by some “laws of a certain code and knowledge” (ix). There cannot be any predetermined truth behind any knowledge or ideological formations as most of the Marxists consider the material domain as the proprietor of ideologies. Foucault believes that it is not the labour that determines the essence of individuals; rather, subjectivity is constructed through our engagement with multitude of discourses. He also discards the notion of power propagated by the Marxist so far as centralized unidirectional weapon of the capital or the elite class; it is not a macro-social phenomenon. For him power is generated and operating through multiplicity of sites in local level. It flows in multiple directions. Hence power is not totally repressive, but positive in the sense that it enables scopes for resistance and transformations. Whereas traditional Marxism believes that ideology stands in opposition to truth, Foucault believes that the notion of truth is itself problematical. Truth is produced in social relations not in social structures. It is produced out of social and political relations of power which are the very domain of formation of subject and knowledge. The use of discourse will determine what kind of knowledge will be utilized in producing truth. This knowledge is not separated from power; because power cannot be exercised or worked unless knowledge is formed. Even he also negates the idea of subject as the sole source of meaning. He believes that fixed notion of subjectivity is a coercive illusion created by the material process of subjection. Instead of such deterministic philosophies, Foucault believes that every idea is ordered “through some material mediums” and which imposes a specific pattern on that idea. It is this pattern which Foucault calls as discourse (100). The colonial discourse, in this sense is itself a product of power relations which always works in perpetuating those relations. Within the realm of
those power relations, individuals have the “technologies of the self” (“Technologies of the” 19) and “ethics of the self” as early discussed and through which they can refashion their art of existence of daily practices (“History of the” 342).

It is needless to say that the perpetuating trend of identity politics in Indian English poetry can be analysed from all such perspectives and theoretical paradigms. Although whatever may be the points of dissimilarities among those notions and paradigms, one specific truth which is apparently vindicated by all such perspectives is that the dominance and resistance dichotomy is always apparent in the entire body of writing as a gesticulation towards critiquing colonial discourse. If the notion of dominance have created the basic domain for cultural plurality and hybridity, the same power relation have constituted conditions for possible resistance to that dominance. Within the context of a multicultural country like India, such power relations can also be perceptible in various thresholds of cross-cultural relations. In India, hence, that cultural duality is further enhanced by multiculturalism behind colonial dominance. The immediate consequence of that cultural plurality produced out of cross-cultural production and colonial dominance is identity crisis.

It is evidently seen that almost all the poets, apart from some selected ones, are found to be living more than one or two cultures and speaking two to three languages at the same time. Most of the poets are well educated in English language and literature and most of them even spoke English as a family language. If we theorize such contextual and linguistic hybridity of such poets from Althusser’s perspectives of “Ideological State Apparatuses”, it will be seen how their education in English
language and literature insisted them to conceive the dominant ideologies related with such education and language with consent (143). Among such “ISAs”, Althusser claimed “the educational ISA” and “the family ISA” (ibid) as most pervasive and dominant forms of “ISAs” which ultimately have “replaced the Church-Family couple” of pre-Capitalist period (154). The material manifestation of such ideological dominance of “the educational ISA” in India is best reflected through the objectives of establishing of Hindu College in 1816 at Calcutta (143). Gauri Viswanathan remarks regarding the objectives and consequences of establishing Hindu College explicitly:

The most striking example of differences between the Orientalists’ objectives and Indian needs is that of the founding in 1816 of Hindu College, a college that sprang up entirely from the demands of a group of Calcutta citizens who wanted instruction not only in their own languages and sciences but also in the language and literature of England. (43)

The immediate consequence of that establishment and introduction of English literary education was a kind of paradigm shift in the ideology of the students reading in Hindu College. Giving the reference of one of the members of British administration namely Charles Trevelyan, Viswanathan remarks:
Charles Trevelyan went so far as to claim that there were as many converts from the Hindu College as from missionary schools; . . . they remained more lasting believers of Christianity precisely because their literary education had served to develop their critical understanding more sharply than a pure religious education would have done. (88)

The College, in reality, was actually succeeded in creating an ideological condition for dismantling traditional Indian value system and for inculcating the colonial ideologies among the young Indians emerging as newly educated intellectuals during the period. During the pre-independence period of Indian English poetry, that “School-Family couple” was so invasive that did not even provide much room for resistance for the poets writing in the language of power (Althusser 154). Nonetheless, in this Althusserian paradigm of subject formation, there is less room for individuals for resistance and novel identity formation. These ideological apparatuses seek to produce some subjects by assisting governing system of domination and those subjects, in turn, are ideologically habituated to acknowledge the value of that dominant system. Corresponding to such confinement in his model, Ania Loomba also remarks that the paradigm affects “a closure by failing to account for ideological struggle and oppositional ideas. If subjects are entirely the creation of dominant ideologies then there is no scope for any ideas outside of these ideologies . . . .” (33). Within the domain of the pre-independence period, “the educational ISA” brought almost all the poets in perpetual dominance of British Romantic literatures during when Indian English poetry emerged and impelled them to create a platform for the genre which was primarily derivative and imitative in nature (Althusser 143).
Absorbing all the essential influences of the British Romantic literature when Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) started the genre and his career as a poet, he unknowingly had created conditions for establishing a derivative and imitative tradition in Indian English Poetry. Being a displaced among the Indians as the son of a mixed Portuguese and Indian descent and an English woman, Derozio felt the pressure of cultural expulsion and colonial “hegemony” in all detail within the country (Gramsci 137). However, as Althusser remarks, Derozio did not confine him only within the domain of ideological dominance; as Gramsci remarks, he sought to constitute a realm for resistance with the effort of revitalizing the golden history of India. In this encapsulating effort, though India occurred in his poetry, the aforesaid counter discourse and resistance to the discourse of suspicion regarding his own identity was thoroughly excluded from his poetry. When he, in the poem “To India-My Native country” seeks to represents India, it is the simple direct representation of a man trapped within the perpetual gaze of the colonial orientalist ideology:

My country, in thy days of glory past
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,
And worshiped as a deity thou wast,
Where is that glory, where that reverence now? (1-4)

It echoes nationalism and an effort of rejuvenation of the country of a poet, but not any sort of distinctive Indianness. Derozio’s effort in portraying the nationalistic zeal in his poetry is considered by M. K. Naik as “an unmistakable authenticity of patriotic
utterance” which ultimately represented an inculcated Indian identity in his poetry, but not the typical Indian sentiment (23). What is actually pessimistically missing in his poetry is the needed discourse of decolonization to castigate the orientalist projection of India as irrational, uncivilized other. In the poem namely “To the Pupils of the Hindu College”, he evidently praises those students of Hindu College who have freed their minds from the devastating influence of enchanting spells of medieval ideologies through modern education. And in this context, it seems clearly explicit to us from above discussion that what kind of modern education was provided to the students of Hindu College.

Notwithstanding Derozio was discarded as the first Indian English poet by critics of our present time for his distanced voice and unsettled root of identity, still the tradition that he had established was further executed by atavistic regression, mythopoetic imagination and revitalization of a pan-Indian identity in the context of colonial India. From one perspective it can be a specific type of identity politics basically engendered by pan-Indian sentiments and collective identity, where the poets by “stressing on their distinct Indianness” and by “identifying themselves with the society they were writing about”, they were basically endeavoured to create a space from which they could able to assert and resist pan-Indian identity and the colonial discourse respectively (V. Prasad 19). Kasiprasad Ghose (1809-1973) reveals his pan-Indian sentiments by asserting India’s uniqueness like this way:

Where mighty Ganga’s billows flow
And wander many a country by;

Where ocean smiles serene below,

Beneath thy blue and sunny sky. (13-16)

Elsewhere Gooroo Churn Dutt laments over his distance from the ancient age in the poem “Introductory Lines”:

I a poor school boy with my scanty store

Unlearned in thy mysterious shastras’ lore

........................................................

I’m born in this unlucky age

Without the fire of any ancient sage… (3-4, 9-10)

In this poem, his lamentation over the loss of the golden past is pessimistically manifested and vindicated. This typical pessimistic tone is created by his own distance from the past as a colonized person. Likewise Michael Madhusudhan Dutt (1824-1973) also recounts the legend of Purus and Alexander and laments over the lost of ancient pride:

Where is Purus now?
And where the noble hearts that bled

For freedom—with the heroic glow

..........................................................

and where art thou- Fair Freedom! thou

Once goddess of Ind’s sunny clime! (105-107, 111-12)

In all these lines, poets are conspicuously manifesting a mythologized perspective to cope with a typical Indianness and thereby have displayed “no visible sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the European culture” (Prasad 1999, 17). They are dreaming of a free India within the ambit of the prevailing colonial discourse and dominance. Although it does not mean that they have not internalized the ideological dominance of colonial “hegemony” or cultural corrosion as citizens of a colonized nation; but that trauma of internalization was not explicitly manifested in the reflective level of their poems (Gramsci 137). It can be simply internalized through their overemphasis on pan-Indian identity and the perpetual effort for revitalizing the golden past of the nation. On the one hand, they could not make free their consciousness from the devastating influences of colonial ideological and literary “hegemony” (Gramsci 137). Whereas G.J.V. Prasad says it as the “insider-outsider status” (ibid) of the poets, Nehru counts it as one of the features of Indian Renaissance; for him Indian Renaissance “was twofold: she looked to the West and, at the same time, she looked at herself and her own past” (330). That duality of cultural identity and of ideological stance as product of colonial “hegemony” was clearly evident in the technical derivativeness and thematic Indianness of pre-independence poetry where
the poets sought to catch their thematic Indianness through strenuous projection of the oriental India (Gramsci 137). Following the same tradition and ideological subjugation, Shoshee Chunder Dutt (1825-1886) wrote “India” and “Sivajee”, Govin Chunder Dutt (1828-1884) “A Farewell to Romance”, Hur Chunder Dutt (1831-1901) “Tarra Baee”, Greece Chunder Dutt (1833-1892) “Samarsi”, Omesh Chunder Dutt (1836-1912) “The Chief of Pokurna”, Ram Sharma (1837-1918) “In Memory of Swami Vivekananda” Romesh Chunder Dutt “Sita Lost” and so on. All these poems have exercised a naïve kind identity politics abandoning aforementioned subjective and contextual “positionality” and resistance towards colonial discourse (Sachez 38). For example S.C. Dutt in “India”, yearns for a free India and thereby questions: “Land of my fathers! Canst thou ne’er be free?” (14). In “Farewell to Romance”, G.C. Dutt extended farewell to the golden past of the nation from which the colonial India was far away:

Farewell- a long farewell- to thee, Romance!

We may not meet as we met before (1-2)

In “Tara Baee”, H.C. Dutt espouses the masculine vigour of ancient India by using the subject’s points of view:

And make my noble father’s name

Of every song of theme;

To rescue Thoda from the slave
Who lives to fill a coward’s grave? (21-24)

On symbolic level this poem can be considered as an appeal to the colonized Indians to ‘rescue’ the land from the colonizers but that basically manifests a tone of self-criticism rather than a critical awareness towards deterioration of cultural identity and vigour. Likewise, in “Samarsi”, G.C Dutt orientalizes the caves of Samarsi and O.C. Dutt the legend of Pokurna by following the same ideological stance established so far. Ram Sharma’s “In Memory of Swami Vivekananda”, again is a lamentation over the lost vigour and identity of India’s golden past within the crossroad of lived history. In the course of historical dissention of the nation and subjectivities as well, the poets in all these poems, apart from their thematic Indianness, assert “a displaced hostility against the colonial power”, but not towards their own ideological subjugations, as Nandy remarks (20). What seems to be a typical feature of that “displaced hostility” (ibid) is that through that ideological apparatus, the poets tried for an implicit comparison between the colonial discourse and the golden past of the nation in a way that might overthrow the ideological dominance of the colonial “hegemony” in an objective and meandering manner (Gramsci 137). The strategic maneuver was culminated with the first major Indian English poetess namely Toru Dutt’s (1856-1877) Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan (1882), where she rediscovered nine ballads of the legendary India from the same perspective. In all the ballads, Toru has strategically obtained a kind of “proleptic” narrative strategy marked with atavistic regression towards the past in order to show the oriental zeal and ancient pride of the nation (Nayar 189). Like the other poets of this group, she also conceives that identity can be conceived not through self celebration, but through
celebration of the golden past of the nation and collective identity. Hence G.J.V. Prasad remarks that this effort of Toru cannot be said as an “escape into traditional India but an attempt to situate herself in a cultural community” (55). But what makes her more famous is her “Our Casuriana Tree”, a poem of memorizing, universalizing, and spiritualizing the emotion of the poet. Although, for M.K. Naik it was her “that Indian English poetry really graduated from imitation to authenticity” (Naik 37), still the poem echoes the sensuous appeal perceptible in the odes of Keats. Likewise her profound lyricism and the exotic setting of the poem recall, beyond her memory of her dead “sweet companion”, the memory of Wordsworth’s lyrical jilt and Coleridgian exoticism (26). What makes it a typical Indian is her attitude towards the tree and her concretization of nostalgic yearning:

But not because of magnificence

Dare is the Casuriana to my soul:

Beneath it we have played…

O sweet companion, loved with love intense

For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear. (23-27)

It projects the sentiment of a typical Indian woman, who is emotionally attached to a tree that symbolizes her memory. If, in her ballads, her sense of identity lies in her strategic digging into Indian legends, in it, her spontaneous ejaculation of feelings, emotion and desire for a tree symbolizing memory and cultural milieu as well as her
spiritualization of that desire constitute the required identity of the poet. It seems less strategic than her ballads.

All these poets sought to attain a primordial but essential Indian identity which was confined within strategies of reconciliation of past and present, redefining of myth and legends and too the idealization of the valour and pride of national heroes. The primary goal of that identity politics was not to challenge the mentioned colonial discourse and hegemony, but to define how they were Indians and how their culture was far superior to the colonizers and many times what they were and can be. But that viable tradition was not even maintained by all the poets of the period. The best example may be Monmohan Ghose (1869-1924). He was such a poet who marked a complete departure from the tradition established so far by the earlier poets and submitted himself to the influence of the British English poetry. He is a liberal humanist of a colonized nation for whom literature is not the product of its soil revolting against shared or marginalized identity; rather it is a creative art that seeks to transcend the immediate boundary of its provincial context in order to deal with universal values and moral preoccupation. He was the best example of Althusserian “educational ISA” corresponding to his education in English language in England (143). He wrote poems on personal exile, loneliness, frustration and also on some universal themes like love, death, nature, beauty etc. For example, his Primavera (1890) is a pessimistic account of various experiences of an alienated individual collected from the moments of joy and ecstasy. He is an exiled individual who asserts his identity not to the colonisers, but to the Indian from which he is alienated through his education. In the poem “Myranwy”, he seeks to convince the Indians that he, too,
like them, is an Indian. Being displaced from his own community, here we hear the voice of not a colonized or a marginalized Indian, but of a castaway. In the poem “London”, he indisputably reveals his attachment with the city manifesting his inclination towards the British literary canon and exuberance.

However, his brother Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), who had a similar upbringing, showed a different temperament as a poet. Whereas Monmohan was inclined more towards the contemporary British literature, Aurobindo towards the classical Greek, Latin and Indian literature; specifically, he owed much from the Vedas and the Upanishads. Poetry for him was an elevating pleasure of uniting the divine and the physical; it is an art of dealing with the supreme transcendent self or the cosmic being:

My breath runs in a subtle rhythmic stream;

It fills my members with a might divine:

..................................................

My body is God’s happy living tool,

My spirit a vast sun of deathless light. (1-2, 13-14)

His has a poetic self that is untouched by physical reality or cultural deterioration of the colonial India. Almost all the poems are written in an entirely new world view of
poetic inspiration and fulfillment. For him, identity lies not in the socio-cultural context of his nation or in the medium of expression; rather, it is the direct product of one’s mystical union with the almighty- a transcendental self. There is nothing political about this self. One of his contemporaries Robindranath Tagore (1862-1941) is too a mystic in the true sense of the term, but his place in Indian English Poetry is open to question. He wrote only one poem directly in English namely “The Child”; all of his other creations are available in translation.

The same tradition was continued in Sarojini Naidu’s (1879-1949) poetry also. She was, of course the last voice of the pre-independence Indian English Poetry from when the effort of projecting the secular India was started in Indian English poetry. Apart from the typical traditional theme of revitalizing myth and legend, she mainly has incorporated with five different themes- love, Nature, scenes of Indian life, personal loneliness and the questions of life and death. But interestingly, in all these themes, the then current social reality and the question of identity were seemingly remained untouched by the poet; rather, there was over romanticization and idealization of all her themes. Sarojini was basically interested in projecting a picturesque India incorporating multicultural dimension of cultural milieus and the religious domain. Whereas, in the poem namely “The Queen’s Rival” she deals with the legend of the Queen Gulnaar, in “The Soul’s Prayer” she addresses her inner turmoil regarding life and death:

Speak, Master, and reveal to me
Thine inmost laws of life and death

Give me to drink each joy and pain

Which thine eternal hand can mete. (3-6)

It is the metaphysical question regarding the mysteries of life and death apparent in most of the mystical poets of the period. That particular metaphysical lore in her poetry comes directly from the influence of Ghalib’s ghazals and Urdu poetry. Her birth place Hyderabad was itself a prominent place of medieval Muslim culture where she tasted from her childhood the Islamic atmosphere of delicacy, oriental splendour and the richness of Persian poetry. That lore taught her to express innermost emotion in terms of divinity and ecstasy. In “The Pardah Nashin”, she idealizes a woman inside a ‘pardah’ which ultimately reveals her sensitive apprehension of life of woman confined within the domain of cultural and religious chauvinism:

Time lifts the curtain unawares,

And Sorrow looks into her face…

Who shall prevent the subtle years,

Or shield a woman’s eyes from tears? (15-18)

Likewise, almost all her poems deal with a subject matter through which she only reveals her inner thought and emotion relating to national pride and woman in
general, not the socio-political context of her living. She was a poet of her own world where her sense of identity rests on her expression of her own self in terms of cultural prejudices and chauvinistic pride. The entire scenario of the pre-independence Indian English poetry as a derivative genre was culminated with Sarojini without any experimental approach towards thematic and technical innovation. Identity politics in most of the poets of the period was not directed by explicit resistance towards colonial discourse and “hegemony” or any sort of response towards the social reality which have deteriorated cultural values and dignity; rather, they were the poetic voices busy in seeking and asserting essentialist notion of identity based on golden myths and legends of the nation (Gramsci 137). It was a type of poetic lore that reflects its identity in terms of its own voice only. They expressed Indianness through Indian themes, but at the same time by submitting themselves into the British poetic tradition, they too reinforced the so called discourse of suspicion. The poetry written during that period fulfilled the urge of the poets but did not serve the ultimate purpose of an emerging postcolonial literature. That was expressive in nature, but not subversive. From our reading of pre-independence Indian English poetry, a kind identity politics seems revealed to us where poets speak about the root, but not about the then present context; they define who they were, but not who they are. The sense of a colonized person vis-à-vis social reality was entirely missing in that poetic lore.

When a new panorama was emerged in Indian English poetry after independence, poets started to endow with new tests and temperaments, new skills and gestures. Like modern poetry in British and other literatures in English, most of the post-independence poets have attempted to capture the true picture of day-to-day
reality, moral and spiritual upheaval corroding the vitals of rich culture and tradition, a sense of alienation, frustration and desolation in a fragmented society. Most of the poets of this period are found to be engaged with the art of writing the self as one of the main features of modern poetry in English. Within the ambit of such multifaceted concerns and dispositions, identity politics in post-independence Indian English poetry is also found to be incorporating a variety of trajectories and dialectical relationships, assorted socio-political and cultural arenas along with new dimensions of postcolonial and gender discourses and, in turn, itself becomes multidimensional. Manifesting new awareness towards self and society at large, the poets sought to establish a poetic lore “authentically Indian” and “artistically viable” (Parthasarathy 42). The thematic and technical experimentations and innovations are thoroughly continued in the entire field of poetry, although, the effort of establishing an innovative poetic lore was not so easy; there still continued the reconciliation of myth and reality, past and present and effort for revitalizing the golden Indian past in most of the leading poetic figures of the period. New Indian English poets still considered themselves as exiled and English in India as a “nowhere language” (Alexander 24). There was, of course, the physical disappearance of the Britishers, but the internalization of colonial legacy was still continued in the form of psychological and artistic influences. That hindrance enhanced the often expected resistance towards colonial discourses and colonial “positioning” engendered by the colonial discourse in most of the poets of this period (Hall 237, Sachez 39). However that positive move itself felt “challenge from older nationalistic intellectuals and from regionalists who demanded a renaissance of the culture of the pre-colonial languages of India” (King, *Modern Indian Poetry* 2). The tension between the traditional and the modern India was still going on during the post-1947 period of Indian English poetry where the
modern India was simply found as an artistic product of the paradigm shift from the traditional one. As Vilas Sarang remarks, “...the question of Indianness looks suspiciously like a red herring, but one has to go after it nevertheless” (6). Indian English poets could not make free themselves from the discourse of suspicion even in the post-independence period corresponding to imitations of other literatures and vitals of universal modern predicaments. The question of national and individual identity was still continued in this period as a basic inquiry in the field of any sorts of writings in English.

As it is already indicated that all these factors became positive impediments for the post-independence poets corresponding to their motivation towards better understanding of the condition, under which they were writing for the sake of experimentation. They became self-consciously aware for the need of creating new discourses as resistance towards colonial discourses to make free them from colonial legacies and other derisive forces coterminous to self-liberation and novel identity formation. That discourse of suspicion during the post-independence period was also encouraging with regard to its psychological stimulation for broadening the scopes of identity politics converting it as the chief locus of self-assertion and of the writing-the-self tactic.

With his restraints and sophisticated compactness, Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004) made the first attempt of modernizing Indian English poetry through his volume *A Time to Change* (1959). Being a Jew and a citizen of previously colonized country, the question of identity was found to be the chief concern of his poetry. As a
man of professional, his identity politics does not incorporate a strong resistance towards the colonial discourse, but also a kind of secular self-consciousness regarding his “personal quest for a satisfactory way of living in the modern world” (King, *Three Indian Poets* 91). With his utmost professionalism, Ezekiel sought for a poetic voice addressing to all human being in general with regard to the general moral and psychological obsessions and distractions in the modern world. The post-colonial gesture as a typical feature of modern Indian English poetry was started with him through his basic concerns with the “lives and identities that an increasing number of educated Indians knew or would seek” (ibid 92). The poet plainly shows that temperament in the poem “A Poem of Dedication”:

I do not want the yogi’s concentration,

I do not want the perfect charity

Of saints not the tyrant’s endless power.

I want a human balance humanly

Acquired, fruitful in the common hour. (29-33)

As King remarks, Ezekiel’s secular and representative voice is the direct outcome of his “outsiderness” and “marginality” as products of his education and birth (ibid). With a generalizing tendency, the poet asserts his identity in an affirmative tone: “A man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India” (Ezekiel 88). However, that
sense of rootedness could not able to provide him a sense of belonging in his country; the home that the poet sought to constitute through that sense, in turn, was converted into a ‘hell’ in the poem ‘After Reading a Prediction’: “This is the place / where I was born. I / know it / well. It is home / which I recognize at last / as a kind of hell / to be made tolerable” (13-19). A basic impediment causing his alienation was certainly his own sense of “outsiderness” vis-à-vis various collective identities apparent in the country (King, *Three Indian Poets* 92). His secularist notion towards Indian societies and individual identity was actually the epitome of that resistance towards the discourse of suspicion which in turn alienated him from others. Such vision impels him to consider poetry not as revelation of typical Indian identity but a domain of expressing human identity in general and secularist thoughts.

Although, such pan-Indianism was not a conspicuous element in post-independence poetry; poets like R. Parthasarathy (1934- ) and Adil Jussawalla (1940- ) are two fine examples of regression through which they try to relocate them into their indigenous culture and tradition. As an Indian poets living in England and writing in English, both the poets felt strongly alienated from the English language and at the same time from their own cultural moorings. The ideological domination of the Althusserian “educational ISA” is so compelling in both the poets that ultimately brought both the poets away from their cultural mooring and ancestral tradition (147). While Jussawalla always emphasizes his marginality “to being part of Indian middle classes”, Parthasarathy always emphasizes his rootedness by reclaiming his strong attachment with root and culture (King, *Modern Indian Poetry* 231). For example, in “Exile-2” of *Rough Passage* he claims: “There is something to be said for
exile / you learn roots are deep. / That language is a tree, loses colour / under another
sky” (9-12). Parthasarathy believes that any sort of discourse of domination paves the
way for creating a counter discourse towards that domination. For him, it is the root
that determines the identity of an exiled individual; an exiled person needs the
discourse of root to relocate him with his indigenous culture and community. In the
course of that dissention, the poet was in ‘trial’ and which, in turn, alienated him from
his past and communal bond. In “Trial-9”, he remarks: “I have put aside the past / in a
corner, an umbrella / now poor in the ribs” (7-9). Hence the poet returns to his
indigenous culture to be incorporated with root and identity. As he proclaims in
“Homecoming-4”:

I made myself an expert

in farewells.

..........................

I am my father now. (1-2, 10)

In this ‘homecoming’ section, the poet conspicuously uses the tool namely the poetics
of return with extensive use of memory to be allied with past experiences and cultural
heritage, where the poet can able to find his sense of identity. Within the ambit of
such perpetual regression, his poems are converted into a medium “to express Tamil
rather than Indian nationalism” (King, Modern Indian Poetry 234). Such sense of
alienation too marks as an important feature of Jussawalla’s poetry also, however, the
sense of “the emotional need to be a part of community” is more poignant in him than
Parthasarathy (ibid, 244). Being alienated from the English language and the English society, he thinks himself a castaway, a person lost in the labyrinth of desires. In the section 7 of “Missing Person”, he remarks that “Exile’s a broken axle. / Goes back (to where / whose travels cannot home?) / goes back to where / a mirror shakes in recognition” (7-11). Manifesting that same sense of exile and alienation, he remarks in “Halt X”:

I do not know what station this is, or why

We broke our journey… (1-2)

He conceives his sense of uprooting as consequences of colonial legacy and influence of English Literature which together have rendered strong ideological dominance over the poet. So he becomes extremely hostile to the English language and literature in “Missing Person, Part-II-1”:

To see an invisible man

or a missing person,

trust no Eng. Lit. That

puffs him up, narrows his eyes . . . (5-8)
In this poem, the poet explicitly indicates that the sense of a ‘missing person’ is catastrophically arising within him through perpetual dominance of English literature and language. All the poems of this particular section are his epistemic realizations of all sorts of fragmentations going on in the modern society at large as products of internal hybridization emerged through the internal commerce between alien and indigenous. Being a Parsi poets living abroad, he is not cut off from the country only, but also from his community. It is this condition that ultimately paves the way for psychological alienation from his root and ancestors; as the poet says in “Connection”:

My father asks for mercy on the phone.

His voice is thin. I ask

who is it speaking? (1-3)

The question of root seems always significant to all the Parsi minority poets writing in English. But when that root recalls the memory of minority, it is needed to be pulled out for engaging with identity politics. Gieve Patel (1940– ) in “On Killing a Tree”, emphatically asserts that the root of primordial identity is needed to be pulled out, as it brings into fore the notion of otherness or minority:

No,

The root is to be pulled out-
Out of the anchoring earth,

It is to be roped, tied,

And pulled out…

…………………………

out from the earth cave. (19-23, 25)

The poet believes that if roots are not pulled out from the earth completely, they can create new lives in future. Through the metaphor of root, the poet seeks to bring the notion of memory and past experience in creating the sense of primordial identity in present context. Like a diasporic poet, according to Sarang, he lives within India in “between two worlds” (Sarang 23). Although Sarang recognizes these two worlds as the world of pan-Indianism and minority respectively, the hybridity of postcolonial existence is missing from his recognition. A poet belonging to minority is actually caught in between three different worlds or identities- one is the hybrid world created by the British colonialism, other one is the pan-Indian world of Indian nationalism and the last one is the world of minority. What seems remedial in such contexts is the poetics of return through extensive use of memory and nostalgia. In the poem “Nariyal Purnima”, the poet explicitly mentions about the perpetual gaze of the Parsi identity within the ambit of national identity.

However, in contrast to the other two Parsi poets, Daruwalla’s poems are found to be somehow different in terms of themes and revelation of identity. His
poems are of course subtle revelations of his personal experiences, not merely the recording of the predicament of a minority poet. Poetry for him is basically the revelation of his personal predicament as a modern individual. He remarks that “poetry first is personal”, but at the same time it consists “a social gesture . . . external reality” (Daruwalla 21). In almost all the poems, his social awareness and delicate portrayals of the realistic picture of Indian societies are far more explicit than his minority sentiment. In some selected poems, he speaks about communal and cultural barriers in creating identity and belonging, but in an indirect way. For him, all cities and towns, though they are full with riots and other violence, are seen same at night in the poem “Viginette III”. What is strategic about the poet’s realization of the cities and towns is that all the cities are found similar at night only, where the questions of community, religion or minority are not considered as determining factors of human behaviour, attitudes or sense of identity. The social reality that the poet has to face everywhere is far harsher than imagination. In the poem “Rumination”, the poet experiences ‘violence’ everywhere:

I can smell violence in the air

like the lash of coming air. (1-2)

In a city like that where violence reigns and fragmentation hovers every step in succession, the poet’s efforts to have a definite sense of self and belonging are thoroughly problamatised:
I look around for cleansed feeling,
the kind you experience
walking in temple
after a river bath
I cannot find it
I have misplaced it somewhere
in the caverns of my past. (41-47)

His predicament becomes more vibrant when he finds his ‘mistress’ as a “half-caste”—“perched / on the genealogical tree somewhere / is a Muslim midwife and a Goan cook” (“The Mistress” 2-4). As a poet of consciousness, Daruwalla considers these thoughts always apparent in all human eyes. In the poem “The Unrest of Desire”, he explicitly remarks that the inward and outward movements of thoughts cannot be overpowered by the ‘mask’ we wear.

The sense of uprooting is also very poignant in other Muslim diasporic poets like Agha Shahid Ali also. But, as Bruce King remarks, such diasporic writers go against the nationalistic poets and prose writers corresponding to their idealization of the past and thereby find ways to “transcend uprootedness and turn lamentation into more encompassing vision” (King, Modern Indian Poetry 257). Within the ambit of their poetry, there is always an imbalanced mixture of “proleptic” and “analeptic”
visions and narrative strategy resulting in mere hybridity of vision and identity (Nayar 188). It is locus of hybrid existence that at once paves the way for shared identity and longing for community. And when he speaks about his community in the poem “The Dacca Gauzes”, king’s idea about his “encompassing vision” is revealed clearly:

... my grandmother just says

how the muslims of today

seem so coarse ... (25-27)

Almost all the poems of Ali are marked with such nostalgia, as poetics of return in which memory plays a crucial role in negotiating with the present living context and past experiences. His frequently anthologized poems like “Snowman”, “Cracked Portrait” and “The Seasons of the Plains” are based on nostalgic yearning of his ancestors and the course of historical dissention. Although, in such a tri-cultural atmosphere he is not missing like Jussawalla, rather things become more valuable and clear to him in absence. Hence, memorizing his hometown in the poem “Postcard from Kashmir”, he speaks:

This is home. And this the closet

I’ll ever be at home. When I return,

The colours won’t be so brilliant. (5-7)
As a displaced individual in diasporic location, memory seems more vibrant and colourful than what is real to him. Almost all of his autobiographical poems are found to be the exploration of that narrative strategy revitalizing the memory of his ancestors, family, along with the condition of his exile. In “Snowman”, he brings the “skeleton” (7) of his grandparents under his skin and that “passed / from son to grandson” (15-16). In “Cracked Portraits”, he finds the spirit of his ancestors in his reading of the Koran. And elsewhere, in “A Dream of Glass Bangles”, he mentions how the image of his parents is intimately connected with his house.

Such “analeptic” vision and narrative strategy are common features in writings of all the diasporic poets of Indian Writing in English (Nayar 189). Instead of idealizing the past or national history, they rather like to revitalize personal or family history as means of relocating the sense of dislocation into the primordial culture and tradition. For King that sense of dissention in the course of history “might be more useful than ‘post colonialism’ with its emphasis on a fractured, resistant, national or cultural identity” (Modern Indian Poetry 258). However, such diasporic narratives are not only marked with the “proleptic” narrative visions as discussed by P.K. Nayar; the explicit negotiation with the present context of living and the need for assimilation brings the “proleptic” vision and narrative strategy into their artifact of imagination (189). The apparent tension between both the visions and narrative strategies always remains as a conspicuous element in their poems. It is this inherent tension between diasporic “positioning” and personal positionalities, diasporic identification and individual identity that pave the way for novel and multiple identities in case of diasporic poets (Hall 237, Sachez 39). The main target of present research i.e. A.K.
Ramanujan is such a diasporic poet for whom identity is not a fixed essence or a product; rather it is the consequence of the influence of all the substantial things of living context and a process manifesting the consciousness of the individual. The research made upon the poet evidently shows to us how identity politics for a diasporic poet is itself a never ending process of negotiation and strategic manipulation of thought and vision vis-à-vis the need of the context, surrounding and personal predicament of displacement.

However, in many of his poems such “cubist view of the self as fractured and belonging to different eras” is curtained by his memory of his home and family (King, *Three Indian Poets* 81). In such an attitude, the family or the ancestors are only feasible sources that can provide the sense of identity and at the same time are parallel to India. Human identity though may be changed depending on the context of living and the surrounding, the essence that originally belongs to the home or family remains same always. This essence is primarily found inherent in memory from which notions of identity are emerged in new forms and nature in future. It is memory, which is always transformative by nature and capable of creating new meanings and sense of identities corresponding to the context of living and surrounding. However, such an idealistic view of human identity was not continued till to his last poems. There is rather a paradigm shift of his perspectives and visions towards the middle period of his poetic career where the poet only speaks about uncertainty and changeable nature of individual identity. The poet goes on manifesting the unpredictable nature of diasporic identity and also shows how various “technologies of domination” are always in a perpetual tension with “technologies of the self” in Foucauldian term for
the sake of personal pleasure and art of existence (Foucault, “Technologies of the” 19). Till to the end of his poetic career, Ramanujan bluntly shows us how identity politics is itself converted into a multifaceted term and strategic manipulation of one’s social “positionality” corresponding the individual’s consciousness of the self, need of the context and the sense of belonging (Sachez 38). Hence, in almost all the diasporic poets, the perpetual tension between the “proleptic” and “analeptic” vision and narrative strategies always end in a hybrid and productive outcome (Nayar 188).

Vikram Seth reveals his anxiety of loneliness and the sentiment of having been uprooted in the poem “Homeless” in this way:

I envy those

Who have a house of their own

Who can say that their feet

rest on what is theirs alone.

Who do not live on sufferance

in strangers’ shells. (1-6)

The poet explicitly reveals how one’s sense of intimacy with the context of living brings the sense of fulfillment in terms of identity and existence. Memory for the poets remains as a single tool through which they can feel attachment with their
homeland. In case of Vikram Seth, the “analeptic” vision is always domimative than his forward looking vision for novel and multiple identities (ibid). Regarding the importance of such poetics and return, Sharat Chandra remarks in the poem “Self-Portrait”:

There are scars instead
of lines on my palm
I have no biography
only remembrance . . . (1-4)

His spatial belonging to the USA fails to instill in him the sense of emotional belonging. Our critics of diaspora deal with all these issues but specifically with the psychological aspect of the so called “third space” that itself resides in the mind of the writers (Bhabha, “The Third Space” 211). For them, it is a space that belongs neither to the present nor to the past and the poets writing from that in-between space are oscillating in search of belonging and the true essence of self. Unlike Parthasarathy and Jussawalla, these poets strongly felt the sense of exile but could not able to obtain the tool of regression as means of identity formation and belonging. The clash between memory and shared identity and afterward, the strategic idealization of that clash seem to be the characteristic features of the identity politics of all the diasporic poets of the post-independence Indian English poetry. In this ideological clash, many of them lost the sense of a definite inner self and find it as fractured and multiple like Ramanujan. But the agony of exile and the urge to retrieve what is being lost are
always evident in the pessimistic outlook towards life and experience of these poets. They speak about their family or ancestors but at the same time feel an unbridgeable gulf between the present and the past of their existence. It is this gulf which constitutes Bhabha’s notion of “third space” and which remains thoroughly productive as well as apprehensive at the same time (ibid).

Although this gulf is strongly felt by the poets living in India also; however, what marks the difference is the psychological dominance that they share is not so coarse like that of the diasporas. It is the reason why in Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetry, the poetic persona is always revealed as a distanced individual emphasizing the importance of subjective memory and the inner essence of the self. His has an inner self which is not only alienated from ancestral tradition or culture but also from the external reality manifesting ideological dominance of colonial legacy and hybridity. Sometimes his sense of alienation extends that extreme point where the poet seems too alienated from his own self; he says in the poem “The Moon Moment”

How can I stop the life I lead within myself-

The startled, pleading question in my hands lying in my lap … (18-19)

His inherited Christianity and distance from the indigenous Orissa traditions introduce the sense of failure along with his inability to embark upon the vital questions of life in the poem “Waiting”: 
what I suddenly realized I was really waiting for:

the life that my life seeks, when I go in

to answer it; but it had gone the other way

to where I couldn’t meet it at all … (29-32)

Thus, there is a split between the practical life that he deals with and the sense of self signaling the hiatus between his anticipations and ultimate gains throughout the course of dissention. What he gains actually nothing but the sense of isolation. The sense of growing fragmentation as evident in social reality of his surrounding itself brings the sense of dissolution into the self of the poet. That sense of downright alienation is best reflected through the striking sentence in the poem “A Kind of Happiness”: “What would tell me at last where I belong?” (26). His sense of alienation, as it is indicated earlier, has reached that extreme point from where he cannot able to defend his sense of dissention. Though Bruce King finds a strong affinity between Mahapatra and Dilip Chitre regarding their concern with the self as a cage for its potential, still Chitre is not too pessimistic regarding his own place among the scheme of things like Mahapatra. Being a Marathi bilingual poet, Chitre too knows that he is hybridized like others, but that hybridization needs adjustment rather than hopeless ailment like Mahapatra. So he utters in the poem “Traveling in a Cage 5”:

. . . in the yellow darkness of the bar
I inhaled another country’s noise and perishable warmth

.................................................................

And tried to guess the bitter taste of grin and tonic … (9-10, 13)

He ends the particular lyric of the sequence with overt assertion of his fear for the outside world- the door which he hesitates to open. It is the symbolical reference to the door outside his self which paves the way for the external world. So signaling his atavistic regression, he tries to return back to the world of his family in the poem “The View From Chinchpokli” - to which he actually belongs:

There I will shape India’s
destiny

Using my immaculate gift. I will ride in a taxi.

.................................................................

I shall smoothly go past

.................................................................

It will be an absent-minded observation. (23-25, 32, 49)

Manifesting strong tendency towards regression, most of the poems of Chitre always seek to revitalize past experiences and memories in search of belonging into his
parental tradition. In case of Chitre, hence all sorts of ideologies of dominance have opened up scopes for resistance towards that dominance itself. However, the other Marathi bilingual poet Arun Kolatkar is an exception among the Indian English poets. His main concern is not the self or the sense of belongingness, but reality. In all his major volumes of poetry he mainly studies the philosophical nature of reality and its relation to human beings. In his award winning poetry collection namely *Jejuri* (1976), he deals with the problem of complex relationship between human existence and reality. In his sophisticated analysis of Indian English poetry, Amga compares the collection with T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1920) corresponding to his representation of Jejuri as “a passive witness to all the drama of human depravity” (145). Like Dom Moraes, his poetry also bears strong influence of modern English Poets including Eliot, Pound, Carlos Williams, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and so on relating to his concern with the apparent strain of meaninglessness and hopelessness that thoroughly persist in all the dramas of human existence. The affinity between both the poets is that both are autobiographical, but their main concern is the gross pessimism relating to individuals’ relation to the external world. But Moraes is more conscious about his growing alienation and loneliness in the course of dissention as a poet. In his first volume of poetry, he asserts his failure to achieve the desired promised land. He believes that complex societies always create their own complexities and forms of alienation. He has been an outsider right from the beginning of his poetic career whereas only at home in language and in poetic art. Hence loneliness intoxicated him as he contemplated over his present situation and the sense of belonging. He utters in the poem “Autobiography”: 
I have grown up, I think, to live alone

To keep my old illusions, sometimes dream,

Glumly, hat I am unloved and forlorn … (25-27)

In such ‘forlorn’ moment the meaning of love seems meaningless to him as if it has lost the prevailing innocence that the poet often discovered in it. As a result of growing estrangement, life was itself sunk into utter glumness and self-pity. He always endeavored to create a space within himself- a private space of imagination, legend, romance pastoral or fairytale through which the poet can able to create new meanings of experiences and identity as well. For both these two poets- Kolatkar and Moraes, the art of poetry itself plays a dichotomous role- a tool to assert poetic talent as well as to engage with identity politics with various “technologies of the self” and active resistance (Foucault, “Technologies of the” 19).

Such critical awareness for identity creation and assertion is also clearly evident in poems written by the woman poets of the post-independence period. But what makes them different from the male poets is that whereas almost all the male poets have preferred a fairyland created out of memory and nostalgia so as to create the sense of belonging and identity, the female poets basically prefer the real world to face the problems of identity. Most of the female poets writing during the period strategically tried to telescope individual identity and the changing position of women in various Indian societies at large. What makes both the arenas of fair voices of the
post-independence period politically identical is that almost all the poetesses have strategically dealt with socio-cultural resistance towards patriarchy as the chief domain of identity politics in both the individual and larger social levels. However, unlike the poetesses of the pre-independence period, they marked a departure from the fairy imaginary world of myth and legends as manifested by Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu and in turn, sought to cope with day-to-day problems and personal experiences in a patriarchal society. Most of them express identity and “positionality” in terms of counter discourse both towards the patriarchal as well as to the colonial cultural and ideological dominations (Sachez 38). Kamala Das’ “An Introduction”, from this perspective, is a beautiful combination of the both. As she utters:

I am an Indian, very brown, born in

Malabar, I speak three languages, write in

Two, dream in one. (4-6)

Here she asserts her feminine sensibility as an Indian and as a representative fair voice of the period. When she tends to speak any language with a view to make that intimate to her, she provides a counter discourse not only to the so called discourse of suspicion but also to Freudian view of language as phallocentric. So she speaks in “An Introduction”:

Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak

Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness

All mine, mine alone. (10-13)

Even in many of her poems, she writes “about the warmth of her childhood and the family home in Kerala” stimulating the confessional elements in her poetry (King Modern Indian Poetry 148). Like most of the male poets, she too conceives life as an isolated cage of personal memories and desires where self identification is itself a messy process. In the poem “My Grandmother’s House” she goes far away from the home, where she enjoyed her childhood; it lives only in her memory:

There is a house now far away where once

Received love. That woman died,

The house withdraws into silence … (1-3)

She always marks an affinity with other South Indian poets like Ramanujan, Parthasarathy or Meena Alexander- who are displaced from their own locations and thereby fell strong sense of alienation even within the country and abroad. But what seems really interesting in her is that, they, unlike the male poets, do not show any enveavour to re-root themselves into the primordial tradition or family which is patriarchal by nature and structure. Instead of such belligerence, they divulge an open
urge to generate an intrinsic private space with the hope of exercising and revealing emotional ecstasy and internal aspirations respectively. As Das reveals this space in “An Introduction”:

It is I who laugh, it is I who make love

I am sinner,

I am saint…

I too call myself I. (54, 56-57, 59)

Such assertion of subjectivity not only makes them different from the pre-independent poetesses, but also from the male poets of all the ages. But Das’ depiction of India, in terms of the Radha-Krishna lore is not different from the traditional one. In it she shows the continuity of tradition in Indian English Poetry. Das’ reconciliation of myth and reality is an effort to highlight the difference between man-woman relationships in our present time on the one hand and also create a space in terms of Radha’s dignity in the mythic time on the other. Such manifestations of a private space are evident in Mamta Kalia’s poetry also; but in her poems like “Tribute to Papa”, her disgust to the patriarchal construction of society seems more prominent than her depiction of India:
You want me to be like you, papa,

Or like Rani Lakshmibai.

You're not sure what greatness is,

But you want me to be great. (17-20)

Such an attitude towards the patriarchal structure and values of society is also a characteristic feature of Gauri Despande’s poetry also. For example, in her “The Female of the Species”, she draws a line of demarcation between male and female psychology. In both these two poetesses, their strategic assertion of female psychology and the effort to constitute a private space achieve a better dimension than their urge to belong somewhere.

The sense of belongingness is somehow missing in the poems of the woman poets for they conceive the tradition or culture as entirely patriarchal or male oriented. In comparison to the family or tradition, the mother figure appears more frequently in their poems. Eunice De Souza ‘hacks’ her mother in her dreams, as the mother figure itself symbolizes patriarchal domination and exploitation. In the poem “Forgive me, Mother”, she utters:

Forgive me, mother,

That I left you
Now I’m old alone

In dreams

I hack you. (1-2, 10-12)

Their sympathy with the mother figure and hatred for the father figure are clear indication of their “consciousness of the situation and problems faced by women” (Ibid, 158). Even it is not feminine in the real sense of the term; it arouses a kind of self pity, rather than a dismantling attitude and counter discourse. As she utters in “de Souza Prabhu”: “. . . my parents wanted a boy. / I’ve done my best to qualify. (16-17).

Being a Portuguese descent, she is always aware of her marginality also. But what makes her sense of belongingness different from others is that her own culture and tradition constitute her marginality like the Parsi and Jew poets discussed so far. Hence she finds other ways of belonging in the poem “de Souza Prabhu”:

No matter that

My name is Greek

My surname Portuguese

My language alien.

There are other ways
of belonging.

I belong with the lame ducks. (8-14)

Meena Alexander too deals with similar issues; in her poems, “Memories, desires and fiction merge as she examines the construction of her identity and its relation to family history” (Ibid 310). Being a diasporic woman poet living in the United States, she often delves into her memorises in poems like “House of Thousand Doors” the locale colour and scenes of Kerala, where she lived her childhood:

This house has a thousand doors
the sills are cut in bronze
three feet high

…………………………

that shimmer in the bald reeds
at twilight
as the sun burns down to the Kerala cost. (1-3, 6-8)

Same kind of memorizing attitude is conspicuous in Monika Varma’s poetry also; but she has a vision which is typically romantic and centered on her lost love and passionate ecstasy. Like the other poets of the lore, she too considers that memory
itself paves the way for constituting identity for a displaced person. In the poem “It is the Forgotten”, the poetess explicitly reveals the importance of memory in constituting identity and the sense of the self. She searches her sense of identity in a patriarchal society where her existence is meticulously threatened by her own marginality. Hence in many times, a sense of withdrawal from the sociological perspective to the metaphysical one often marks the major concern for the poetess. The poems like “To Other Lands”, “The Problem”, and “In the Loud World” are some fine examples of that sense of withdrawal in Varma’s poetry. However, ambiguity towards the cultural root or tradition is still explicit in Varma’s poetry. As all the woman poetesses conceive an ambiguous attitude towards cultural root and tradition that it deals with one’s socio-cultural identity and at the same time the patriarchal marginalization, they always maintain a distance from it and treat it ironically in turn. What makes them aware of the self is not their social existence or the experience of reality but the very perspective or the ways of seeing towards the society.

The new women poetesses like Menka Shivdasani in her poetry collection *Nirvana at Ten Rupees* (1990) clearly reveal that the social convention, myth, and culture are the enemies of the repressed self of a woman. Even the poems of more recent women poetess like Tara Patel, Imtiaz Dharker, Chitra Banerjee, or Sujata Bhatt express same kinds of anguish towards culture and tradition, specifically towards the patriarchal structure of society. Within the ambit of such patriarchal domination and repression, they often tend towards constructing a separate world of imagination where they can able to attain desired freedom and emotional fulfillment. However, the most surprising thing about these poetesses is that all of them are
diasporas. Among them Imtiaz Dharker seems to be controversial and different from other poetess vis-à-vis her conspicuous attempt to revitalize notions of home and space in her poetry. But in a patriarchal society, home does not constitute a sense of desired identity for a female poet; rather it imposes the sense of domination and bondage. In the poem “Battle-line”, she explicitly remarks:

    Having come home

                        .....................

    spaces become too small

    Doors and windows begin

    to hold your breath

                        .....................

    leaving home

    you call yourself free. (68, 71-73, 80-81)

Throughout the poem, she raises many questions regarding the disparity between dignity and liberty that a woman deserves and receives in a society respectively. It is this disparity which constitutes the so called battle-line between sexes. Even she has written some poems considering marriage as a deadly bondage for a woman. The poem “Another Woman” deals with the harsh reality of a woman’s life who is forcefully “sent to, / the man she had been bound to, / the future she had been born
into” (36-38). In “Purdah-I”, she boldly speaks against domination of custom in a Muslim society. The poems of Imtiaz Dharker, hence decisively reveals the anguish of a female poet living in a patriarchal society where constituting identity is not a matter of reciprocity between the subjective and ascriptive, but a matter of domination and subjugation.

Thus, a survey of the male and female poets of Indian English poetry reveals the fact that identity politics itself is a conspicuous element in the entire history of the genre. In other words, the genre itself emerges by foregrounding identity politics as the basic endeavour and a tool for authentication for the poets writing in an alien language. This strategic assertion of identity is articulated in the entire body of poetry in terms of the revitalization of myth or legends, expression of strong attachment to the community sentiment or religio-cultural elements, memorizing intimate bondage with the ancestors or family roots and so on. But in case of the female poetesses, these means of articulation of identity have shifted into a cozy imaginative world, where all these means are being treated ironically. Such means which have governed identity politics of all the male poets are themselves converted into some detached patriarchal means of subordination of the fair sex in that imaginative space. On the other hand, identity politics of the pre and post 1947 poets are also differed from one another in terms of their dealing with subject matter, resistance towards colonial ideology or discourse and other epistemological issues. The pre-independent poets were more confined within a limited world of myth, legend and of some metaphysical or mystical issues. What is fundamentally lacking in those poets vis-à-vis the post-independent poets is their response towards the “hegemony” of colonial discourse and dominations.
(Gramsci 137). Their thematic Indianness did not reveal any sense of their personal identity, instead a kind of pan-Indian identity manifesting the homogenizing tendency and generalization. The post-independent poets, in contrast, are more personal, confessional, and conscious about their livelihood. But what makes the similarity in both the strategic dimensions is their consciousness about identity. All they handle their themes as a scratchy reply to the discourse of suspicion which always sees Indian English poetry as thematically isolated and alienated from the cultural domain. It is a scrupulous attempt to recover oneself from the shared and marginalized identity that one has to handle by internalizing the colonial legacy or diasporic identity.

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A.K. Ramanujan’s Thoughts on Identity and Identity Politics

The question of identity is one of the important issues for a diasporic poet like A.K. Ramanujan. Throughout his career, as a poet, he is always found to be addressing this particular issue along with other vital themes of poetic creation both as an alienated searcher of identity and a dislodged celebrator of own displacement. Right from the beginning of his poetic career to his last poetic creation, the poet has been dealing with the issues of identity and self in both the tacit and explicit ways. In almost all the poems written during his long sojourn, the poet employs the strategic parts of identity politics as a discourse of political and epistemic engagement in order to question the problematic of identity formation in alienation from the ancestral home and culture along with the psychological domination of diasporic existence. In it, as it is discussed in the introduction to identity politics, the poet actively plays a troublesome role in dealing with the trajectories between “positioning” (Hall 237, Sachez 39) to “positionality” (Sachez 38), identification to identity along with cultural intimacy to “diasporic intimacy” and root to route (Boym 251). His perception of such dichotomies arising out of his dealing with varied dialectics like home and homelessness, root and rootlessness is so stimulating that eventually brings the so-called double perception and split consciousness of diasporic existence. Even when one of his colleagues, namely Milton B. Singer, once asked him about the similarity between the Western and Indian conception of self, Ramanujan firmly replied that he had found a striking parallel between the Gīta and Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself”
in their conception of “a double self” as actor and object (Singer xiii). His double perception resulting out of his concept of “a double self”, as one of the dominating themes of his poetry, is also a conspicuous element of all his non-fictional writings concerning literature and culture, where the poet affirms his thoughts on identity and its multifaceted political dimensions (ibid). As a consequence of this double perception, the poet often seems lamenting over his isolation from ancestral home and family on the one hand and in some moments goes for celebrating the so called plurality of identity on the other. Such concept of double self makes him aware of what he has lost as a diasporic writer and also gives him the awareness of what he has gained or can be articulated in imagination in isolation as well.

However, it cannot be said that the multiplicity of perception and the concept of more than one self were the direct outcome of his long exile; rather, it has been an obvious element of his childhood. He was brought up in an atmosphere where multilingualism has operated as a significant factor of social relationship. In his childhood he was raised in a tri-lingual environment. When he spoke to his father on the second-floor study of the family’s three story house in Mysore city, he used English. Downstairs, with his mother in the Kitchen, Tamil was spoken. And on the streets outside, he communicated in Kannada. Such multi-lingual atmosphere brought to him new thoughts and perceptions and opened up new ways of thinking about self or identity. In it, all three languages are connected with one another through reflexivity or through the self. Though the languages are different, in this case the user always remains the same; in other words, the subject stimulates the relationships among the objects i.e. the languages, through reflexivity. It is the same kind of reflexivity which
was discussed earlier in the introductory chapter on identity politics. On the other hand, the subject, from the perspective outside the self, becomes an object itself and mingles with other objects, i.e., languages. Indirectly, it manifests the fact that the essential self remains as the director of multi-linguism, or itself is converted into other possible selves and thereby, opens up numerous possibilities to experience multiplicity of possible selves available for the director self. From Bhabha’s perspective of liminality, Ramanujan constantly has to encounter right from his childhood with various kinds of thresholds by maintaining his experience of multiple selves and cultures. Ramanujan was psychologically involved with tri-lingualism so as to experience contingencies of identity politics and border existence. Those locations or experiences can be seen from Homi Bhabha’s perspective as “signifying practices rather than actual in-between spaces” that construct the notion of discrete identity (Thieme 144). From Foucauldian perspective, in such thresholds, the poet has to be engaged with the “technologies of the self” to transform him into an active agent (Foucault, “Technologies of the” 19).

Following such notions, Ramanujan in his essay “Where Mirrors are Windows: Towards an Anthology of Reflection” asserts the view of plural Indian tradition. In his reading on Indian traditions, Ramanujan minutely plays the role of a genealogist from Foucault’s perspective to emphasise the singularity of Indian traditions and the separate roles of each single tradition. It is “singular at the top and plural at the bottom . . . . Indian traditions are organized as a pan-Indian Sanskritic Great Tradition . . . and ‘many local Little Traditions (in the plural)” (Ramanujan “Where Mirrors are” 7, emph. original). From genealogical perspective, these little
traditions are the complex courses of descent, where the great Indian Sanskritic tradition was the foundation. He puts forward a holographic perspective towards the Indian traditions that every little tradition is the true representation of the essential Indianness or Indian tradition. For him, in a country like India, multi-culturalism itself is the right way to maintain the essential Indian identity. Though in his reading of the plurality of traditions and culture, Ramanujan negates the deteriorating conditions of the little Indian traditions resulting out of colonial assimilation, still he admits the conflicting nature of these traditions. The conflicting nature of these little traditions is organized through context sensitivity and reflexivity. For him, what we call Brahmanism, Bhakti traditions, Buddhism, Jainism, tantra, tribal traditions, folklore, and modernity itself are the prominent forms of this system. For the poet, all these local traditions always give “responses to previous and surrounding traditions, they invert, subvert, and convert their neighbours” (Ibid, 8). As a perfect genealogist, Ramanujan reads these dissensions as the consequences of the historical development of the great Indian tradition. In due course these belief systems have lost their essentialised identity and have opted new identities as historical outcome. However, in reading these systems, Ramanujan has not espoused any sort of skeptical attitude like the postmodernist; rather, he reveals him as a realist corresponding to his emphasis both on the epistemic and variable and nonessential aspects of these traditions. In this process, each local tradition generates behavioural responses to the parental tradition even in alienation and dislocation also. On the other hand, reflexivity deals with the interconnectedness between cultures through family resemblances, self-awareness, mirroring, distorted mirroring, and parody and so on as said by the poet. In the essay namely “Where Mirrors are Windows: Towards an Anthology of Reflection”, he gives three related kinds of reflexivity- (a) “responsive,
where text A responds to text B in ways that define both A and B; (b) reflexive, where text A reflects on text B, relates itself to it directly or inversely; (c) self-reflexive, where a text reflects on itself or its kind” (8). In this case text (a) is called “co-text”, (b) is called “counter-text” and (c) is said “meta-text” (ibid).

The vast majority of Indian literature, oral and written, over the centuries, in hundreds of languages and dialects, offers an intricate but open network of such relations. Through reflexivity, any text, poem, or even genre responds to other respectively just as an individual is related with him/her with the community; hence any writing cannot be said as alien vis-à-vis other writings, even if that is written in an alien language. For him even civilization has to be described in terms of these dynamic inter-relations in-between different traditions, texts, ideologies, social arrangements and so forth. Throughout the said essay, Ramanujan applies Bakhtinian perspective towards tradition and civilization to facilitate the fact that realities of civilizations are essentially in dialogic relationship with one another. He believes that contradiction, inversions, multiple views are always affecting one another and all these are some ways through which traditions, in turn, relate with one another. Like Foucault, he too discards any inherent teleology in the course of development of civilization. In his reading of little Indian traditions and civilization, he also negates the metaphysical perspectives so as to facilitate the material basis of those traditions and textual productions. As for Ramanujan, “Without the other, there is no language for the self” (Ibid, 26). From the postcolonial perspective, in the binary of self/other or subject/object, the other is always instrumental in constructing the identity of the self. It arises out of the structuralists’ notion of difference, where in any kind of
binary, the identity of one can be derived with the help of the other. The concept of such difference is clearly evident in his notion of the self as “a subject” as well as “an object” (Singer xiii).

The material basis of things is more clearly evident in his seminal essay “Is there an Indian way of thinking?” If all the traditions are connected with one another through reflexivity and the self always tends to derive its identity through reflexivity and through other means, then undeniably the question that arises amid these thoughts is that “is there an Indian way of thinking?” after all! In the essay, Ramanujan replies to this question affirmatively that through the process of “context-sensitive” as opposed to “context-free”, one can able to experience the essential Indianness of his/her character (“Is There an” 47). But the ultimate impediment to this kind of thinking is the multi-culturalism of the country, which is the root of its social structure and cultural milieus. No unitary perspective can operate in the internal and external structure of Indian societies due to the excess of multi-culturalism and secularism.

Ramanujan firmly believes the fact that such inconsistencies are not the result of inadequacy of education or lack of logic. Against the excessive multiculturalism and secularist approaches towards various socio-political and other issues, particularism also plays a significant role in Indian societies. He says, “Each class (jati) of man has its own laws, its own proper ethics, not to be universalized” (Ibid, 40, emphasis original). For he believes that universalisation means “putting someone in another’s place” (Ibid, 39). But as the poet believes Indian do not put them in another’s place; rather they bring their rules, ethics and laws with themselves. It is this
particularism which facilitates the “positionality” of individuals even in alien locations (Sachez 38). As the psychologist Alen Rolland in his book In Search of the Self in India and Japan: Towards a Cross-Cultural Psychology (1979), remarks that Indians carry their family context wherever they go, feel continuous with their family. This propensity towards particularism reveals the fact that being a diaspora, a poet or a writer can never be completely alienated from his/her own tradition and roots. Even in a colonized country, despite the continuous cultural exchanges, a man is not completely freed from dominant cultural laws and ancestral history where he/she actually belongs. The collective consciousness, which seems always important for identity politics to resist the shared or marginalized identity, remains always already with the Indians. Hence, Ramanujan believes that cultures have overall “tendencies to idealise” (ibid 40, emphasis original) and think in terms of either “the context-free” or “the context-sensitive” kinds of rules (ibid 47). In a country like India, “context-sensitivity” (ibid 48) is always the “preferred formulation” (ibid 41). Cultural laws are crucial factors of guiding human behaviour and manner and of constituting identity. “Context-sensitivity” gives rise to more intricate sets of standards by which appropriateness depends on various factors, especially factors of identity and personhood, such as birth, occupation, life stage, karma, dharma, etc (ibid 48).

Ramanujan stresses that this difference in philosophical outcome is not an indication of irrationality, but a different kind of rationale. “No Indian text comes without a context, a frame, till the nineteenth century”, as he remarks (Ibid 41). Even epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata often speak of “context-sensitivity” (ibid 48). On the other hand, space and time are in India not uniform and neutral, but have properties, varying specific densities, that affect those who dwell in them. The soil in a village, which produces crops for the people, affects their character.
In his postulation of “context sensitive” and “context free”, what seems really fascinating is that, if non-material things like space and time can affect other things quite internally, then his diasporic space definitely might have affected his character (ibid 47). It is the reason why in his last poems, Ramanujan marked a departure from his earlier sociological concept of explicit self to the metaphysical concept of non-self. Corresponding to the substantiality of things, Ramanujan reveals the contrary notion of the dominant discourse that “Indians are ‘spiritual’”; rather, they are “really material minded” (ibid 46). As the poet remarks empathically about the Indians: “They are materialists, believers in substance: there is continuity, a constant flow . . . of substance from context to object, from non-self to self . . .” (ibid). For Ramanujan, we Indians can easily adopt any culture, social customs without negating our context of belonging; we are the masters of appropriation. However, apart from these “context-sensitive” behaviors and rules, universalism also operates as the unifying force in the kernel of every society (ibid). The governing ideals may not be “context-sensitive”, but “context-free” (ibid). This universalism espouses the fact that each member is equal and at the same time like any other human being. According to Ramanujan technological development and “the post-Renaissance sciences” (ibid 48) intensified this urge for “context-free” (ibid 47). To give the example of ‘context-free’ universal Indian ideology, Ramanujan glorifies the Indian concept of life in Indian society. In India, human life is divided into four different stages like – “brahmacarya (celibate studentship)”, “grahastasrama (the householder stage)”, “vanaprastha (the retiring forest-dweller stage), and “sannasya (renunciation)” (ibid, emphasis original). In every stage, the dominant context changes uniquely and at last, in “sannasya”, the context ends in a free state (ibid). For Ramanujan, hence, modernism is a progressive movement from the “context-sensitive” to the “context-free” in all realms of life (ibid
It is an erosion of context. From this perspective, the postcolonial appropriation is also an example of this tendency, where the Western literary or cultural milieus are appropriated in order to suit the needs of a colonized. As he says, “. . . Indian borrowings of Western cultural items have been converted and realigned to fit pre-existing context-sensitive needs. When English is borrowed into (or imposed on) Indian contexts, it fits to the Sanskrit slot . . .” (Ibid 50, emphasis original). In his defense of cultural assimilation and appropriation, Ramanujan firmly believes that the etymological significance of things or ideas are often changed and arrived at new ontological epiphenic meanings in the process of dissention of that respective thing or idea.

Both the essays clearly reveal the fact that, despite those liberal movements and “context-free” (ibid 47) urges of modernism, there always lie definite biases for “context-sensitivity” (ibid 48). When an Indian borrows elements from the West, it is not a blind adherence of the dominant Western discourses, rather a creative appropriation. The urge for root, ancestral history, tradition or culture is the recurrent need of a postcolonial or a diasporic writer. In this progressive outlook, the development of a culture can be said as the result of the unremitting struggle between the “context-sensitive” and “context-free” urges (ibid). In a postcolonial nation as well as in the diasporic location, nobody can make free his/her self from this struggle; the struggle itself has a progressive end. It is the struggle that facilitates someone to comprehend life, society and fellow human beings better. It can instruct someone to enlarge perspective and the concept of the self. Any kind of cultural and literary
borrowings deal with the process of individualization and universalisation at the same time.

These two factors namely individualization and universalisation are conspicuous in literature of various types. The poet firmly believes the fact that truthfulness of literature is often mingled up with its imaginative dimensions. His understanding of literature in that particular line is thoroughly revealed to us when, in the essay “Towards the anthology of City Images” he remarks that though literature can “provide facts for social scientist”, we need to be careful in this regard—as the poet believes that “literature reflects as it refracts” (52). Before its use as a factual document capable of revealing truth and social reality, one needs to judge the “refractive index” of the literary medium (ibid). Hence, in its artistic materialization what is privileged is the imaginative dimension. The poet thereby remarks: “The special contribution of literature is its vision, its intuitive grasp of structure, its perspective; not the facts themselves so viewed, but the facts as seen by the imaginative accuracy of a mind that is not merely factual” (ibid). Literature simply affords a vision of reality which is further accomplished through the process of fact finding; those facts are only available in the symbolic domain of textual representation. As a medium of representation, it is in the course of the symbolic realm through which literature constitutes the identity of space and location. Best example of such kinds of literature is undoubtedly the travel literature, which explores and at the same time explicates spaces. From the Bakhtinian perspective of “chronotope”, the symbolic domain can be read as the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationship that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). Those symbolic domains are not merely some fascinating sites of imaginative
exposure; rather they constitute the entry point into the realm of truth and factual detail. As Bakhtin says:

Whatever these meanings turn out to be, in order to enter our experience … they must take on the form of a sign that is audible and visible to us. Without such temporal-spatial expression, even abstract thought is impossible. Consequently, every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished through the gates of the chronotope” (258).

The chronotopic dimension of those realms as ‘gates’ of entering into the sphere of meaning further paves the way for fact-finding and truth-making. Hence Ramanujan remarks that “Literature provides patterns and hypothesis directly relevant to social science” (“Towards an Anthology” 53).

On the other hand, the poet also believes that not only literature but also language can play an imperative role in constituting identities in social spaces. In the essay namely “Language and Social Change: The Tamil Example”, Ramanujan firmly remarks that various codes like “prestige dialect”, “the importance of courts” or “contact with a foreign language” may affect social changes (98). In this view, as he remarks, the process of modernization predominantly in India is affected heavily by the contact of Indian regional languages with the British English. Here, his notions of “context-sensitive” and “context-free” can be used to theorize that particular shift, as he believes that modernism itself is a movement away from “context-sensitive” to “context-free” (“Is There an” 48). Whereas the “context-free” urges are always negative to the essentialised identity of space and human bodies, “context-free”
movements are directed towards the anti-essentialist notion of identity (ibid). From Bhabha’s perspective, it can be said that “context-free” urges are always open ended and which in turn pave the way for hybridity (ibid). To substantiate the referential aspect of language, Ramanujan refers to the naming system of various Indian regions, where names itself deal with the identity of people not only as individuals but also as members of a class or caste. For example, personal names are used as family names whereas wife and children are taking the husband’s or father’s names in the manner of other parts of India of the west. The very names, in this perspective may serve as a stimulating factor in identity politics of individuals to attain the sense of community feelings and familial attachment.

Ramanujan believes that the internal blending of regional and foreign languages or the ceremonial high style and unceremonious colloquial style of livelihood makes Indian societies internally dialogic. In postcolonial literatures, such internal plurality seems to be a dominating factor in most of the recent writers. It is a part of the technical and the thematic concerns of the writers as well. It is more explicit in all diasporic writers in general, who have to negotiate continually with “dual locations and dual roots” (Nayar 14). Within the ambit of diaspora, that type of duality of situation, as indicated earlier is always marked with anti-essentialist notion of identity and productive negotiation with the same. It also helps to relocate identity through cultural assertion and too provides respective writers ample scopes to vindicate own “positionality” with innovative approaches and ideas (Sachez 38).
Through argumentative detail, hence, Ramanujan reveals the fact that the individualistic and the universal or the locale and alien in literature cannot be separated. The basic podium of the process of universalisation of literature is itself its individualization; the reciprocal relationship between the two is not vanished during its universalisation; rather has problamatised its relation with the origin. Like Foucault’s genealogical notion, Ramanujan too firmly believes that in the process of universalisation, the intrinsic essence of things is lost or vanished. In his radical essay “Some Thought on ‘Non-Western’ Classics With Indian Examples”, he further explores the notion by saying that, “Geniuses arises out of particular cultures, locales and times, but do not entirely belong to them” (115). Hence, a writer who possesses universal appeal in writing stands in between many locations; though not entirely belongs to one of them. As the poet more radically remarks, “Nationalistic ways of classifying cultural expressions like literature or painting . . . may be convenient, popular, but need to be questioned” (ibid). Rigorous inquiry of any piece of creative output divulges many embedded “qualifications” apparent within the creation and which, in turn, are being transcended (ibid). Even, as he believes, terms like Western or non-Western do not exist in reality; these are “politically loaded” terms which simply create “dangerous fictions” (ibid). For him the term non-Western is a negative one that shows the numbing homogenizing tendencies of the fiction created by the Western discourses. Even he questions the singularity and the exquisiteness of these grand terms like non-Western or Western languages and cultures. Internal commerce and explicit appropriations are always apparent in all such discourses. Citing the examples of Thoreau and Gandhi, Ramanujan says how Thoreau cited Sanskrit texts and Gandhi appropriated “Thoreau’s phrase ‘civil disobedience’” in Indian political scenario (ibid 116, emphasis original). Like a genealogist, he believes that no culture
is singular in its very essence; cross-cultural fertilization and reactions are always common in every society. One particular piece of art or literature is not entirely a product of its own culture; it positively bears the influence of other cultural elements also. As Foucault believes that there is “something altogether different” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 78) behind things, Ramanujan too believes that everything in this world is the product of the “long and continuous inter-play, cross-cultural exchanges and transformations” (Ramanujan, “The Ring of”, 85). In this internal commerce, the origin is always lying hidden somewhere. In such reading, hence, the notion of unified, homogeneous subject positions and creations seems always falsifying and farfetched. Through that perspective, Ramanujan comes into the conviction that literary expression itself is not singular and monolithic; it is hybrid in nature and at the same time belongs to a particular culture as a source of its emergence. The poet further explores the perspective by examining the nature of the relation constituted by literature and society. A literary classic does express the whole community over a long period of time and its values, yet it transcends that community and belongs to anyone who wishes to work towards understanding and expressing it. We need to address circumspectly both to the uniqueness of cultural expression as well as to the universal elements in it. But, at the same time Ramanujan also posits the view that to understand classic of another culture or time is not an easy task or an automatic process. It is embedded in that culture and which revises its symbols and genres and in turn, draws sustenance from its unspoken values and beliefs. That transcendence is a general phenomenon apparent in all types of classical literatures across the globe. To understand such literatures, we need first a hold over the culture and value system of the provincial context of production along with universal values and moral preoccupations. Those unspoken values are implicitly intimate with the
identity of the creator. Being a diasporic poet, Ramanujan believes that human identity or self is constituted by memory. It is through memory that one gets the opportunity to master over the past and to defend identity crisis. In “The Ring of Memory: Remembering and Forgetting in Indian Literature”, hence, he firmly asserts the view that “to remember means to master over the past, and thereby to get rid of it” (86). It is also through memory that one can able to avoid repetition. So he believes that memory plays a significant role in mastering over the past in order to forget it or to master over it. Whereas memory serves as the melting point of dislocation and primordiality, the same strategy brings the notion of imposed identity to the self. In the diasporic location, memory becomes an apparatus to connect oneself with the detached family and ancestral history from which one remains alienated. Digging into memory means to get linked with the root; as Ramanujan believes, “. . . amnesia is curse, a form of alienation from one’s self, for one’s self is largely constituted by memory . . .” (ibid). For the poet, memory provides awareness of self by bringing in to the context the isolated history of belonging. Hence, he believes that separation from and absence of the desired root itself is the potent context for a poet like him, who lives in separation from the family and ancestors, to be more cognizant about the family and the ancestral root. It is marked with the renovation of collective consciousness vis-à-vis root and identity.

Thus it is found that Ramanujan, in all the general essays on literature and culture, explores his distinct concepts of identity and identity politics, which are equally manifested in his poetry. His notions of “context-sensitive” and “context-free” are two worth mentioning ideas, which seem very useful in theorizing a writer’s debt
to other writers and literatures as well (Ramanujan, “Is There an” 47). These are two such innovative ideas always pertinent to read a range of literary movements from Renaissance to Modernism. The shared or marginalized identity, as a catalytic context of identity politics, can be countered with the notion of “context-sensitivity” (ibid 48). On the other hand, in his reading of the internal commerce and appropriation of non-Western and Western literatures, cultures and languages, the notions of apparent hybridity and effective history are explicitly revealed to us. With this particular notion, Ramanujan revolutionizes the notion of hybridity as a prevailing mode of social relation and literature in a multicultural or displaced location. The apparent hybridity is an obvious element of literary and cultural formations. The dialogic nature of Indian culture and literature provides the poet ample scope to further explore the diasporic space as a melting point of cultures and ideologies. Even he asserts the view that multi-culturalism and liminality are two conspicuous elements that prevailed during his childhood. The multi-cultural atmosphere of his childhood provided him the further scope to understand better the “third space” of liminality (Bhabha, “The Third Space” 211). Apart from these his notion of memory as a specific tool to be in contact with and to forget the past, is certainly an innovative approach to maintain identity in the postcolonial context and the diasporic space both. Memory to him is a specific tool to construct the lost identity as well as to forget the colonial construction of identity. Like Foucault, Ramanujan too accepts the fact that in due course of journey, a subject is transformed into a form capable of transforming the self depending on needs and the context. Against the locus of identity crisis, a subject has the potentiality to discover myriad subject positions and identities as well. In due course what is lost is the notion of unified subject and primordial identity.

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95